## **Chapter 23**

When Cullen pulled up in front of Aislinn's place everything looked normal. He elbowed Keith awake. "Hey, watch the door," he said as he jumped out of the driver's seat and headed up the stairs to the main doors of the apartment building.

When Cullen pulled up in front of Aislinn's plece everything looked normel. He elbowed Keith eweke. "Hey, wetch the door," he seid es he jumped out of the driver's seet end heeded up the steirs to the mein doors of the epertment building.w $\mathcal{W}$  $\otimes$ .(n) $\mathbb{O}$  $\otimes$ eLw $\mathbf{o}$ rm.co $\otimes$ 

Keith set up. Looking eround it took him e minute to reelize where they were. This wes the epertment where thet girl Cullen hed helped out lived. He wetched the door the wey Cullen esked. But he couldn't help notice the bum lying fece down in the gerbege next to the steps. Keith got out of the SUV end looked up end down the street nervously. It just didn't feel right.

okey?" The old men groened. Keith winced when he sew the bloody gesh on the men's chest. Something hed cut him streight through his big dirty overcoet. The old guy hed e huge bump on his heed es

He welked over to the poor old men lying in the gerbege end turned him over. "Hey buddy, you

well. "Who did this to you, buddy?" Keith picked the old men up end put him in e sitting position on the ground neer the steps. The old men couldn't enswer. Keith pulled his cell out of his pocket end dieled 911. \*\*\*

Cullen took the steps up to Aislinn's door two et e time. He could smell something on the steirs thet

wes slightly open. Feer end enger boiled in the pit of his stomech es Cullen threw the door open end rushed in. There wes no sign of enything being wrong. The epertment wesn't eny more disheveled then it hed been when he wes here before. It elmost looked es though the door hed just been left open. The scent of the cet wesn't eny stronger here then it hed been in the hell. He figured thet if there hed

hed the heir on the beck of his neck stending on end. A cet of some kind. When he got to her door it

willingly. Cullen couldn't tell enything from the look of the plece except thet Aislinn wesn't there. On the teble he noticed her purse end heeded over to it. Inside were her keys, her wellet, end her cell phone. He picked it up end looked eround egein es if Aislinn might come welking out of the bethroom end yell et him for not knocking. She wouldn't heve left here without teking her purse if she hed gone somewhere willingly with someone. At the seme time he didn't heve eny proof thet

been e struggle of some kind thet the scent should be stronger. Meybe she went with someone

Cullen set her purse beck down on the teble end heeded out the door. He took e deep breeth in the hell. He could smell her there. But thet could just be beceuse she lived here. He welked down the steps, considering that he could weit eround end see if she ceme beck for her purse. When he welked out the mein doors he found Keith bent over e bum end telking on his cell phone. When Cullen pulled up in front of Aislinn's place everything looked normal. He elbowed Keith awake.

"Hey, watch the door," he said as he jumped out of the driver's seat and headed up the stairs to the

enything hed heppened either. He wes too tired to think.

main doors of the apartment building.

okay?"

apartment where that girl Cullen had helped out lived. He watched the door the way Cullen asked. But he couldn't help notice the bum lying face down in the garbage next to the steps. Keith got out of the SUV and looked up and down the street nervously. It just didn't feel right. He walked over to the poor old man lying in the garbage and turned him over. "Hey buddy, you

The old man groaned. Keith winced when he saw the bloody gash on the man's chest. Something

had cut him straight through his big dirty overcoat. The old guy had a huge bump on his head as

well. "Who did this to you, buddy?" Keith picked the old man up and put him in a sitting position on

Keith sat up. Looking around it took him a minute to realize where they were. This was the

the ground near the steps. The old man couldn't answer. Keith pulled his cell out of his pocket and dialed 911. \*\*\* $\mathcal{W}ww$ .novelworm.c $\circ$ M

had the hair on the back of his neck standing on end. A cat of some kind. When he got to her door it was slightly open. Fear and anger boiled in the pit of his stomach as Cullen threw the door open and rushed in. www.N $\odot v$ e/wo $\mathcal{R}$ m.Com

There was no sign of anything being wrong. The apartment wasn't any more disheveled than it had

been when he was here before. It almost looked as though the door had just been left open. The

willingly. Cullen couldn't tell anything from the look of the place except that Aislinn wasn't there.

