



WITH HAVERTOE CHARGED AND BOOKED, THE reports filed, the case closed, Eve couldn't come up with a single excuse to ditch the dinner with the Hollywood types.

And she tried.

She poked her fingers in the active cases of her detectives, hoping to hook an angle that required her immediate and personal attention. When that failed she considered pulling out a cold case at random. But nobody would buy that as an emergency, especially with Peabody breathing down her neck.

"What are you wearing tonight?" Peabody demanded.

"I don't know. Something to cover nakedness."

"Long or short?"

"Long or short what?"

“The outfit. Short, showing lots of leg. You’ve got all that leg so you can. Or long and sleek because you’re skinny and can pull that off.”

Eve dawdled over a report Detective Baxter had turned in. Reading it three times was just being thorough. “You’re spending too much time thinking about my body.”

“Thoughts of your body haunt me night and day. But really, Dallas, are you going sexy or restrained, elegant or snap?”

“Maybe the restrained sexy snappy elegant. Whatever the hell any of that is.” Taking her sweet time, Eve signed off on Baxter’s report. “And why the hell do you care what I wear?”

“Because I have two main choices for me, and once I know which direction you’re going, I’ll have a better handle on it. The one really shows the girls off, but if you’re going restrained I don’t think I should put the girls on display. So—”

Genuinely stumped, Eve swiveled in her chair. “You actually think I’m going to help you decide if you should flaunt your tits at dinner?”

“Never mind. I’ll ask Mavis.”

“Good. Now why are you and your famous girls in my office?”

“Because it’s almost end of shift and you’re trying to stall, looking for a reason you can legitimately skip the party.”

“I am so.”

Peabody opened her mouth, then laughed. “Come on, Dallas, it’ll be fun. Nadine will be there, and Mavis and Mira. How often do any of us get to party with celebs?”

“Hopefully this will be the last time. Take your girls and go home.”

“Really? We’ve still got ten till end of shift.”

And the odds of catching something hot in ten weren’t good. “Who’s the boss?” Eve asked her.

“You are, sir. Thanks! See you tonight.”

With little choice once Peabody bolted, Eve signed off on another report. Since staring hard at her 'link didn't cause it to signal that a psycho had just wiped out all the tourists on Fifth Avenue, she gave up and shut it down for the day.

It was just one evening, she reminded herself on the way down to the garage. The food would probably be good, and Peabody was right, there'd be plenty of people there she knew. It wasn't as if she'd have to spend the whole time making small talk with strangers.

But it made her think about the Icoves, the father and son, the respected doctors who had played God in their underground lab. Creating human clones, she thought, dispatching those who weren't perfect, duplicating others. Educating them, training them, enslaving them.

Until they'd both been murdered by their own creations.

After this dinner, she reminded herself, she'd be done. Except she'd already been told she had to go to the New York premiere. But after *that* she'd be done with the whole celebrity thing. And finally she'd be done with the Icove case.

How many of them were out there? she wondered. The clones, the Icove creations? She thought of the little girl and the baby she'd let go—or Roarke had let go—of Avril Icove—the three Avril Icoves, all married to the younger Icove.

Had they read Nadine's book? Wherever they'd gone, were they paying attention to the never-quite-ending interest in how they'd come to be?

And she thought of what she and Roarke had left—no choice with the facility about to blow—in tubes and hives in the underground lab. The set, the hype, the actress in the long, black coat fixed the lives that had been created in, and had ended in that nightmare facility front and center in her mind.

Yeah, she wanted to be done with the Icove case.

She drove through the gates, rolled her shoulders back. One evening, she reminded herself as she saw the glory of home.

Next time she had a full evening free, and if the weather stayed mild, she and Roarke would have dinner on one of the terraces. Do the whole wine and candlelight thing. Maybe walk around the estate in the starlight.

She'd never thought of doing those things before Roarke, never wanted them. But now there was Roarke, and there was home. And there was a want to cherish both whenever she could.

She parked at the front of the house where it spread, where it rose up in its fanciful towers and turrets. Maybe the party wouldn't last all that long. They could come home, take that walk in the starlight.

Absently she rubbed at the faint twinge in her arm as she got out of the car. The injuries she'd sustained in Dallas had healed—or close enough. But the memory of them . . . yes, there was a want to cherish when she could.

As she expected, Summerset—the skinny—and the cat—the fat—waited in the foyer.

“I see you were unable to formulate an excuse to miss tonight's festivities.”

She didn't much care for Roarke's pain-in-her-ass majordomo knowing her that well. “There's still time for murder. It could even be here and now.”

