

Excerpt from *Murder Masterpiece: A Boston Publishing House Mystery* (Christopher Matthews Publishing/Boston, 2017)

MURDER MASTERPIECE
A Boston Publishing House Mystery
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PROLOGUE

An incomprehensible modern artwork was not the first thing that came to mind when I heard someone say: “Art is whatever you can get away with.” No, the first thing I thought of was the famous painting one of our authors at Harpoon Books was accused of stealing. Curious, as our author was in big trouble and I didn’t know that much about art or art theft, I investigated.

I was surprised to learn that the biggest art heist in history occurred in Boston—my hometown—twenty-five years ago when two guys, disguised as cops, conned their way into the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in the middle of the night. The thieves handcuffed the only two guards to pipes in the basement and duct taped their heads, hands, and feet. Then they proceeded to cut priceless paintings out of their frames, including a Rembrandt and a Vermeer masterpiece.

The thieves rolled those oil paintings up, folks. I hear cracking even now. Did they snap rubber bands around them? They walked out of the Gardner Museum with half a billion dollars worth of art—the most valuable property heist in history—stuffed in a

bag, or perhaps tucked under their arms. To date, the FBI has failed to recover any of the thirteen stolen artworks or nail the thieves even though there's a two million dollar reward. Talk about getting away with it, huh?

On a surreal note, Isabella Stewart Gardner stipulated in her will that nothing could ever be changed in her museum, so empty frames hang in the Gardner Museum today where the stolen art once did—a ghostly reminder of the unsolved crime, a shrine to the lost art, to stolen art everywhere.

Following, I tell the story of how a famous painting was recently stolen from the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston and how our author at Harpoon Books was accused of the theft and of murder. I'm able to shed some light on the mystery of the Gardner Museum heist because I discovered that they're connected. True story.

* * *

CHAPTER ONE

AFTERNOON AT THE MUSEUM

On the second floor of Boston's Museum of Fine Arts, known colloquially as the MFA, in a narrow hallway lined with artworks by European masters, I stopped to check the museum's map. Needing to be prompt for an appointment, I noted the correct direction and kept moving at a good clip past the paintings I had no time to study, my boots making satisfying clicks on the herringbone-patterned, hardwood floor.

At the entrance to the Impressionism Gallery, I scanned the room. An immense painting, maybe six-feet in height, dominated the far wall, the image in the ornate gold

frame one I recognized immediately. A couple. A man in a floppy hat, which obscures his face, embraces a lovely woman in a dance hold, one hand in hers, the other on her lower back, the Mona Lisa expression on her face somewhere between joyous and “What the fuck does this guy have in mind?” Hard to tell. Interested, I made a mental note I needed to study art history and checked the placard: *Dance at Bougival* by Pierre-Auguste Renoir. *Ah.*

I backed away for another look. The stunning painting moved me so much I felt my eyes burn with tears, and while I rummaged in my handbag for a tissue, someone tapped me on the shoulder.

Damian Kerry nodded at the Renoir. “Think he was fucking her?”

I sniffed. “You don’t have to be so crass. It’s the most beautiful thing I’ve ever seen.”

“Wow.” He squeezed my arm. “You’re crying.”

I stepped away, blew my nose. “Look at it.”

“I know, genius, right? *Joie de vivre*. Mind-blowing emotion.”

“It’s so famous, the drama of it caught me off guard.”

“The brain registers priceless artwork and triggers an emotional response,”

Damian said.

“I’d say it’s a masterpiece if it makes you cry.”

“Definitely a fucking masterpiece.”

“I need to sit down.”

“You’ve contracted a case of Stendhal’s Syndrome. Named for the novelist. He hyperventilated, burst into tears, almost fainted, in front of moving works of art in Florence. It’s an actual thing.”

“Whatever it’s called, I don’t feel so well.”

“You were always too emotional,” Damian said.

I didn’t dignify his comment with a reply, but sat on the bench in the middle of the room to wipe my eyes.

Damian sat beside me. Two-finger’s-width close. “Thanks for meeting me.”

I looked away from the Renoir. At him. “You piqued my curiosity. What’s up?”

He lowered his voice. “I wanted you to see the Renoir. Have you read my galley?”

I felt a twinge of guilt. “Uh...I started it.”

“Did you get to the murder?”

“I have to admit I’ve only had time to read the first chapter.”

