

NO GOOD DEED

BY ROSEMARY REEVE

CHAPTER 1

I wish to hell I had made Mark stay over that night. I could tell how tired he was. His face looked taut and pale in the misty evening, like a grey mask. Even inside the house, his eyes seemed shadowed.

Mark and I went way back. We had met as foster brothers in Tacoma, more than twenty years earlier. We had reunited in the fall, when he had helped recover a friend of mine who had been kidnapped. Since then, Mark and I had been making up for lost time. We played basketball together; we shot pool together; we even spent Christmas together. We hung four socks on my mantle, our names emblazoned in a red and green row: Jack, Harmony, Mark, and Betsy, my dog.

Then everything stopped. Mark hadn't come around since Christmas. He had left me a voicemail saying that he was OK, but that he couldn't see us for a while. Harmony and I listened to it a couple of times. There was music in the background, laughter, the sound of a door opening. Then a pause. His whisper was rushed and hoarse: "I miss you guys." Click.

We missed him too. So I was delighted when he showed up that night on my porch. But I was also worried. He had dark circles under his eyes, and he had lost weight. His uniform hung on him as if it were trying to get away. When he took off his jacket, I saw the bruises on his neck and wrists. These were some serious bruises: yellow-black around the edges and an angry red in the middle.

He shook his head at me. "Don't ask."

I ignored the instruction.

"Are you OK?"

"Yeah, Jack, I'm OK," he said. "Now."

He started to say something else, but his words were lost in a surge of orange fur from the kitchen. My dog planted her front paws on his shoulders and knocked him to the floor. He sat down heavily and crashed his head against the hall table. Betsy started licking his face.

"I thought Betsy didn't attack anymore," Mark protested, struggling to get up.

"That wasn't an attack," I told him. "Since you've been gone, Betsy's gotten clingy. She needs a good half-hour of lap time every day to feel secure. If a lap is not immediately forthcoming, Betsy provides her own. She almost knocked Harmony down the basement stairs the other day. She was being affectionate, but she doesn't know her own strength."

Mark rubbed Betsy's ears. Her tail wagged into a blur. "Did you miss me, Betsy? I missed you too. Yes, I did. I did. I missed my little girl." Betsy wiggled rapturously.

Mark spotted Harmony's briefcase on the hall table. "Hey, do you want me to split?" he asked. "I didn't realize Harmony was over. I didn't see her car."

"She went to the Co-op to pick up some stuff for dinner. And no, of course I don't want you to go. Don't be an idiot. There'll be plenty for the four of us."

"Sure I won't be -" he waggled his eyebrows - "intruding?"

I shook my head ruefully. "I'm sure."

"Not to be too personal, but why the hell not?"

I sighed and looked him squarely in the eye. "Not to be too personal, but where the hell have you been, and what the hell happened to you?"

Mark let the matter drop. He knew about my touch and go relationship with Harmony: more go than touch. *Much* more go than touch. Harmony was getting over the trauma of being kidnapped. She was getting over the trauma of losing her father - in more ways than one. She was getting over the trauma of losing her stepmother. Until she found her way through all that pain, she had said that a serious relationship was out of the question. So I was waiting. I was waiting for Harmony to come back.

There was a noise behind us. Physically, at least, Harmony was back. Harmony and a bag of groceries burst into the room. The coolness of the outdoors clung to her. Her black hair and long black lashes sparkled with raindrops. Her blue eyes shone.

"Jack, I think I saw Mark's car down at the end of the block," she said. "I'm not sure, but it had that little ding in the side like Mark's -"

I stepped aside so she could see Mark sitting on the floor with Betsy. He waved. Harmony rushed over to him. Still clutching the groceries in one arm, she tried to lean over and give him a hug. Strawberries showered down on Betsy, who was not too relaxed to snap them up. I relieved Harmony of the groceries, and she wrapped her arms around him. She didn't see the bruises until she straightened up.

"Oh, Mark," she exclaimed, pushing his collar down. He had a red welt across his throat, a crimson slash through a mottled bed of green, black, and purple bruises. "Mark, what happened to you? Are you all right?"

"I'm all right," he assured her, but I could hear the strain in his voice. "I'm tired, and I'm mad, but I'm all right."

Harmony sat down and leaned toward him. Her whole body seemed to listen. "Why are you tired and mad?"

Mark hesitated. As a legion of deponents had learned to their sorrow, it was frighteningly easy to tell Harmony things you didn't intend to and probably shouldn't disclose. He swallowed a couple of times. It seemed to hurt him. He said slowly, "I've been working on a bust for months. It's a big deal. Last night, everything blew up on us. I think I know what happened, but I can't prove it, and I don't know what to do about it. I could get in a lot of trouble if I'm wrong. But if I'm right, and I don't do anything about it, we're all in a lot of trouble."

Harmony said, "You think there's a leak in the police department, and you think you know who it is?"

Mark blinked at her. "Did I say that?"

"Of course not. It was an unfounded, sensationalistic guess on my part. I watch a lot of television. But even assuming that you had said that - which you hadn't - we could argue that it was a privileged communication because Jack and I are your attorneys. So there's nothing for you to worry about."

Mark stared at her for a moment, then started to laugh. "I missed you, Harmony," he said. "But I'd kind of forgotten what a dangerous woman you are."

Harmony didn't laugh. "Do you need a lawyer, Mark? Because I wasn't kidding. If you need to make sure you're protected, you can talk to us without being afraid that it's going to come back and bite you. If you don't want us involved, we can find you someone else. I'll pay for it," she added.

Mark rubbed his chin. He was thinking it over. "I probably do need to talk to a lawyer," he said, speaking carefully and precisely. "I wish I could talk to you and Jack, but I'm not sure I want you two getting mixed up with this. Let me sleep on it. Maybe the best thing would be if you referred me to someone else. I will pay him or her myself." He sighed and stretched. "I don't want to talk about this anymore right now, OK, Harmony? I've already told you a lot more than I should have."

Harmony nodded. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to press you. But you nearly got killed because of a bad apple in the police department. And I'm not losing someone else I love without a fight."

An uneasy look from Mark. "How did you know I nearly got killed?"

"My stepmom was strangled, remember? The mortuary tried to cover it up with makeup and a high collar, but I could still see it. I could still see a mark just like that on her neck. It was from an extension cord."

"Yeah, I remember." Mark's eyelids suddenly drooped, as if it were too hard to keep them open. He rubbed his hands through his hair.

I picked up Betsy and laid her on the couch. She didn't even stir. I offered my hand to Mark and pulled him up. "Are you sure you're safe now?" I asked.

"Oh, yeah. I'm completely safe now." He tried to smile. "They can't catch me."
He was wrong.
He was so, so wrong.