“There's a message from Trina for you on the house 'link.”

Eve froze on the steps. Freezing was a natural byproduct of blood running cold. “If you let her into this house, there will be murder. Double homicide when I beat both of you to death with a brick.”

“She's occupied downtown assisting Mavis and Peabody, and will be

unable to get here for your hair and makeup before the event. However,” he continued as relief trickled through panic, “she’s left detailed instructions for you.”

“I know how to get ready for some stupid dinner,” Eve muttered as she stomped upstairs. “I don’t need detailed instructions.”

In the bedroom, she stripped off her jacket, her weapon harness. And scowled at the house link. “You think I don’t know how to take a damn shower and slap on some face junk?” she demanded of the cat, who’d followed her up. “I’ve done it before.”

More in the last couple years, she judged, than in most of the years before combined. But still.

But the cat stared at her with his bicolored eyes. She hissed, stomped to the link, and called up the message.

Just do what I tell you and you’ll be good to go. I’ll know if you screw this up, so don’t. Now, start with a long, steamy shower and the pomegranate scrub.

As Trina’s voice droned on and on, Eve sat on the side of the bed. There were a zillion steps, she calculated. Nobody in their right mind took all those steps just to clean up for a party.

And who the hell would know whether or not she scrubbed with pomegranate?

Trina might, she thought.

Anyway, a long, steamy shower sounded fine. No problem.

By the time she’d finished the shower, the scrub, the body lotion, the face brightener, and the hair product that looked and felt a little too much like snot to suit her, she gave murder a more in-depth consideration.

She smeared stuff on her eyes, brushed stuff on her cheeks, smeared dye on her lips, and cursed whoever had invented facial enhancements.

Enough was enough, she decided, and walked back into the bedroom just as Roarke walked in.

How come he didn't need all the fuss and gunk to look so damn pretty? she wondered. Nothing Trina could come up with could improve on that face—that carved-by-benevolent-angels face, and the wickedly blue eyes, the perfectly etched mouth that smiled now as he saw her.

“There you are.”

“How can you tell it's me? I've got so much crap on my face I could be anybody under it.”

“Let's see.” He stepped over, laid his lips on hers. “There you are,” he said again with that whisper of Ireland in his voice. “My Eve.”

“I don't feel like your Eve, or mine either. Why can't I just go around with my regular face?”

“Darling, it's very much your face. Just partied up a bit. Sexy. And you smell the same.”

“It's pomegranate, and some other stuff Trina ordered me to use. Why do I let her push me around?”

“I can't say.” And wouldn't. “How did it go at the studio?”

“It's weird, but Durn's okay. We didn't stay the whole time because we caught a case.”

“Oh?”

“Caught and closed.”

He grinned. “And I feel I have to say I'm sorry it went so well. Why don't you tell me about Marlo Durn and the others while I shower?”

“You probably know some of them. You've bumped elbows, and more, with the Hollywood crowd.”

“Hmm” was his non-answer as he undressed. “In any case I haven't

bumped anything with Marlo Durn, which should be a relief to all of us as I've seen some of the media coverage of her. She could pass for your sister at this point."

"I guess. And it's weird." Hands in the pockets of her robe, she leaned against the door and watched his most excellent ass head for the shower. "The one playing Peabody's a bitch."

"Rumor has it," he called out over the pulse of water. "And also that there's no love lost between her and Durn. Should be an interesting evening."

"Maybe they'll punch each other." Eve felt her enthusiasm click up a notch at the idea. "That would be fun."

"We can only hope."

"The sets are spooky," she continued. "All that was missing from the bullpen were crumbs on Jenkinson's desk. That and the smell, but it takes years of cop to get that smell."

When he stepped out of the shower, wrapped a towel around his waist, she frowned. "That's it? That's all you have to do? It's not right."

"Some of it should be offset by the fact you're not required to shave your face."

"I don't think that's enough."

She stalked over to the closet, opened it. And scowled again.

"What am I supposed to wear? There are too many choices in here. If you've got one thing, you don't have to think about it. You just take it out, put it on. This is too complicated. Peabody hounded me about this until I wanted to pull her tongue out and wrap it around her neck. Between her and Trina my brain's fried."

Amused, he walked over, stepped into the closet. "This." He lifted a dress off the rod.

Short, she noted, with a kind of drape to the skirt from where it was caught at the side of the waist with a flower of the same material and

color as the dress. Not really blue, not really green, with a kind of shimmer overcast. She eyed it, the wide scoop of neck, the thumb-width straps.

“How do you know this one?”

