

Трилер

IT STARTED TWO YEARS AGO, with the murder of my best friend, Randi Menke, in Providence. She was strangled in her living room. No sign of a struggle, no sign of forced entry. For a while the Rhode Island cops thought maybe her ex had done it. I guess there'd been a history of domestic assaults. Nothing she'd ever told me, or our other best friend, Jackie, about. Jackie and I tried to console ourselves with that, as we wept together at Randi's funeral. We hadn't known. We just hadn't known or of course we would've done...something. Anything.

That's what we told ourselves.

Fast forward one year. January 21. The anniversary. I'm at home with Aunt Nancy in the mountains of northern New Hampshire, Jackie's returned to her corporate life as a VP for Coca-Cola in Atlanta. Jackie doesn't want to mark the occasion of Randi's murder. Too morbid, she tells me. Later, in the summer, we'll get together and celebrate Randi's birthday. Maybe we'll hike to the top of Mount Washington, bring a bottle of wine.

I still call Jackie on the twenty-first. Can't help myself. Except she doesn't answer. Not her landline, not her work line, not her mobile. Nothing.

Романса

JACKSON ENDED THEIR snowmobile tour at his favorite mountain restaurant.

"We'll have lunch here."

Kayla pulled off her helmet. Her gaze was fixed on the view, which could have been because it was spectacular, but he had a feeling it was because she'd rather look at just about anything but him. "I'm grateful for the offer of lunch, but what I'd really like is to go back to the resort and do some work."

She was running from him.

The kiss had shaken her, and he had some sympathy with that because it had shaken him, too.

For a brief moment in the forest, she'd thawed. Under his hands and mouth, Kayla Green had transformed from ice machine to warm, soft woman, but now she was frozen again, the layer of ice between her and the world thicker than ever.

He wondered what it would take to melt it permanently.

"This is work. You're getting to know Snow Crystal." Jackson chose the table with the best view. "Sit down. The specialty of this place is the hot spiced apple cider."

If they hadn't been on top of a mountain, she would have argued. He saw it in the way she held herself, tense and poised for flight. But there was no flight because her only way out of here was on the back of his snowmobile, and he wasn't going anywhere.

So she sat. "If it's a local specialty I'd like to try it of course, thanks." It was a signal that she wanted to get this over with as fast as possible. "I'm interested in—" She broke off, her expression frozen, as a pretty girl wearing a red ski jacket and a Santa hat skipped across the deck to them.

"Jackson! I wasn't expecting to see you here today." The girl flung her arms around him and Jackson almost drowned in blond hair and perfume.

Драма

Germany, 1944

The sound comes low like the buzzing of the bees that once chased Papa across the farm and caused him to spend a week swathed in bandages.

I set down the brush I'd been using to scrub the floor, once-elegant marble now cracked beneath boot heels and set with fine lines of mud and ash that will never lift. Listening for the direction of the sound, I cross the station beneath the sign announcing in bold black: Bahnhof Bensheim. A big name for nothing more than a waiting room with two toilets, a ticket window and a wurst stand that operates when there is meat to be had and the weather is not awful. I bend to pick up a coin at the base of one of the benches, pocket it. It amazes me the things that people forget or leave behind.

Outside, my breath rises in puffs in the February night air.

The sky is a collage of ivory and gray, more snow threatening. The station sits low in a valley, surrounded by lush hills of pine trees on three sides, their pointed green tips poking out above snow-covered branches. The air has a slightly burnt smell. Before the war, Bensheim had been just another tiny stop that most travelers passed through without noticing. But the Germans make use of everything it seems, and the location is good for parking trains and switching out engines during the night.