

## Chapter One

For a homicide cop, murder often started the day. For the mixed-race female sloppily wrapped in a tarp and stuffed in a construction site dumpster, it had surely ended hers.

Lieutenant Eve Dallas ducked under the crime scene tape and strode across the demolition rubble. She'd already been on her way downtown to Cop Central when the call came through, detouring her to one of the construction sites in Hudson Yards.

The day had a soft feel to it, a breezy warmth as May of 2061 made way for June and the heat that would surely follow. Construction types stood around in their hard hats and steel-toed boots, gulping coffee, shooting the shit, and goggling at the dumpster where a couple of uniforms stood by.

Civilians, Eve knew, couldn't resist goggling at the dead. She could hear the hard, staccato, machine-gun echo of an airjack at another site. The whole sector, she knew, was full of them.

The dumpster sat on the north side of the seventy-story spear of a building, on the edge where a trio of lesser towers huddled. The trio, post-Urban Wars toss - them - up - and - cross - your - fingers construction, showcased the dingy and wear of the years, the shrugged shoulders of neglect.

She noted broken windows, the pitted, graffiti-laced walls, crumbling facades, old beams now bent and twisted, and the big, muscular machines, the strangely delicate sway of the towering cranes, and the mountain range of lesser tools lined up to deal with them.

To her eye, it resembled the aftermath of a war zone, but the only casualty she could see lay wrapped in a dumpster like so much debris.

Whatever the plans, the schedule, the budget might be, it all stopped now.

The civilians could goggle at the dead, but she stood for them.

She carried her field kit to the cops at the dumpster, tapped her badge. "Who's first on scene?"

"That would be us, Lieutenant. Officers Urly and Getz."

"Run it for me," she said as she took a can of Seal-It from her kit.

Urly, a tall Black woman in her early forties, took the lead.

"Getz and I responded to the call at oh-seven-thirty-five. We confirmed the DB in the dumpster here, and secured the scene. The nine-one-one caller, a Manuel Best, stated he found the body shortly after he reported to work at seven-thirty."

"Maybe the blood trail gave him a clue."

Urly's lips twitched—the closest she got to a smile. "Yes, sir. Best stated he thought someone had dumped a dead or wounded animal in there."

"He's pretty shaken up, Lieutenant." Getz, white, husky, thirties, chin-pointed to the left. "Just a kid, college boy, summer job. Just started this week."

"Hell of a way to enter the workforce. I'll want to speak with him when I'm done with the body."

She stepped up, avoiding the drops of dried blood, and, a tall woman herself, peered into the dumpster.

She could see the side of the victim's head through the plastic sheeting. Scraggly hair, the color of dust, spilled over it. Blood matted the hair, smeared the sheeting.

Her hand fell out when the killer tossed her in, Eve thought. Rush job, bash, dump, run.

"Severe blunt force trauma to the right side of the victim's head is visible, as is a blood trail starting approximately four feet from the dumpster on the far side of the security fencing. Blood on the front of the dumpster, on the plastic sheeting used to cover the victim. Likely used to carry the victim to the dump site."

When she had the interior of the dumpster, the position of the body fully on record, she hissed out a breath.

She sealed up, passed her field kit to Getz.

And boosted herself into the dumpster.

Construction crap—not garbage, so lucky day. But construction crap could include nails, glass, toothy metal, and all kinds of sharps.

"She can't be more than five-two," Eve judged as she found a corner of the sheet, drew it up, and exposed more of the head wound. "Blood, bone shards, gray matter. Hand me my kit. Looks to me like . . ."

She took the kit, pulled out microgoggles. With them, she leaned in. "Yeah, murder weapon's going to be a crowbar. I can see where the two-pronged hook went in, the flat handle indented."

Gently, Eve turned the head. "Two strikes, right temple, upper back of the head. One probably did it."

"Oh hell. Lieutenant, I know her. Getz?"

He rose up a little, leaned in. "Yeah, shit. Sidewalk sleeper, sir. She roamed around this area, did some unlicensed begging."

"We looked the other way there," Urly added. "She was harmless. She'd make little flowers or paper animals out of litter, pass them out to anyone who gave her some change, you know?"

"Got a name?"

"No, sir. She used the Chelsea Shelter mostly in the winter or bad weather. Or flopped in one of the condemned buildings here like a lot of them. She didn't hustle or hassle, but she kept a little book, and wrote people up for rule violations."