“The little black dress is a classic for a reason, but often expected—especially in New York. So you’ll go with color, rich color in a soft sheen. It’s feminine without fuss, sexy without trying to be.”

She took it, turned it around, and lifted an eyebrow at the deep plunge in the back. “Without trying.”

“Very hard. You have shoes to match.”

“I do?”

“You do, yes, and go with diamonds. Leave the color to the dress.”

“Which diamonds? Do you know how many you give me? Why do you do that?”

The aggrieved sound of her voice amused him nearly as much as giving her diamonds. “It’s a sickness. I’ll get them for you once you’re dressed.”

She said nothing, and stood where she was as he selected a dark suit from his forest of suits, a slate-colored shirt, and a stone-colored tie.

“How come you don’t wear color?”

“The better to serve as the backdrop for my beautiful wife.”

She narrowed her eyes. “You had that one ready.”

“The truth is always ready.”

She jabbed a finger at him. “That one, too.”

“Such a cynic.” He gave her a pat on the ass as he passed. She could have found more to say, cynic-wise, but decided to save it. By the time she’d dressed, apologized in advance to her feet, and trapped them in the ice-pick heels, transferred her weapon and badge and communicator to one of the useless bags women were forced to carry to evening events, Roarke had the diamonds laid out.

“All of that?”

“All of that, yes,” he said firmly as he finished his tie.

“You could buy New Jersey for all of that.”

“I’d rather see them on my wife than buy New Jersey.”

“They’ll see me from space,” she muttered as she plugged in the glittery drop earrings, clamped on the bracelet, the fancy wrist unit.

“No, not like that,” he said as she fought with the clasp on the triple-strand necklace. “This way.” He adjusted the chains so they draped front and back.

She started to make a comment about shoulder-blade jewelry, but when she turned for a look had to admit it looked damned snappy.

“The evenings are cooling off.” He handed her a short, translucent coat. Over the dress it looked like a thin film of stars.

“Did I already have this?”

“You have it now.”

Her eyes shifted to his in the mirror. She had a smart-ass remark ready, but when he smiled at her, she thought, *Oh what the hell.*

“We look pretty good.”

With his hands on her shoulders, he pressed his cheek to hers. “I think we’ll do.”

“Let’s go play Hollywood.”

It felt like a play, the set, the costumes, the lights. Mason Roundtree’s primary residence might have been New L.A., but he didn’t stint on his New York pad.

The Park Avenue townhouse rose three stories and boasted a roof terrace with domed lap pool and garden. He’d gone minimalist contemporary in style with lots of glass, chrome, open space, and blond-toned wood. Here and there a pin light showcased some sinuous sculpture or

jewel-toned ball. Art juggled between colorful splashes or dramatic black-and-white photographs.

Off the entryway with its single spear of silver light, the living area spread under high ceilings. A fire simmered low in a silver hearth.

“At last.” Blunt as a thumb in a black suit, Roundtree shot out a hand, gripped Eve’s. He sported a goatee, a perfect triangle of blazing red, and a mass of wildly curling hair.

She thought he might look more at home felling a tree with an axe in some mountain forest rather than a sleekly modern New York drawing room.

“You’re a hard woman to wrangle, Lieutenant Dallas.”

“I guess.”

“I missed you on set today. I wanted some time.”

“It was murder.”

“So I heard.” His eyes blazed blue as he studied her face. “Damn bad timing. I’m hoping you find some time to come down to the studio,” he said to Roarke with another fast grip and grin.

“I’ll see what I can do.”

“Damn near wrapped. I don’t want to jinx it but so far this project’s been smooth as a baby’s ass.” He had his sharp bluebird eyes on Eve again, one hand tugging at his goatee. “You’ve been the only wrinkle. Can’t get you to consult, take meetings, do lunch, interviews.”

“It’s still murder.”

“Ha!”

“Mason, you’re hogging our centerpiece.” A curvy brunette wearing lipstick red with glinting sapphires glided up. “I’m Connie Burkette, Mason’s wife. Welcome.”

“I’m an admirer,” Roarke told her.

She purred. “Nothing lovelier to hear from a gorgeous man. Let me return the compliment to you, and to you,” she said to Eve. “Mason’s

been saturated with this project for nearly a year now. And when he's saturated, I get soaked. I feel like I already know both of you. So, champagne, wine? Something stronger?"

At the most subtle of signals one of the staff passing flutes of champagne sidled over.

"This is good. Thanks." Eve took a glass.

"Your dress is fabulous. You wear Leonardo, don't you?"

"He's a little big for me."

Connie laughed, an easy, throaty sound that went with her slumberous brown eyes. "That he is. I loved meeting him and Mavis. She's a true and unique delight. And the baby! What a beauty. Now come along with me, see your old friends, your new ones."