“In Chapter Two a mystery writer murders an art thief at the MFA.”

“You? You do it? Why?”

“The writer wants the Renoir for himself,” Damian said.

“That’s crazy. How’s he get that painting out of here? It’s huge.”

Damian shrugged. “Back in the day there was this guy who stole a Rembrandt in broad daylight. Walked right out of here with it under his arm. Well, ran. True story.”

“He got away with it?”

Damian violated my personal space with his thigh. “He did for a while.”

I felt a hot jolt along my leg and pressed my knees together. “Was it solved? Do they know who did it?”

“The most knowledgeable con I ever met—Johnny Coyle. He’s notorious for art heists.”

“Is he the model for the thief in your book?”

“Finish it and see.”

I stared at the Renoir. “Even if the writer got away with it, how would he sell something so famous, so obviously stolen?”

“People think stolen art is hanging in some insane collector’s secret room or in the underground bunker of a criminal mastermind who wants to control the universe.”

“Very James Bond. Like *Dr. No*.”

“Yeah, but rarely the case. Most likely, the thief stashes the art in a storage locker, or even under his mother’s bed. Then he or his gang might use it for collateral in a drug deal or for currency to run guns—you know, for run-of-the-mill crime.”

Damian Kerry was nobody’s fool. He’d had several best sellers for the publishing house where I work, Harpoon Books, and now we were betting his forthcoming mystery about an art heist would be his biggest hit.

He did his homework researching material and living the life with the bad guys: from small-time Southie hoods to the Sullivan Hill Gang—a Somerville-based faction of the Irish Mob—and Mafia guys in the North End.

“Did they ever recover the stolen Rembrandt?” I said.

“Johnny swapped it for a lesser jail sentence after he shot a cop in an unrelated incident.”

“He killed a cop?”

“Luckily for him the cop survived.”

“Is he in jail?” I said.

“Recently got out. I saw him yesterday.”

“You’re in it up to your eyeballs with those guys, aren’t you, Damian?”

He fondled the medallion dangling from the thick gold chain around his neck—his St. Christopher medal—one I knew well from our previous association.

“Yeah...well, they’re in an interesting line of work,” he said.

“Writing mysteries isn’t interesting enough?”

“To make it interesting enough I need, uh...information.”

“You want to know what I think?” I said.

He tugged on the St. Christopher medal and looked at me, his brown eyes, soulful, deep. “Absolutely.”

“You want the Renoir for yourself.”

“I’m obsessed with that fucking painting. I come here all the time. Look at how the guard keeps an eye on me.”

I checked. The guard was watching us.

“Why are you telling me this?” I said.

“You’ll write a goddamn good press release and get me lots of media attention so people will know how much I want this painting, like a deterrent so I don’t actually end up stealing it.”

“Maybe you should see a shrink.”

“Yeah, right. That’s what you said when you broke up with me,” he said.

“Did you take my advice?”

“I don’t need to see a fucking psychiatrist.”

“I never should’ve slept with you. You’re bad news. Another bad boy in a long line of mistakes I’ve made.”

“If you could turn back time.”

“Your taste in music was always cheesy.”

He squeezed my thigh with his thick fingers. “I love Cher.”

I swiped his hand away, changed the subject. “I’m dying to know how the mystery writer does it.”

He rubbed his hands together and stood up. “Come on. I’ll show you where it happens.”

He led me back the way I’d come—through the narrow hallway hung with European paintings—but stopped there, pressed my arms, pressed me against a wall.

“Do you miss me? Late at night. All alone in mommy and daddy’s fancy building.”

He was scaring me. “Of course not. Let me go!”

“I think *you* need to see a shrink. You’re still living with your parents,” he said.

“You know I have an apartment in their building to keep an eye on my unwell mother, so if you’re going to insult me, I’ll write a mediocre press release about your book and not make a single call on your behalf.”

“Then that sleeze ball, Grenier Lowell, will fire your ass. You in love with him like all those other women where you work?” Grenier was the president of Harpoon Books.

“Yeah, right. That’s hilarious...I’d appreciate it if you’d keep ridiculous speculation to yourself.”

“You are Woman. I hear you roar,” he said.

“Shut the fuck up.”

I kept walking—headed to the exit—ignoring him, making a point of looking at the art.

He caught up with me underneath the glorious domed ceiling that caps the rotunda near the museum’s entrance.