"What kind of violations?" Eve asked as she got out her Identi-pad.

"Jaywalking, littering—she was fierce about littering—shoplifting, trespassing, not picking up your dog's poop." Urly shrugged. "She'd write down a kind of description of the violator, the violation, the time and place. She'd hunt up a cop and read off the page. Ask us to make a copy."

"Mostly, we would, and we'd thank her, give her a couple bucks," Getz added. "We all called her CC—for Concerned Citizen."

"Spotty on the ID data, lot of blank spots. But she comes up as Alva Quirk, mixed race, age forty-six. No fixed address. No current employment. No family listed on her ID. We'll do a run there."

"Alva," Urly repeated. "Lieutenant, if it turns out she doesn't have family, the cops in the Tenth would take care of having her cremated. She was kind of a mascot."

“I’ll make sure you’re notified. TOD, zero-one-twenty. COD, blunt and sharp head trauma. ME to confirm.”

Eve heard the clomping, recognized pink cowgirl boots. “Peabody,” she said without looking up. “Just in time. Everybody, seal up, and let’s get her out. I can get her up,” Eve said before Getz could climb in with her. “I can get her up and pass her to you.”

It was a process, and not a pleasant one, but Eve slid her arms along and under the plastic, got a grip.

Even deadweight, the victim couldn’t have been more than a hundred pounds.

Urly reached over, took some of that weight, then Getz and Peabody helped lift the legs.

They laid her, the sheet still wrapped around her lower body, on the ground in front of the dumpster.

Eve crouched down to check the multiple pockets of Alva’s faded gray baggies. “No book, no nothing.”

“She usually had a backpack, but she kept the book and a pencil in her pocket.”

“Not there now.” She looked back at the dumpster, thought: Fuck.

She looked up at her partner. It still took her an extra instant to adjust to the red tips and streaks in Peabody’s dark, now floppy hair. In fact, Eve thought she registered a few more of both streaks and flips.

“Peabody, Officer Getz is going to take you to the wit who found her. Get his statement. There has to be some security around this site—get copies of any discs or hunt up any security guards. And make sure whoever’s in charge knows this site is shut down until I say otherwise.”

“I got it.”

“Let’s open up the rest of this plastic.”

When she and Urly unwrapped the lower body, Eve saw the stub of a pencil in the ragged cuff of the baggies.

“Pencil stub, caught in the cuff of her pants,” she said for the record as she took out an evidence bag. “Dropped it when she got bashed and it got caught in there. Someone didn’t want to be in her book. I’m not going to find the book or her backpack in that dumpster. Gotta look, but the killer took all that. Missed the pencil, but this was a rush job.”

She sat back on her heels a moment, because she could see it. “Murder weapon may be in there, but smarter, if they were going to leave it, to wrap it up with her. We’re going to find the kill site. Cleaned up some of the blood, but it was dark—even with the security lights, you wouldn’t get it all. And he was sloppy, didn’t wrap her nice and tight, so she started coming out of the sheeting, dripped some blood.

“Maybe she was flopping here for the night. They’ve got the buildings locked up, fenced off while they’re doing what they do, but it’s familiar here, so she comes here for the night. Nice night, who wants to be ass to elbow in a shelter on a nice night? Hears something, sees something. Can’t have that, gotta write that down for my police friends.”

“Oh crap, Lieutenant, that sounds right.”

“Illegals deal, rape, mugging—it’s not going to be littering or dog shit. He could take the book, but what’s to stop her from telling somebody? Only one way to fix that. Where did he get the crowbar? Because that’s what it’s going to be.”

As she spoke, she ran her hands over the victim, checked for other wounds, offensive, defensive. “Just the two strikes to the head. Back of the head when she’d turned away, right

temple on her way down, to make sure. Take the book, the backpack, check her pockets and take whatever she has. Get the sheeting—has to know where to find it—wrap her up, carry her over to the dumpster, drop her in.”

“Why not just leave her where she fell?”

“Somebody might come by, find her. You’ve got to get away, ditch that pack, destroy that book, and clean up. You got blood on you, you got spatter. Nobody’s going to find her for hours. Likely a couple hours more than the wit did because of the sloppy.”

“She said to me once, she had to take care of New York because New York took care of her.”

“That’s just what we’re going to do, Officer. We’re going to take care of her.”

