

## One

Jaime Monroe pummeled the heavy bag in an Ali-like flutter of powerful punches.

The first time she put on a pair of boxing gloves, she felt like a cartoon character.

Until she hit the bag.

Then her adrenaline began to surge, sweat ran and she felt powerful.

An avid athlete, she excelled in all sports, but boxing was her outlet. It toughened her for long hours as a deputy district attorney in the Domestic Violence Unit of the Denver County District Attorney's Office. At twenty-eight, Jaime was in her third year of the demanding, high-stress job, which she worked with an ardent passion. Boxing sharpened and focused her attention, cleared her mind. It was a stress-management tool she used to turn negative emotion into positive energy.

Tonight, well into an intense workout, sweat darkened her gray T-shirt and clung to her slender back.

An image of Kelly Jo Cox's broken and battered body flashed before her and Jaime stepped back from the heavy bag, tasting bile in her throat. She looked toward the window, her reflection staring back at her. She was 5-feet 8-inches tall, agile and lean with brown hair that reached to her shoulders. Her broad, smooth face gave an impression of calm. She had strong cheekbones, a long, slender nose and a generous mouth with a wide, ready smile. She took a deep breath and attacked the heavy bag again with an onslaught of punches, as hard and forceful as a man. The center of the heavy bag was dented inward by the solid impact of her punches, fueled by a fervor that lived within her.

Kelly Jo had been raped and murdered and Jaime was prosecuting her attacker. Closing arguments would begin in a few days. It was Jaime's first major trial and she was ready. For months she had worked to build an airtight case.

With Kelly Jo's case, Jaime needed the energy she got from boxing. She would begin every routine with a half-mile run. Push-ups, sit-ups and dips were done at intervals. She finished in the club's training room with a combination of free and circuit weights, a rowing machine, stationary cycle, trampoline and jump rope.

Men would often ask what she was training for.

“Nothing,” she would reply, wondering why they paid so much attention to her. “I’m just working out.”

They would laugh. Shake their heads. She heard their whispers behind her back.

“Why would a doll like that want to work the heavy bag?”

But she ignored them.

There was no reason to smile tonight. Kelly Jo’s case made her question her profession. Though it made her consider another line of work, she would never give up. She could not. There were other reasons why. Deep-rooted motives that kept her going. Deep-seated demons of guilt she needed to exorcise. This was the only way.

With a final quick flurry of punches, Jaime stepped away from the heavy bag. She wiped her forehead with the back of her glove. She removed the gloves and grabbed her water bottle. She took a long drink and stared out the window, letting her body cool.

Downtown Denver was fascinating at night. Her club was located on the fifth floor of a tall building off 17<sup>th</sup> Avenue. She could hear sirens as they passed by on the streets below, devoid of the crowds who walked along them during the day. Lights from tall buildings stared back. She could not see anyone in the building across the street and thought of the many evenings she had worked well into the night, only realizing it was late and time to go when the cleaning crews came, or the night security guard would startle her by saying, “Ms. Monroe, you still here?”

She took another long swallow of water and picked up a jump rope. It tapped the floor in an even rhythm, keeping pace with the thoughts about the case as they turned in her mind.

Kelly Jo was fifteen when she died, but had the mentality of an eight-year-old. Kelly Jo’s younger sister, Beverly, was a cute, freckled-faced little girl, with honey-blond hair. She was nine, precocious and old enough to know that something bad had happened to her sister. But when it came to testifying, Beverly froze with terror. She could hardly speak.

*Why shouldn’t she be afraid?* Jaime thought.