He grabbed my elbow. “This is it—the scene of the crime.”

I leaned over the stone balustrade to look below.

Damian maneuvered behind me, his hands on my hips, and leaned into me. “Can’t you see it?”

I elbowed him in the stomach. “Back off.”

He didn’t let go.

“I’m showing you how it happened,” he said. “Our mystery writer comes up behind our victim, the art thief, just so.” Damian tightened his grip on my hips and grinded into my rear end. “Then an arm goes around his throat like this. Real quick. The writer, disguised as a cop, grips the thief’s throat with one hand, then jerks him off his feet, flips him over the balustrade. Screaming, the guy lands in the basement. His head smashes to pieces. Blood spurts in the air, oozes over the stone floor. Our writer’s agog at what he’s done.”

“Stop it, Damian! You’re hurting me.”

He loosened his grip, his eyes strange, glittering. “Sorry, I got carried away.”

I was breathing hard, and so was he.

I stepped back, rubbed my throat. “For a second I thought you were gonna push me over the edge.”

“God, I’m sorry. I don’t know what got into me. All the sudden I was right there, like the book was a movie. Like I was the killer.”

I took a deep breath. “You’re seriously disturbed.”

He ran his hands through his crowning glory—his thick, dark hair. “Every time I come here to check out the murder scene, I break out in a cold sweat, start breathing hard and heavy. Like I’m the killer. Like it’s real.”

“You *are* the villain. In your book, anyway.” I felt his forehead. “You’re cold and clammy.”

He covered my hand with his. “I think I saw a ghost.”

I felt my stomach clench like I’d heard a secret I didn’t want to keep: Something terrifying had shaken the six-foot, two-hundred-pound man. I put my arm around his waist and helped him sit on one of the benches against the wall. He leaned back, stared into space.

“I can’t wait to finish the book to see what happens,” I said.

“Will you read it today?”

“Sure. Of course.”

“Call me as soon as you’re done and let me know what you think?”

I patted his hand. “Okay, okay. I will.”

“Have you ever noticed those murals on the ceiling above the rotunda?” he said.

I looked up. “No, they’re gorgeous.”

“The museum commissioned John Singer Sargent to paint them. It took him ten years.”

“Looks like the inside of a Fabergé egg,” I said. “Like a giant Easter egg.”

Damian frowned. “I don’t know what the problem is, but I get dizzy every time I look up at them.”

“You’re kind of freaking me out. Maybe you should get yourself checked out by a doctor.”

“Self-diagnosis? Post-partum depression. You know, from finishing the new book.”

“You can’t go off the deep end yet. You still have to promote it,” I said and wished later I hadn’t.

But he smiled. “I think I’ll go to Vegas. Take it easy. See Cher.”

“You are laugh-out-loud funny, man,” I said with relief.

“Wanna go?”

“I’ve got work to do...on your book. Remember?”

“Oh, yeah. Come on, let’s get lunch.”

“Can’t. Got a meeting with Donna, who’ll murder me if I’m late. Plus I can’t handle the liquid lunches you do.”

“Parting is such sweet sorrow,” he said.

“You’re a literary genius.”

I left Damian contemplating the Sargent murals and headed down the stone steps, back to work. It was freakishly warm for Columbus Day, and the museum cast a shadow on the forecourt bounded by Huntington Avenue, where a bunch of Northeastern frat

boys were tossing a Frisbee around. One of them flung the thing my way. I smiled at the kid, hurled it back, kept walking the green mile down Huntington to the T stop, late for a meeting with Donna, my boss.

* * *

CHAPTER TWO

THE BOSSES

Donna DeMille, the Vice President of Marketing at Harpoon Books, looked pissed off when I walked into her office a half-hour late, so I put on my song and dance act.

“Damian? God, that man is sexy,” Donna said. “I guess you’re excused this time since it was work related.”

“Couldn’t get away from him. He was having a panic attack or a mid-life crisis or something over finishing his book.”

“What happened?”

“He showed me this fantastic, gorgeous Renoir of a dancing couple at the MFA that gets stolen in the book. Have you read it yet?”

“No, but sounds fabulous.”

“Yeah, I’m dying to finish it.”

Donna brushed cookie crumbs off the top of her desk and reached for Damian’s bound galley. “Where’s the murder?”

“Chapter Two.”