Rising, Eve called for the sweepers and for the morgue.

“Stay with the body,” she told Urly, then boosted herself back into the dumpster.

Urly gave her that hint of a smile again. “Those are really nice boots.”

“Well, they were. Describe the book.”

By the time Eve swung out, empty-handed, Peabody was waiting for her.

“The wit just started working for Singer Family Developers, and on this job,” Peabody began. “His uncle’s one of the crew, got him in for the summer. He saw the blood, thought there was an animal in the dumpster, maybe just hurt, so he took a look. Saw the body and, in his words, went freaked.”

“Did he touch anything?”

“He says no. Too freaked. But he called it in, then tagged his uncle.”

Peabody shifted on her pink boots, careful to keep them away from the dried blood.

“The wit was one of the first on the job this morning—trying to make good—and his uncle was just pulling up. Uncle took a look, too, and they waited for Urly and Getz. While they waited, the uncle—Marvin Shellerling—contacted the foreman, who contacted Singer. That’s Bolton Kincade Singer, who took over from James Bolton Singer, his father, about seven years ago. Singer is cooperating. I’ve got security discs, but am told they don’t cover this area—just the buildings. Nothing back here that needs security according to Paulie Gerald, the foreman.”

Peabody glanced down at Eve’s now scarred and filthy boots. “You know, the sweepers would’ve done that search.”

“Yeah, and they’re going to do another. I had to see if the killer tossed any of her stuff in there with her. Or the murder weapon. Any human security on-site?”

“Not at this point. They have the fencing, the cams, and right now it’s a lot of demo. When they start bringing in new materials, they’ll add to security.”

“A job this size has more than one boss.”

“Right now, it’s demo, and that’s Gerald.”

“All right.” Eve pulled a wipe from her kit to clean her hands. “We’re going to fan out, find the kill site. The trail leads that way before it stops—or before she started to drip. I’m leaning toward somewhere along the other side of the security fence line, but out of the lights.”

She started along the trail of blood. “We need to run Singer, the foreman, and anyone else who has access inside the fence after hours. We start there and—”

She broke off when a woman—eighteen, maybe twenty—called her name as she ran over the rubble.

T-shirt, Eve noted, jeans, boots, candy-pink hair spilling out of a fielder’s cap.

Eve concluded one of the crew, and wondered if someone had found the kill site for her. "Lieutenant Dallas." Her breath whooshed out; sweat streamed down a pretty face nearly as pink as her hair.

"That's right."

"I recognized you, and you, Detective. You have to come. You have to come right away."

"Where and why?"

She pointed. "A body. There's a body."

Eve gestured behind her. "That body?"

"No, no, no. Manny—um, Manuel Best—told me about the woman, and I'm sorry, but that's how I knew you were right here. And I told Mackie I'd run, I'd run right here and get you."

"You're saying you found another body?"

"I didn't, not exactly. Mackie did. Or some of one, and he said work stopped and call the cops, and I said how you were here, and he said go get you. You have to come."

"Officers! Stay with the victim until the morgue arrives. Secure the scene until the sweepers get here. Where?" she asked the woman.

"We're about a block up."

"Part of this construction site?"

"No, no, it's not part of this. This is Singer Family Developers. We're on Hudson Yards Village, residential and office buildings, a shopping arcade, and a green space."

To save time, Eve left her vehicle; taking a block on foot would be quicker.

"Let's have a name."

"Oh, sorry. I'm Darlie Allen."

"And how do you know my witness?"

"Your . . . oh, you mean Manny. Some of us go for a beer—or a cold otherwise—when we knock off. We just hung out a couple of times since we started. He just started with Singer. And we're, you know, going to go out this weekend. He tagged me about that poor woman. He was really upset. And somebody told him you were in charge, and then when we found the body, I came to find you."

"How'd you find the body?"

"We already demoed the main part of the old building. It was a restaurant. We were jacking up the floor, the old concrete platform. The boss says it's substandard—hell, a good chunk of it had already decayed—so we're taking it all. I was watching because I want to learn how to use the jack, and this big piece broke off, and I could see how they were right about it being a crap job in the first place all that time ago, because there was a lot of hollow, and that's not safe. There's a cellar below—and that's already had some cave-in. And it was in there."

"A body under the concrete? We're talking remains then. Bones?"