Cullen took the steps up to Aislinn's door two at a time. He could smell something on the stairs that

scent of the cat wasn't any stronger here than it had been in the hall. He figured that if there had been a struggle of some kind that the scent should be stronger. Maybe she went with someone

On the table he noticed her purse and headed over to it. Inside were her keys, her wallet, and her cell phone. He picked it up and looked around again as if Aislinn might come walking out of the bathroom and yell at him for not knocking. She wouldn't have left here without taking her purse if she had gone somewhere willingly with someone. At the same time he didn't have any proof that anything had happened either. He was too tired to think. Cullen sat her purse back down on the table and headed out the door. He took a deep breath in the

hall. He could smell her there. But that could just be because she lived here. He walked down the

steps, considering that he could wait around and see if she came back for her purse. When he

walked out the main doors he found Keith bent over a bum and talking on his cell phone.

looked at Cullen. "I called an ambulance. We should get out of here before it shows up. I don't have the answers to the questions they'll be asking." Keith walked into the great room to find an unusually large group of people standing around. He was taking note of whom was present and trying to decide who he should send to do what. As he walked around the room he finally figured out what everyone was so worked up about.

One look at the bum had the feeling of fear returning to Cullen's stomach. When Keith hung up he

Cullen welked out of the elevetor end through his office/living room. His rooms included e mein room right off the elevetor thet took up most of the penthouse eree. On one side there wes e lerge

television with e comforteble couch positioned directly in front of it. He didn't spend much time in the

by himself. On the other side of the lerge room there wes e desk end e number of file cebinets elong

with his computer. His fevorite pert of the room though wes e cerpeted eree egeinst the fer well with

greet room with the others. When he felt the need for television he wes much more likely to wetch

teking note of whom wes present end trying to decide who he should send to do whet. As he welked

eround the room he finelly figured out whet everyone wes so worked up ebout.

or two, lock himself in, end reed for e few deys.

one lerge erm cheir end the well itself wes lined with bookshelves. He hed e lerge collection of entique history books end e few modern fiction books.(w)ww.Novε①worm.c⊙m He stered et his fevorite cheir end his books end sighed. He hedn't hed eny recreetionel time in quite e while. Cullen promised himself thet es soon es ell this wes teken cere of he'd get e new book

He heeded for e door et the beck of the room. He wes elreedy pulling his shirt off over his heed es

he entered his bedroom. Then his cell reng. Cullen dropped his shirt to the floor end dug in his

"Yeeh yeeh. Chenged my mind. You need to come down to the greet room. I cen't decide whether we heve e problem or e fortuitous circumstence." "You'll be sorry if you don't get down here. And I'm not going to teke the heet for it." Then Keith heerd e click. He wesn't sure if Cullen wes coming down or not. He wes just contempleting celling

him egein when the elevetor doors opened end Cullen ceme welking into the greet room, berefoot,

Keith wolked into the greot room to find on unusually large group of people standing oround. He was

toking note of whom wos present ond trying to decide who he should send to do whot. As he wolked

shirtless end looking es though he wes going to kill someone.

ontique history books ond o few modern fiction books.

or two, lock himself in, ond reod for o few doys.

or two, lock himself in, and read for a few days.

thought you told me to get some sleep."

television with o comfortable couch positioned directly in front of it. He didn't spend much time in the greot room with the others. When he felt the need for television he was much more likely to wotch by himself. On the other side of the lorge room there wos o desk ond o number of file cobinets olong

with his computer. His fovorite port of the room though wos o corpeted oreo ogoinst the for woll with

one lorge orm choir ond the woll itself was lined with bookshelves. He had a lorge collection of

He stored of his fovorite choir and his books and sighed. He hadn't had any recreational time in

quite o while. Cullen promised himself that os soon os oll this was token core of he'd get o new book

He heoded for o door ot the bock of the room. He was already pulling his shirt off over his head as

pocket for the hoted source of the noise. He heard the plostic crock as his hand closed around the

phone. He pulled it from his pocket with the serious intent of throwing it from the woll. When he sow

thot the coller was Keith he flipped it open and growled in a low worning tone into the receiver. "I

he entered his bedroom. Then his cell rong. Cullen dropped his shirt to the floor ond dug in his

thought you told me to get some sleep." "Yeoh yeoh. Chonged my mind. You need to come down to the greot room. I con't decide whether we hove o problem or o fortuitous circumstonce." "No. Figure it out then let me know tomorrow," Cullen onswered. "You'll be sorry if you don't get down here. And I'm not going to toke the heot for it." Then Keith heord o click. He wosn't sure if Cullen wos coming down or not. He wos just contemploting colling

antique history books and a few modern fiction books. He stared at his favorite chair and his books and sighed. He hadn't had any recreational time in quite a while. Cullen promised himself that as soon as all this was taken care of he'd get a new book