She stuffed a couple of mini chocolate chip cookies in her mouth and cracked open the galley.

“If you start on the cookies again, you’ll gain back the weight you worked so hard to lose and get depressed all over again.”

Annoyed, Donna stabbed her forehead a couple of times with her middle finger.

“Wow... a murder scene at the MFA?”

“Guess who gets it?” I said.

“Don’t tell me...okay, tell me.”

“The art thief. Damian’s villain—a mystery writer—murders him.”

“My god, he was always crazy. Good looking, but crazy. Why’d you break up with him any way?” she said.

“I followed him to this auto repair shop in Somerville, where he’s been hanging out—involved, I think, with gangbangers, with the Sullivan Hill Gang. I swear the man has a split personality with matching sets of psychological issues.”

“Want to know what I think?”

“Of course.”

“Get back with the detective—Grady.”

“Bad idea.”

“He carries a gun,” Donna said.

“The gun’s hot, I guess. But he goes AWOL, too. Doesn’t call. I’m better off on my own for now.”

Donna shucked her tweedy Chanel jacket and rolled up her sleeves. “You need to figure out what kind of man wouldn’t screw you over.”

“Gee, thanks. I’ll keep that under advisement.”

Donna laughed. “Want to go shopping tomorrow? I need motivation for my diet.”

“Absolutely.”

“I never should’ve charged you with being the diet enforcer. You’re way too enthusiastic.”

“It worked. You lost weight.”

Donna sighed. “And I’m grateful, but not sure Grenier was worth it.”

“Why? What’s going on?”

“We had a drink last night at the Four Seasons, but he wouldn’t stay for dinner. He *said* there was some place he had to be.”

“He’s enraging.”

“He came in this morning looking very hung over.”

“Want me to talk to him?” I said.

“That’d be helpful. He’s cheating on me I’m sure.”

“I’ll find out.”

“You’re indispensable.” She tossed the bag with the remaining cookies into her wastebasket. “So...finish Damian’s book and get me a rough draft of the press material by the end of the week.”

“No problem. You got it.”

“And let me know if you find out anything from Grenier.”

“You’re the boss.”

Donna crossed her legs and admired her spectator pumps. “Yep. That’s the one thing I definitely am. The boss. Well, that and not fat anymore.”

“You rock, Donna.”

* * *

Donna’s hard-edged personality had softened since she’d been dating Grenier, the company president, but now it looked like he was reverting to form and screwing around—his prime directive since his recent divorce. Hopefully, Donna wouldn’t revert to her form—eating for comfort.

I detoured to Grenier’s office. “You got a second?” I called.

“Come on in. Shut the door,” Grenier said, his voice clipped by the cadence of a born-and-bred, New England preppie.

I navigated past the shelves of Harpoon’s books and the Oriental rug islands to Grenier’s desk throne in front of a window that looked out at the Four Seasons Hotel and the Public Garden.

Grenier leaned back, his hands behind his head.

I folded my hands in my lap, looked at him sweetly, and considered whether I could use his tie, which was decorated with whales, to choke him to death.

“I come in peace...on a mission.”

“Do tell.”

“Donna thinks you cheated on her last night.”

Grenier loosened his tie. “She’d be dead wrong.”

“She said you skipped out after one drink.”

“I had to meet Damian Kerry.”

“Why didn’t you tell her?”

“Damian said to keep it quote unquote ‘on the down low.’”

“You’re telling me.”

“You’re a pain in the ass, and if I don’t, you’ll pester me with email after email, text after text.”

“You know me well. So you met Damian?”

“I consented to drink at the bar of his choice, but he never showed up, reducing me to watching the Celtics’ game and having a couple of cocktails with South Boston’s finest.”

“Donna’s upset.”

“Frankly, Frances? I’m tired of her dogging me all over town. Why should I have to keep her informed of every move I make?”

“Because she loves you?”

Grenier got vertical and picked up a bottle of Johnny Walker Black off the credenza behind his desk. “Like one?”

I bit the inside of my cheek. “If you insist.”

Grenier handed me a glass. “A toast. To Damian’s new book.”

“You’re changing the subject.”

“I promise to do better by Donna. I really do care about her.”

I clinked Grenier’s glass. “To change.”

“To change...and Damian’s book,” he said.

We exchanged a weird, semi-serious look and knocked back the smoky topaz liquid.