"Dallas!" Marlo, sleek in a sheath of dull bronze, rushed forward. "I'm so glad you made it. Peabody said you'd already closed the case. Isn't that amazing?" she said to Connie. "They caught a killer within hours."

"It's not hard when the killer's a moron," Eve commented.

"Aren't the two of you something?" Connie caught one of Eve's hands, one of Marlo's in turn, and made Eve wonder if everybody in Hollywood felt compelled to touch.

"I've known Marlo for years," Connie continued, "but seeing you both side by side is, well, surreal. There are differences, of course." Angling her head, Connie looked them both up and down. "Marlo's a bit shorter, and your eyes are longer in shape—and without the makeup Marlo lacks the little chin cleft—but at a quick glance, it's—"

"A little spooky," Eve finished.

"It is."

"Joel wanted me to have the cleft done surgically—the producer," Marlo added.

"You're not kidding."

"I'm not. Joel tends to go over the top. But it's what makes him the best."

"I shaved my head for him for *Unreasonable Doubt*," Connie said. "But in that case he and Mason were right. And I have the Oscar to prove it."

"It wasn't the shaved head that netted you the Oscar. It was brilliance."

"See why I keep this beautiful young thing around?" Connie asked. "Oh, that must be Charlotte Mira."

Eve glanced back. "Yeah. That's Doctor Mira and her husband, Dennis." God, he was cute, Eve thought, in his spiffy suit and mismatched socks. She felt more relaxed just looking at him.

"I need to introduce myself. Take care of our star, Marlo."

"You know I will. She's magnificent," Marlo said when Connie walked toward the Miras. "She's the classiest actor, and woman, I know. She and Roundtree have been married—first time for both—for over twenty-five years. That's a good run for anybody, but a miracle in our business, especially when both are in the business."

Then she stared over Eve's shoulder, blinked. "Oh my."

"Ladies."

"Roarke," Eve said by way of introduction.

"It certainly is. They didn't get the eyes. Close, but not quite. Sorry. Julian and I have been working together for months now, and I've gotten used to thinking of him as you. But now here you are."

"It's a pleasure to meet you. I admire your work."

"You're here." Peabody, girls rising proudly over a bodice of stars scattered on midnight, rushed over. "We were getting the tour of the house, which is seriously uptown."

"Peabody." Roarke took a flute off a tray and offered it. "You look delicious."

“Oh my God,” Marlo said under her breath as Peabody flushed and beamed.

“Thanks. This is so exciting. We’re having the best time.”

Beside her, Ian McNab grinned. His version of fancy dinner wear ran to a pumpkin-colored shirt, a lime green suit, and high-top skids that matched the shirt. His blond hair was pulled back from his thin, attractive face in a long tail, leaving the dangle of gold loops on his ear to glint in the light.

Eve started to speak when a man stepped to Peabody’s other side. He wore his blond hair pulled back in a long tail, leaving his thin, attractive face unframed. His suit, shirt, tie were all the color of night fog, and fit his slim frame perfectly.

“McNab, that’s what you’d look like—almost—if you dressed like an adult human.”

“Pretty tight, huh?” McNab said and chomped into the canapé he’d snagged from another tray.

“Matthew Zank, in the role of Detective Ian McNab.” He held out a hand to Eve. “Sir.”

The quick charm made Eve smile. “Dallas will do.”

“Hey, everybody!”

As Eve turned at the familiar voice, Mavis flashed a camera. “Mag! I’m making an a-s-s of myself, but I want pictures.”

“The kid’s not here,” Eve reminded her. “You don’t have to spell *ass*.”

“Habit. Ass, ass, shit, fuck. God that felt good. Anyhow, Leonardo’s huddled with Andi about her dress for the premiere. Did you meet her yet?” Like McNab, Mavis snagged a canapé. “Andrea Smythe aka Doctor Mira. She doesn’t look so much like Mira tonight ’cause, wow, I’ve never seen Mira wear a black skin-suit, or heard her curse in Brit.”

“Andi’s got the pottiest of potty mouths,” Marlo explained. “Part of her charm, which she has in spades. Everybody adores Andi.”

“She makes Leonardo blush. It’s so totally cute.” Mavis popped the canapé in her mouth.

“That’s a Leonardo, isn’t it?”

At Marlo’s question, Eve looked blank.

“Yes,” Roarke answered for her.

“It’s fabulous. I know from my research clothes aren’t your thing, which is where we part ways. I love them. Clothes, shoes, bags, shoes, and more shoes. Just can’t get enough.”

