



Chapter One

Twenty-nine years later

The harsh blare of a car horn pulled Alex Kincaid from sleep, an uncomfortable ache burning in her lower back. Shifting positions, she felt the rough edge of a chair. She must have fallen asleep in the den. It had been years since she'd done that, awakened with an empty bowl of popcorn in her lap and an old rerun of Taxi on TV. Her mind meandered through the evening before, but she didn't recall if she had been reading or watching television before bed. She settled back in to sleep a few more minutes.

A car rushed by and she shifted again, wondering when her street had become so noisy. Usually no more than one car passed every twenty minutes. But this morning it sounded as though there were a parade going by. No wonder she never slept in the den.

No, that wasn't right. The den was in the back of the house. The cars couldn't be heard from there.

Forcing her eyes open, she stared out her windshield. Her windshield? Confused, she looked at the car around her. Sitting upright, she clutched the steering wheel. What the hell was going on? Above her, the yellow leaves of the fall oak trees sheltered the morning sun, creating patterns of light across her dash.

A cover of dew beaded across her windows. The cool California morning made her shiver. A row of Victorian and Tudor homes stared down at her from the hillside like thick-necked soldiers preparing for attack. What was she doing in her car?

She glanced down at the familiar navy sweat pants and gray Cal T-shirt, trying to remember going to bed the night before.

She'd taken something one of a handful of doctors had given her to help her sleep--Restoril. The endless insomnia had finally driven her to be so exhausted, so totally beat, that she'd regressed to trying the meds again. She'd slept. She'd actually slept. But when had she gotten up? And left her house and driven to--she looked around at the houses--big houses, larger than anything in her neighborhood, all built high off the street, their large windowed fronts staring down at her questioningly.

And where the hell was she?

Leaning forward, she ran her hand over her lopsided ponytail and looked at the street. There had to be a good explanation for this. Her eyes closed, she rubbed at the pain in her temples. Someone must have called her. Her brain kicked into gear as she tried to picture her phone, tried to remember it ringing. Her mind sputtered and stalled like a dying car. She didn't remember talking to anyone.

Hoping one of the houses would nudge into her memory, she stared back at the imposing facades. The block didn't look remotely familiar.

Cars raced down the street, their drivers dressed in ties and suits. Work! Her fingers searched her wrist for her watch. It wasn't there. But she always wore her watch. Turning the key in the ignition, she glanced at the clock on the dashboard. It was nearly seven a.m. She was going to be late for work.

She started the car and glanced at a street sign. Yolo Avenue. She'd never heard of that street.

She'd been sleepwalking; that had to be it. She'd never done that before. It had been so long since she'd even slept through the night. And this was worse than sleepwalking—she had sleep-dressed then sleep-driven and who knew what else.

Fighting off the battling anger at not remembering, she steered the car down Yolo until she saw a familiar street sign. Henry. She was in Berkeley, actually only a half dozen blocks from the station. Yolo was on her beat, but she had never come across it before. Ingrained in her subconscious, somewhere, was this street. That was why she'd ended up there. She shook her head and sped across Shattuck to Ashby. That was the last time she was going to take sleeping pills.

Wishing she had a siren, she blared her horn at the slowpoke drivers around her and sped for home. She parked the car in front of the small home on Pine Lane that had once belonged to her mother. The front grass needed cutting. The hedges had grown up and begun to block the front windows, giving them the appearance of shaded limousine windows, only in green. The Spanish-style house needed painting, too. Its pinkish salmon color always looked as if it had been bought on sale. She wanted the house to be white. But until now, she hadn't realized how much she'd let the house go--suddenly, the house was a disaster.

As she locked the car door, she felt both strangely rested and also unnerved. Neither was a sensation with which she was familiar. She brushed the nervousness off. She didn't have patience for catastrophe now. Rushing up the steps, she shivered, her T-shirt much too thin for the cool morning air.

As she moved, she reminded herself of the positives. At least she had awakened in her own car. What if she had found herself in a stranger's house?

What if she had done something crazy--like driven into a pole or a dog or a child? What if she had robbed a bank?

What if nothing. Nothing had happened. She opened the door to her house and looked around. Everything was normal here.

The drug had a strange effect on her sleep patterns or something. Alex's sleep patterns, or lack of them, had been a popular subject in her household growing up. Maybe she would have a chance to stop by James's office and ask if he remembered anything like that.

She was a very logical person--calm, cool, collected. She didn't drink heavily, exercised religiously and kept her distance from suspicious people. She walked in the crosswalk and flossed daily, for God's sake. Things like waking up on a strange street did not happen to her.

A man's face suddenly popped into her mind. He had been in the bagel store yesterday. He had approached her as she was getting bagels and coffee for herself and her partner. He'd used her name and then Greg had come in and she'd turned away. When she looked back, he was gone. She'd never seen him before or since. And why was she thinking about him now?

Pushing it aside, she just hoped she still had time to shower and dress to be at the station before eight. The patrol captain had little tolerance for tardy officers.

Rushing around, she cursed herself for not programming the coffeemaker the night before. The thought of going without a caffeine fix was torture, but there wasn't time. She glanced at her wrist for the third time in ten minutes. Where the hell was her watch?

Thankfully her job didn't require much primping, and she preferred it that way. She had never worn much make-up. The last thing she wanted to do was look more dainty and feminine. At only five foot three, it was difficult enough to be taken seriously. As she passed the mirror on her way out the door, she caught her reflection.

She cringed at the way her normally curly auburn hair hung limply on her shoulders. Dark circles stood out beneath her eyes, which were so bloodshot it was impossible to tell they were green.

Back in the car, she considered trying to remedy her appearance but decided against it. The one day she had actually put on lip gloss, her partner had teased her that she looked more like she belonged in front of a group of kindergartners than in a police uniform. And while she knew Greg had probably been joking, she was sure there were others who would readily agree with him without so much as a hint of humor. She didn't want to be singled out, just left alone. She was proving herself as a rookie--top of her class, best record so far.

No sense screwing it up by reminding them that she was a girl. She could swear that every once in a while, when things were going really well, they forgot. And in those moments, she loved being on the force more than anything.

At five to eight, she pulled into the parking lot next to the familiar gray building that housed the police department. The yellowed windows on the lower level still bore the bars installed after the station had been bombed back in the sixties. Though she had been on the force only a short time, she'd learned to enjoy the history and idiosyncrasies of the building. It would be strange when the new building was finished.

Alex straightened her back and got out of the car, thinking about what tests today would bring. As one of the few females on the force, Alex was at the receiving end of more than her share of jokes. She was used to it. Facing the teasing of the other officers was fine most days. Bra and panty jokes, she could suffer through.

Issues of her strength, her tolerance, her endurance for the job, those she wouldn't. She'd been a physical trainer for eight years before a rundown with a mugger made her realize she wanted more.

And she'd been tired of women whose idea of getting in shape was leg lifts while having their bikini line waxed. Alex was faster than all of the women and some of the men on the force. She'd proven it at the academy and she'd do it again if anyone questioned it. But mental strength and stability were not so easily measured and she refused to let anyone question hers.

And if anyone found out about last night, that would be the first thing to come into question.

She just prayed no one ever found out.