If it sounds like I was cozy with my boss, Donna, and the company president, I was. We’d been through a lot the previous year during the trial of Jason Minot—the

former president of Poseidon Press, a rival publisher—who'd gone berserk: blew up our offices and murdered two of our authors. He'd been convicted and was in jail for the foreseeable future. His lifetime.

* * *

Back in my office, I called Donna.

“He said he went to this bar in Southie to meet Damian, who didn't even show up,” I told her.

“Bullshit.”

“I think he's telling the truth, Donna.”

“Fine. Thanks for letting me know.”

She hung up, and I spent the next four hours drinking coffee and reading Damian's book. I couldn't turn the pages fast enough.

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CHAPTER THREE

ALL HELL BREAKS LOOSE

When I'd finished reading his galley, I texted Damian to meet me at The Sevens, a neighborhood pub on Charles Street. I didn't hear back right away, but got my things together and stopped by Donna's office on the way out. She'd left without telling me. Something was up.

I high-tailed it through the Public Garden to Charles Street, hoping to chat with the bartender at The Sevens before Damian showed up—if he showed.

The tables by the steamed-up windows of The Sevens Ale House were full, and an after-work crew crowded the bar. Mackers—the bartender—waved me over, asked this random guy to get up, and offered me his stool.

“You’re a treasure,” I said to Mackers.

“Give us a kiss, darlin’.”

I leaned over the bar and pecked him on the cheek.

“What’ll you be having?” he said.

“Vodka tonic with lemon.”

Mackers had trained as a bartender in Belfast, where he grew up in a Catholic neighborhood, but I’d met him one summer in college when I’d worked at his London pub—the Wand and Stars—as a lark because I liked the guy, because of the interesting characters I met who were straight out of a novel by Charles Dickens. Actually? Because I needed the money. But it was money with benefits.

Mackers set me up with the drink. “So how’ve you been keeping yourself, darlin’?”

“Not bad...for being single.”

“Jaysus, Francie, I’m sure that won’t be the state of things for very long.”

“I plan on being number one on my priority list, rather than low on some man’s, for some time to come.”

Mackers flicked his bar towel. “I can’t imagine you being low on any man’s priority list. Did you break up with Damian Kerry?”

“Sure as hell did...for that exact reason. Have you seen him recently?”

“He came in last night with a couple of the fellows and told me all about his new book.”

“Jesus, what’s going on?”

Mackers never came out and said, but I knew he was connected. An Irishman from Belfast? Running a bar in Boston? I mean, please. I wasn’t born yesterday. Plus, he’d borrowed fifty thousand dollars, which he was still paying off, from my da, the boss of an Irish gang—the Irish Mob actually—in South Boston.

Mackers hemmed and hawed.

“I mean it. What’s going on?” I said.

“Nothing he could really get in trouble over. And that’s all I’m gonna say, darlin’.”

“You’ll end up deported or in a hardcore American prison if you’re not careful.”

“Are you daft? I’m helping Damian out with a project of his. Nothing illegal. It’s strictly legit and above board.”

“That’s comforting...not.” I took a gulp of my drink. Felt a presence behind me, a hand on my shoulder. “Christ, you frightened me!”

“You’re jumpy today, woman,” Damian said.

“Under your influence.”

“Pint of Guinness, please Mac,” he said, then looked at me. “So?”

“So what?” I said.

“What’d you think of my book?”

“Funny, I was having a conversation with Mackers that totally threw me off. He said you were in here last night with a couple of the guys and—”

“No sense in sticking your nose in, darlin’, where it’s not welcome.” Mackers tilted a pint glass under the Guinness spigot and pulled the lever.

“Oh, *that* was nothing,” Damian said. “I had some questions about...Belfast pubs. You know, for the work in progress.”

“That’s right, darlin’. And your man came to the right place.” Mackers topped up the pint and left it to settle.

“You guys don’t fool me,” I said.

“For god’s sake, tell me if you liked the goddamned book or not,” Damian said.

“Not so sure I liked the ending, but—” I said.

“Why the fuck not?”

Damian was used to getting his ass kissed.

“It sucked. The love story goes in the toilet,” I said.

Mackers leveled the head of the Guinness with the straight edge of a butter knife and devoutly placed this work of art by Belfast’s finest in front of Damian.

Miffed, Damian picked up the Guinness. “I’m planning a sequel, but my love stories always end up like that.”

