

Chapter 1

"Jan McCann," says a voice with a thick Russian accent.

I know before I turn around that the voice belongs to Vera Moroz, Slavic professor and *femme fatale*.

"*Berezhonova bog berezhet,*" she says.

"Excuse me?"

"God protects a cautious person." She smiles, and I see that her incisors look a little like fangs.

She gestures towards an open door, and I soon find myself sitting opposite her at a cluttered desk. I know what she is about to tell me, and I'm in no hurry to hear it. I know that she is going to produce a crumpled pack of cigarettes and offer me one. I know that she views me as competition for male attention. I know that she's been secretly undermining my advisor's reputation for years.

"How did it happen?" I ask.

She pulls a crumpled pack of cigarettes out of her top desk drawer and offers me one. Virginia Slims. I shake my head. She pulls a cigarette out of the pack with her mouth then tosses the pack into the drawer and slams it shut.

"Who knows? Heart attack."

"When?"

"Late last night. Early this morning. Hugo's always been a night owl."

I look away. He must have died shortly after we spoke on the phone. The corners of my lips twitch, but I won't let myself cry in front of Vera.

"Aren't you going to light that thing?" I ask.

"I'm trying to quit." She smiles again, and I have the unsettling sensation that she's trying to seduce me.

I want to get up and catch one last glimpse of Diener—or what's left of him—but my feet are unresponsive.

"You need a new advisor." The cigarette dangles precariously from her too-red lips.

"Apparently."

"We'll work on that."

"I need to go," I say. This time my feet propel me out of my chair and I head towards Diener's office. A crude chalk drawing has replaced the body, and a lone policeman has replaced the crowd of onlookers.

"I need to see you," Diener had said on the phone.

"Now."

I seek refuge in the Dungeon, the grad student lounge—if you could call it that—and my one true home on this sorry campus. Ted Nieman lies sprawled across the tattered sofa in the corner, a trace of saliva at the corner of his mouth. Above his head hangs a poster of Goethe.

"Did you hear?" I ask.

"I don't hear things from down here."

"Diener's dead."

To my surprise, he yawns. "Diener's been dead for a long time, spiritually speaking."

"I mean it, Ted. The place is crawling with cops."

He props himself up on one elbow and gazes intently at me. "I could use a drink."

"I can't help you," I say. I haven't had a drop in over a month.

"How?" he asks.

"Maybe a heart attack."

He looks me full in the face. "You okay, Jan?"

A lump forms in my throat. "I need to go," I say.

"If you need anything..."

"Thanks, Ted."

He smiles weakly before rolling over and going back to sleep.

Outside Grimm Hall the morning frost has given way to a damp grayness. An overcast sky peaks through the trees between Grimm and the Snoddy Business School. A police cruiser blocks the courtyard and a man in blue commandeers a reluctant husky. A few feet away a cluster of young men in suits talk and gesture towards the policeman.

"Jan McCann." One of the men, a tall blond, has separated from the group and is heading towards me. Brad Gates. Brad has been pestering me for a date ever since we met at a grad student mixer. Somehow, the fact that I've given up sex makes me more appealing to men.

"Hello, Brad."

"I heard what happened. A real shame."

"Did you know him?"

"Can't say that I did."

"Then how do you know it's a shame?"

He scratches his head. "I haven't seen you at the mixers lately."

"No, you haven't."

"I don't suppose you'd have time for coffee, would you?" He beams at me.

"I don't drink coffee."

"Right, well, sorry again about your advisor. He was a good man."

"I thought you didn't know him."

His face reddens. "I'm just ... assuming he was a good man. Anyway, it must be hard to come to campus one day and find out your advisor's been murdered."

I step closer. "Who says he was murdered?"

He turns and looks at the policeman, who is still having trouble getting the Husky to obey. "I need to get going. If you change your mind about the coffee..."

Brad's words trail after me as I head towards the policeman.