

She scurried to her car and sped the mile to her building. Everything took too much time. As she put the car in park, her hands fumbled with the car keys. *Damn it.* She sprinted to her office, and her heart fell. The door was ajar. She could hear noises inside. Not good noises, either, but the sounds of objects being thrown.

*Double damn it.*

Peri pulled out her phone to call 9-1-1. She had raised it to her ear when two figures came out of her office. The trio looked at each other, three pairs of wide eyes. The two were dressed in black and wore ski masks, one short, and one tall.

“Son of a—what are you doing in my office?” Peri reached forward to grab the short one’s mask.

Before she could pull, the tall one had pushed her against the wall. She pushed back, then felt something sharp at her throat, and retreated.

“What do we do now?” the short one whispered. It was a woman’s voice.

“Shut up.” The tall one, a man, kept the blade tight at Peri’s throat while he dragged her along the wall, into the office.

The short one followed, and shut the door.

“Now—” Short Gal began.

“Shh!” Tall Man cut her off, and stuck his leg out, tripping Peri, and tossing her to the floor. Landing on her bruised hip, she yelped. She saw Tall Man’s eyes wrinkle in a smile. He put his thick hiking boot on her leg and stood, putting all his weight on her. She gritted her teeth and glared at him, suppressing any more sounds of pain. Still, it hurt like hell.

*Bastard.*

He jumped off and stood by Short Gal. Peri stayed on the floor and looked at the pair. They were whispering together, Tall Man running his fingers over his knife, a slim switchblade. Short Gal was unarmed, and stood flatfooted, as if she relied on everyone else to give her the next move.

Peri looked around for something to strike back with. Her desk was upended, and there were papers and books strewn around the floor. Apart from a letter opener and a stapler, she didn’t keep a lot of sharp objects in the office. There was a pair of scissors in one of the drawers, but nothing within her reach trumped the knife Tall Man had.

She looked for the safe in the corner. It had been dragged away and had obvious scratch marks and dents. But they hadn’t been able to open it, thank God. She looked over to see Tall Man studying her. Without the rest of his face visible, his eyes were more expressive. They stared at her, then shifted to the safe.

*Damn it.*