I clinked his glass. “I’ll drink to that.”

He checked his phone. “Grady’s on his way here.”

* * *

Detective Joe Grady of the Boston Police Department indeed showed up not long after that. He commandeered a stool, set it down with a thunk. “Mackers. Kerry.” He ignored me.

“Detective Grady. What up, man?” Damian said.

“Jack Daniel’s neat.” Grady said to Mackers.

“My man.” Mackers turned to get the drink.

“What’s going on, Grady?” I asked, well acquainted with the detective, who’d been the lead investigator of the Jason Minot murders.

Grady sighed and reached under his Somerville Stars hoodie—advertising his previous gig in semi-pro hockey—to adjust the holster I knew was strapped to the side of his chest. “Murder. Museum of Fine Arts. At closing time.”

I snapped a look at Damian. “Oh, my god!”

“What the fuck?” Damian said.

“A guy spread eagle in the basement, his head like a watermelon dropped off a bridge,” Grady said. “Either jumped from the top of the rotunda...or was pushed.”

I stared at Grady.

“Who was it? You know?” Damian said to Grady.

“Johnny Coyle—”

“For fuck’s sake,” Mackers said and propped Grady up with his whiskey.

“You know it, man,” Grady said.

“Holy mother of god. My art thief,” Damian said.

“Know him?” Detective Grady said.

“Sure...I saw him the other day,” Damian said.

“Just got out of prison,” Grady said.

“I was telling Francie about him,” Damian said. “About how he walked out of the MFA with that Rembrandt all those years ago.”

“Career con man,” Grady said. “Not sure he deserved the comeuppance he got. Liked the guy. Irish charm and all. Could sing too.”

“What do you want from me?” Damian said to Grady.

“Found a page ripped out of a book. Had your name on it.”

“What! Where?”

“Tacked to the wall where the painting used to be,” the detective said.

“Which painting?” Damian said.

I held my breath, knowing what Grady was going to say.

Grady looked at his notebook. “*Dance at Bougival* by Renoir. Murder must’ve been a cover to get that painting out of there. Judging from the frame they left behind, the thing was fucking massive. Guard’s dead, too.”

“Holy shit! The guard watching you?” I said to Damian.

Damian looked peaked, like he was about to throw up. “They cut my Renoir out of the fucking frame?”

“Totally did,” Grady said.

“That painting gets stolen in my new book, which is still in galleys with the Harpoon Books people. It’s not out yet...” Damian said.

Grady looked at me.

“I didn’t do anything. I just *met* Damian there this afternoon,” I said.

Grady looked at Damian.

“Yeah, I met her in the Impressionism Gallery. I wanted her to see the Renoir since she’s writing the publicity stuff.”

“What the fuck?” Grady said.

“Yeah, the same damned painting gets stolen in my new book. The Renoir,”
Damian said.

Grady shook out a Marlboro, tapped it on the bar.

Mackers whistled. “Jaysus, Mary, and Joseph.”

“Did you leave together?” Grady said to Damian.

“Francie went back to the office to read my book. I stayed at the MFA for a while.”

“Til when?”

“Don’t know. Sometime before closing. Then I had a pint at the Crossroads on Beacon Street while I waited for her to call with a verdict on my book,” Damian said.

“So you were at the MFA around the time of the murder.”

“I was there, Grady, but I didn’t do it. Like I said, I left some time before they closed.”

Grady swallowed his drink. “Don’t leave town, Kerry. Mean it. Not until you hear from me.”

I looked at Mackers. A sickly greenish expression had soured his impish face.

“Does this mean I’m free to go?” Damian said.

“Yeah, but I want a copy of your book,” Grady said.

I removed Damian’s galley from my bag and handed it to him. “It’s a great read, Grady.”

Grady flipped through the pages. “Bet it is.”

“I’m out of here,” Damian said. “I’m really fucking upset.” He slapped some bills on the bar. “Cover everybody, Mackers, and keep the change. I’ll call you, Francie.”

“I’ll be waiting by the phone.”

“Pretty sick publicity stunt, Ms. Paige,” Grady said after Damian left.

“Sensational murder. Art theft. Should thrust Damian’s book into the limelight.” He lowered his voice. “Need to talk to you. Somewhere private.”

I was pretty much shaking all over. “Okay. When?”

Grady yanked my elbow. “Now. Get your coat.”

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