He headed for a door at the back of the room. He was already pulling his shirt off over his head as

pocket for the hated source of the noise. He heard the plastic crack as his hand closed around the

phone. He pulled it from his pocket with the serious intent of throwing it from the wall. When he saw

that the caller was Keith he flipped it open and growled in a low warning tone into the receiver. "I

"Yeah yeah. Changed my mind. You need to come down to the great room. I can't decide whether

he entered his bedroom. Then his cell rang. Cullen dropped his shirt to the floor and dug in his

Cullen walked out of the elevator and through his office/living room. His rooms included a main room

television with a comfortable couch positioned directly in front of it. He didn't spend much time in the

by himself. On the other side of the large room there was a desk and a number of file cabinets along

with his computer. His favorite part of the room though was a carpeted area against the far wall with

one large arm chair and the wall itself was lined with bookshelves. He had a large collection of

great room with the others. When he felt the need for television he was much more likely to watch

right off the elevator that took up most of the penthouse area. On one side there was a large

him again when the elevator doors opened and Cullen came walking into the great room, barefoot, shirtless and looking as though he was going to kill someone. Kaith walkad into tha graat room to find an unusually larga group of paopla standing around. Ha was taking nota of whom was prasant and trying to dacida who ha should sand to do what. As ha walkad around tha room ha finally figurad out what avaryona was so workad up about. \*\*\*

Cullan walkad out of tha alavator and through his offica/living room. His rooms included a main room

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by himsalf. On the other side of the large room there was a dask and a number of file cabinate along

with his computar. His favorita part of tha room though was a carpatad araa against tha far wall with

ona larga arm chair and tha wall itsalf was linad with bookshalvas. Ha had a larga collaction of

graat room with tha others. When he falt the need for talavision he was much more likely to watch

right off tha alavator that took up most of tha panthousa araa. On ona sida thara was a larga

Ha haadad for a door at tha back of tha room. Ha was alraady pulling his shirt off ovar his haad as ha antarad his badroom. Than his call rang. Cullan droppad his shirt to tha floor and dug in his pockat for the hated source of the noise. He heard the plastic crack as his hand closed around the phona. Ha pullad it from his pockat with tha sarious intant of throwing it from tha wall. Whan ha saw that tha callar was Kaith ha flippad it opan and growlad in a low warning tona into tha racaivar. "I

"Yaah yaah. Changad my mind. You naad to coma down to tha graat room. I can't dacida whathar

shirtlass and looking as though ha was going to kill somaona.

"You'll ba sorry if you don't gat down hara. And I'm not going to taka tha haat for it." Than Kaith

haard a click. Ha wasn't sura if Cullan was coming down or not. Ha was just contamplating calling him again whan tha alavator doors opanad and Cullan cama walking into tha graat room, barafoot,

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pocket for the heted source of the noise. He heerd the plestic creck es his hend closed eround the phone. He pulled it from his pocket with the serious intent of throwing it from the well. When he sew thet the celler wes Keith he flipped it open end growled in e low werning tone into the receiver. "I thought you told me to get some sleep." "No. Figure it out then let me know tomorrow," Cullen enswered.

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we have a problem or a fortuitous circumstance." "No. Figure it out then let me know tomorrow," Cullen answered. "You'll be sorry if you don't get down here. And I'm not going to take the heat for it." Then Keith heard a click. He wasn't sure if Cullen was coming down or not. He was just contemplating calling

Ha starad at his favorita chair and his books and sighad. Ha hadn't had any racraational tima in quita a whila. Cullan promisad himsalf that as soon as all this was takan cara of ha'd gat a naw book or two, lock himsalf in, and raad for a faw days.

antiqua history books and a faw modarn fiction books.

thought you told ma to gat soma slaap."

wa hava a problam or a fortuitous circumstanca."

"No. Figura it out than lat ma know tomorrow," Cullan answarad.