"Yeah, but they came from a body. It's not like an animal. I didn't look real close after, because it was sort of awful. But I saw how it was mostly dirt and rotten supports and broken beams under the platform, and the body—remains—that was in a kind of hollow place."

They came to a set of iron steps manned by a security droid. It nodded at Darlie.

"You're cleared, Ms. Allen, Lieutenant Dallas, Detective Peabody."

"It's up on the platform over the old tracks. We're revitalizing what they started before the Urbans, then that got all screwed, so they threw up all this substandard after just to get them up, you know."

“Yeah.”

Boots rang on metal.

“It’s going to be done right this time. Mackie says we’re building an urban jewel, and we’re building it to last.”

She didn’t see a jewel. She saw construction chaos, with a section roped off, and farther north the beginnings of a skeleton that, she assumed, would be one of the residential buildings.

“Who’s in charge?”

“Mackie. I’ll get him.”

“Yeah, do that. But who owns it? Who’s in charge of the project?”

“Um. You are.”

Eve looked into Darlie’s big, puzzled green eyes. And said, “Crap.”

Darlie raced off to where a number of people stood around the roped-off area.

“I can tag Roarke,” Peabody offered. “He’s going to want to know.”

“Yeah.” Her husband, the owner of almost everything in the universe, would want to know. “We’ll see what we’ve got first. Crap,” she said again, and started over as a Black guy who looked like he could curl a couple of the airjacks without breaking a sweat peeled away from the rope and came toward them.

She judged him at about forty, ridiculously handsome, and built like a god in his work jeans, safety vest, and hard hat.

“Jim Mackie, just Mackie’s good. I’m the job boss. I had them rope off the section where we found it. Her, I guess.”

“Her?”

“Yeah, I’m thinking her because it’s them. Sorry. It looks to me like, maybe she was a woman. A pregnant woman when it happened, because there’s what looks like baby or infant or fetus remains with her. Sorry.”

He took off the hat, swiped his arm over his forehead. “That got me shook some. The little, um, skeleton.”

“Okay. How about you move your people away from there, and my partner and I will take a look.”

“You got it. If you need to go down to her? I gotta fix you into a safety harness. The old stairs collapsed even before we took down the building. I don’t trust the supports, and the street-level building below is just as bad—condemned for good reason. This was a shit-ass job. Sorry, sorry. I’m upset.”

“Shit-ass jobs upset me, too.”

That got a smile. “Heard you were okay. Figured you’d be because the big boss, he’s okay. No shit-ass jobs when you do a job for Roarke. You do quality, or you get the boot.”

“She’s the same,” Peabody told him, and earned another smile.

Then he turned around. “Get on away from there, move back. Anybody on Building One, get on back to work.”

The way people scrambled told Eve that Mackie did that quality work, and knew how to run a crew. She stepped to the rope.

She didn’t know much about building, about concrete and beams and rebar, but even she could see a lot in this section was some sort of filler, more like dirt than stone. And curled in it, about eight feet down, between two crumbling walls, the remains of one adult, one fetus.

Too small to be called a child, she thought, and also curled, likely as it had been inside the womb at the time of death.

“Do you know when this was built—poured—whatever it’s called?”

“I do. Not the exact day, but the year: 2024. If the really half-assed records are accurate, late summer, early fall of that year. I expect if there’s a better record of it, Roarke can tell you the day, and the hour.”

Yes, he would, though he wouldn’t have owned it in the late summer of 2024. He wouldn’t have been born quite yet, she thought.

But he’d know who had owned it. He’d know the owner; he’d know who developed it. Whatever he didn’t know, he’d find out.

“I’ll take that harness, Mackie. Peabody, contact DeWinter, get her here.”

They’d need the forensic anthropologist, but in the meantime, Eve needed a closer look. Whoever they’d been, they, as much as Alva Quirk, was hers now.

“I’ll tag Roarke.”

While Mackie sent for a harness, she pulled out her ’link.

Caro, Roarke’s admin, answered. “Good morning, Lieutenant.”

“Caro, sorry. You need to get him.”

Always efficient, Caro merely nodded. “One moment.”

As the screen switched to holding blue, Eve considered she’d have gotten exactly the same response in exactly the same tone from Caro whether Roarke sat alone at his desk enjoying a cup of coffee or ran a meeting involving the purchase of Greenland.