“We can never be friends,” Eve said solemnly, and made Marlo laugh.

“I’m not half the clotheshorse Julian is.”

“Something else he and Roarke have in common.” Eve glanced around. “He’s not here? I don’t think I’d miss him.”

“Always late. He’s bringing Nadine.”

“Really?”

“Who knows,” Marlo said with a shrug. “K.T.’s not here yet either, so—”

“Both our stars. Valerie, get a picture. Joel Steinburger.” The tall, robust man with steely hair and hard black eyes pumped Eve’s hand like a well handle, then turned, gripped her shoulder, bared his teeth at the woman with the camera. “This is a pleasure, a pleasure.” Baring his teeth again, he hooked his free arm around Marlo’s waist, pulled her in. “How did you enjoy your visit to the set today—better late than never! Preston tells me Detective Peabody is going to do a cameo for us. Delighted. We’ll get you in there, too.”

“No,” Eve said.

“It’ll be fun. We’ll see you get the full glamour treatment. Who doesn’t want to be a vid star for a day?”

“Me.”

“We’ll talk.” He winked at her, but those black eyes bored in. “Valerie’s handling the public relations and media for the project. The two of you have to set up lunch, discuss promotion.”

“No,” Eve repeated, glanced at the pretty woman with milk chocolate skin and tiger’s eyes. “Sorry, but I don’t do lunch or promotion.”

“Valerie will handle everything, make it fun for you. Word is you don’t have an agent or manager. Saves some time without the middlemen. We’re going to need you for a couple of days for the extras for the home discs, but the cop look. No glamour there. The audience wants the real you.”

“Does the word *no* ring any bells?”

“Now, now, honey, no need to be shy. Valerie will walk you through it. And get those photo ops we missed on set today rescheduled. Asap.”

“Joel.” Smiling easily, Roarke put a hand on Steinburger’s arm. “Why don’t we find somewhere to talk?”

“Roarke, of course. Another pleasure. The businessman,” he said with another wink at Eve, “the husband. The helpmate.”

“Do you think he knows Roarke just saved his life?” Peabody wondered.

“Did he really call me *honey*? I think my ears deceive me.”

“Apologies, Lieutenant.” Valerie offered a coolly professional smile with the apology. “Mr. Steinburger’s giving a hundred and ten percent to this project. He expects the same from everyone involved.”

“Where does he get the extra ten?”

Valerie’s smile tensed at the corners. “And promotion is part of the whole. If you find you have any time, any at all, please contact me. I promise I’ll vet everything, and only make the best possible use of your time.”

“I wonder if she called him *Mr. Steinburger* when they used to bang

like hydrohammers in his Hollywood office,” Marlo murmured when Valerie walked away.

“No, she called him God,” Matthew said, “as in, ‘Oh God, oh God, oh God yes!’ I’ve heard her. Sadly, the office has been quiet since we got to New York.”

“Oh, they ended it months ago, before we left the Coast.”

“Got Publicity Chief on the project out of it. Sorry.” Matthew flashed that quick, charming smile at Eve again. “We’re shallow, overly obsessed about who’s doing who.”

“Like high school,” Eve suggested.

He laughed. “Afraid so. Plus gossip passes the time between takes.”

“Darling Eve!”

The Irish was a bit more ripe in the voice, and no, the eyes not as stunningly blue. But Julian Cross hit the gorgeous mark, and moved well.

In fact he moved straight to Eve, yanked her into a quick, hard kiss, with a hint of tongue.

“Hey!”

“I couldn’t help it.” The not-quite-blue-enough eyes twinkled at her. “I feel like we’re close.”

“Think that again and they’ll have to write a fat lip into your next scene.” She caught Roarke, eyes narrowed, across the room. “And possibly a broken jaw.”

“Julian, behave.” Nadine Furst sent Eve a sympathetic eye roll as she latched firmly onto Julian’s arm. “Are we the last ones here?”

“K.T. hasn’t showed up,” Marlo told her, and tipped her face up as Julian leaned over to kiss her. “Julian, you haven’t met Detectives Peabody and McNab.”

“Peabody!” With enthusiasm, he reached up, popped her right off her feet. She let out a kind of *woo* before he kissed her. Then she said, “Um.”

“My girl,” McNab said.

“McNab!” Julian didn’t pop McNab off his feet, but he did plant one on him.

Eve wondered if tongues were involved this time.

“Hollywood.” Matthew laughed, lifted his hands. “We’re a bunch of assholes.”

“Some of us more than others,” Marlo murmured as K.T. walked in and scowled at everyone.