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# Chapter 1

## *A Thousand Memories*

The call could not have come at a worse time.

Jordan Crawford was in the middle of a prolonged discussion with James Anderson. James was a thin man in his late forties, with a shiny balding head. He had just a cowlick of hair that he kept trying to get to lay flat on his head. She desperately wanted to take a pair of scissors and cut it off. It was starting to distract her from the point James was trying to make. She began to refocus on what he was saying.

“C’mon, Jordy. Lighten up. You know as well as I do that if we settle now, we stand to make a decent profit for the firm. And it will certainly enhance your reputation and get you that partnership you’ve been after.” James gave her a wolfish smile.

Jordan grimaced. *No doubt you’re hoping it’ll help you move up the ranks.* “My reputation doesn’t need any help, thank you. And I told you *never* call me ‘Jordy.’ I’m not settling this case. Marsh doesn’t have a case and you and I both know that. Any reasonable jury will see that and give me what I want.”

“Reasonable being the key word,” James countered. “Look, let’s see if we can get them to bump up their offer. Maybe another, oh, say two point five. That would bring us to an even ten million. That’s a great deal by anyone’s standards.”

“Maybe.” She thought for a minute. “Tell them we want fifteen, then see if they’ll settle for ten. If they agree, we’ll present it to the client.” She leaned forward aiming her pen directly at his bulbous nose. “But make it very clear to them that we are prepared to go to court and ask for the original twenty-five. And we are very confident that we will get it. Fifteen – and not a penny less than ten. Clear?”

“Crystal.” He began gathering his papers together. “I’m sure Marsh is going to choke on it. But it *is* reasonable.”

“Reasonable being the key.” She smiled. “I know Marsh doesn’t want to go through the hassle of engaging in a protracted court battle. He’s too old to be effective and too proud to let his junior partners handle their most important client.” At that moment, Jamie Wheeler, Jordan’s assistant, gently knocked on the door and stuck her head in. “What is it, Jamie?”

“Sorry to disturb you, Jordan, but there’s a call that I think you better take.”

“Who is it?”

“Your mother.”

At this, James raised an eyebrow. Jordan didn’t respond immediately. She sat back in her chair and folded her hands. After a moment, Jordan said, “Tell her I’ll call her back.”

“I tried that,” Jamie responded. “But she’s called three times in the last hour. She said it was urgent. And Jordan,” Jamie paused. “She sounded really upset.”

James stood up. “I can come back later.”

“No.” She motioned for him to sit back down. “This won’t take long.” She looked at Jamie. “Give me thirty seconds then put the call through.” Jamie nodded and closed the door.

She took a couple of deep breaths. When the phone on her cherry oak desk began to ring, she stopped and stared. It rang twice before she picked it up. “This is Jordan,” she answered.

“Hello, Jordan.” Lillie’s voice sounded strange, distant.

“Hello. How are you?”

"Not well." There was a slight pause. "It's Ulysses."

Jordan's heart skipped a beat. "Mac? Is he all right?"

"He's dead, Jordan," Lillie replied, a slight catch in her throat. "Died in his sleep Wednesday."

Jordan stifled a curse. *Mac has been dead for two days and only now you bother to call.* Exhaling softly, she said, "I'm so sorry. Are you all right? Do you need anything?" She knew even before Lillie spoke the words what was coming.

"Funeral will be Sunday. Then I'll have to bury him. There's not going to be a big service. Just a few friends. I know you're busy." Translation: *Don't bother coming.*

"Do you have enough for expenses?"

"Almost," Lillie replied. "I've got a small policy on Mac, but it doesn't pay off until next week..."

"Don't worry about it. I'll take care of everything. I'll wire you some money. Will five thousand be enough?"

"Oh, Jordan. That's too much. I could never pay you back."

Jordan sighed. "Miss Lillie, I never expected you to pay me back. I want to do this for Mac...and for you." There wasn't an immediate response from Lillie, so Jordan asked, "Are you still there?"

"Yes. I'm fine. I'm here." Lillie was quiet for another moment. "Mac was so proud of you."

*He was, but not you. Never you.* "Shall I send the money to your account?"

"Yes, please."

Jordan asked, "Do you have the funeral home information?"

"Yes. It's Mr. Rainer's mortuary. You remember Mr. Rainer don't you, Jordan?"

"Yes. I do." She wasn't prepared to go down memory lane with Lillie. "What's the address?"

As Lillie spoke, Jordan scribbled quickly. "Don't worry about the money, Miss Lillie. You'll have it by tomorrow."

"I understand." Lillie paused. When she spoke again, her voice was husky, choked with tears. "Thank you, Jordan. For everything."