She didn’t think Roarke could actually buy Greenland, but if he could, if he was planning on it, Caro’s response would have been the polite: One moment.

Eve glanced over as Mackie held up a safety harness. “Give me another sec.”

She took another couple steps away as Roarke’s face filled the screen.

He didn’t smile. Not annoyance, she knew, but concern. Those wild blue eyes held steady on hers. Making sure she was in one piece, Eve thought.

“Sorry,” she began. “I hope you weren’t buying Greenland.”

“Not at the moment.” Ireland shimmered like morning mists in his voice. “Something’s wrong.”

“I caught one on my way in, but that one’s not the issue. It’s the one I caught about a block away from the first. That one’s on, or maybe it’s under, your Hudson Yards Village project.”

“Which part?”

“Ah . . .” She looked back at Mackie. “Which part is this of the project?”

“Right here’s the Sky Garden phase.”

“Sky Garden. Some restaurant you took down, in the cellar of that. They jacked out the concrete over the old rails, and we’ve got remains, human remains. Two. What appears to be a female and a fetus. I’m calling DeWinter in to examine and confirm.”

“A pregnant woman buried under the platform there?”

“The way it looks from where I’m standing. I can only confirm two human remains, which I further speculate, given the platform was built and poured, according to your job boss, nearly forty years ago, have been there a few decades. Again, DeWinter will take that end of things.”

“Bloody hell.” He raked a hand through that gorgeous mane of black hair. “I’ll be on my way to you within ten minutes.”

“Okay. I’m going to have to shut down your project until—”

“Yes, yes, we’ll deal with that. I’ll be there,” he said, and cut her off.

“That’ll be fun,” she muttered. She looked over at Peabody, who nodded, wound a finger in the air. More fun, Eve thought, with the fashionable Dr. DeWinter coming up.

She stepped back to Mackie, looked at the harness, looked down in the hole. “All right then, let’s get me suited up so I can make sure this isn’t some sick prank.”

Hope lit all over his face. “Oh, hey, like maybe it’s fake?”

“I’ll know in a minute.”

It wasn’t, but she had to make that determination even if it meant hanging by a damn cable over a bunch of broken concrete, rebar spikes, rocks, and Christ knew.

“It’ll hold ten times your weight,” he told her as she put her arms through the straps. “It’s got good padding, so it’s not going to dig into you, and that adds protection.”

He adjusted the straps, checked the safety buckles, the D rings.

“You ever use one of these?” she asked him.

“Yep. I’m not ten times your weight, but I bet I more than double it, and no problemo.”

“Good to know.”

“DeWinter’s on her way.” Like Eve, Peabody looked down in the hole. “Do you want me to go down with you?”

“No point. I’m going to get it on record, confirm we’ve got human remains, and see what I see. I need my field kit.”

“We’re going to hook it on this ring right here,” Mackie told her. “Keep your hands free.” He handed her a pair of work gloves. “And protect them. You ever do any rappelling?”

“Not if I can help it.” When he laughed, she shrugged. “Yeah, I know the drill. Check in at the other site, Peabody. Start lining up interviews. We need a full run on the victim.”

“You’re set,” Mackie told her. “We’ll take it slow. Lot of rubble down there, and where she is, between the walls? That wasn’t poured, so it’s not going to be real stable.”

“Yeah, I see it. Peabody, DeWinter needs to bring recovery equipment.”

“She knows.”

Of course she knew, Eve thought, and admitted she was stalling.

“Okay.” She ducked under the rope, took another careful look so she could mentally map her route down. Then turned her back to it as she pulled on the gloves.

She gripped the belay rope, took up the slack, leaned into it, and started the descent.

Obstacles, she thought, checking left and right behind her as she went down, feet perpendicular to the wall, keeping her pace slow but steady. She adjusted right, left to avoid rubble and rebar and busted beams.

Six feet down, she called up, “I’m moving a couple feet to the left. I can get closer. She’s right below those beams, between two walls. Say, how stable do you figure those beams are?”

“They held up so far. We got you, Lieutenant. You’re not going anywhere.”

While she didn’t want to end up somehow breaking through the ground and splatting on the rubble, she’d actually worried more about the remains.

She eased down on a broken beam, gave it a little testing bounce. “Feels solid enough.”

Kneeling, she pulled off the work gloves, then resealed her hands.

And took a close look at her second and third victims of the morning.