Jordan hung up the phone, staring at the notations in her near perfect penmanship on her legal pad. *I can't believe Mac is dead.*

James interrupted her thoughts. "Jordan? You okay?"

She looked up. "Yes, thank you." Remembering the work piled on her desk, she added, "Get back on Marsh's case. I'll want an answer by close of business." The look on her face indicated that their time was over.

James stood. "I'm on it." He turned to go, then stopped at the door. He turned to face her and said, "I'm sorry about your loss."

"Thanks. Send Jamie in, will you?"

"Sure." James stepped out.

In seconds, Jamie entered, notepad and pen in hand. "Is everything all right?"

"Yes." Jordan picked up the paper that she had written on and handed it to Jamie. "Please arrange to have a funeral wreath sent to this address. I need it delivered by tomorrow."

Jamie glanced down at the information that Jordan handed to her then looked up sharply. "Isn't this your father?"

"Foster father, Jamie," she answered tersely. "And yes, he's dead. Just arrange for the flowers please."

"I'm so sorry, Jordan. Can I do anything else?"

"Just the flowers. Oh, and don't make a big deal out of this. I don't want a lot of sorrowful glances and meaningless gestures coming my way."

"Of course." *Keep this to yourself. Gotcha, boss.* Jamie turned to go when another thought occurred to her. "Should I make travel arrangements?"

Jordan shook her head. "I'm not going. Too much work to do and not nearly enough time to do it in."

Jamie couldn't hide her dismay. "But Jordan, he is – was – your *foster* father. Shouldn't you be there --"

Jordan cut her off. "No. I haven't been home in years. To show up now would be hypocritical at best. I'm arranging for the expenses to be taken care of. I can't take off now even if I wanted to." When Jamie stood staring at her, she shot back, "That's all."

Watching Jordan, Jamie had the distinct impression that Jordan Crawford was in more pain than she was willing to acknowledge, least of all in front of her. "I'll take care of the flowers right away." *And I'll be praying for you.* She turned to leave when Jordan stopped her.

"I apologize, Jamie. Please reschedule my appointments this afternoon and hold my calls. I've got some work I need to do, and I don't want to be disturbed."

"Done." Jamie turned and left the office, closing the door behind her.

Jordan turned her attention to her Blackberry. Scrolling through her address book, she quickly came across the bank information for Miss Lillie. Since this wasn't the first time she had sent money back home, she knew the transaction would be relatively simple. *Why am I doing this? I don't owe her anything.* A small voice responded, *Do it because Mac would have wanted you to. Do it because she's a lonely, old woman who has lost everything. Do it because it's the right thing to do.*

There were other times she had sent money before: to replace a leaky roof, to purchase an engine for the battered old truck Mac loved. It was always because of Mac she had willingly sent money. It must have irritated Lillie when Mac mentioned their financial situation to Jordan. She always made sure their needs were met. For some odd reason, she always felt like she owed them something for taking care of her those years after Mommy Dear died. Truthfully, it was just her way of showing off. Maybe she wanted to throw it back into Lillie's face: *I did this! All on my own! No thanks to you!*

Shaking her head sadly, Jordan picked up the phone and dialed her personal banker. He picked it up on the second ring. "Tom Peters."

"Tom? It's Jordan."

"Jordan! How the heck are you?" Tom's friendly voice and good-natured cheerfulness was evident over the phone. Over the years, Tom had become a friend and confidant.

"I'm good," Jordan lied. "Listen, Tom, I need you to wire five thousand into Miss Lillie's account."

"Five thousand? Wow! Did you finally talk Mac into buying a truck made within the last twenty years?" He laughed.

"No. Tom, Mac passed away and Miss Lillie needs some help with the expenses."

Tom let out a big breath. "Jeez, I'm sorry Jordan."

"Thanks. Can you take care of that for me, right away?"

"Sure. Give me a few minutes. I'll call you right back." He hung up the phone.

Jordan waited, organizing some papers that were scattered across her desk. About ten minutes later, Tom called back. "Jordan? It's taken care of."

"Thanks, Tom. I really appreciate you handling this so quickly."

"My pleasure. Say, why don't you come over and have dinner with us tonight? Ann and the kids would love to see you. And you really shouldn't be alone tonight."

Jordan smiled at the thought of Tom's three-year-old twins climbing in and out of her lap for hugs and Ann's great cooking. "Sounds good, but can I take a raincheck?"

"Of course. Door's always open. Take care, Jordan."

"Thanks. You too." She hung up the phone. Slowly, she spun her chair around to face the windows in her massive corner office. Leaning back in her chair, she stared out at shimmering blue waters of Lake Michigan, allowing herself to become lost in a thousand memories...