

CHAPTER 7 (Excerpt)

As they came down the street toward the house, Maggie noticed a black SUV with blacked-out windows parked about a block away. The sun was nearly set, so she couldn't see inside the windshield. She didn't want to panic Celeste, but she wanted to get inside quickly. Only one type of person drove cars like that.

"Celeste, leave the bags in the car until tomorrow. We need to get inside."

Celeste looked at her sideways. "What's going on, Maggie?"

"Probably nothing, but there's a blacked-out SUV about a block away that wasn't there when we left earlier. I think Shep just has me a little paranoid. We'll call him when we get inside."

Celeste's hands were shaking as she turned the car off and pulled out the keys. Maggie put a hand on her arm to calm her.

"Celeste, this house has an airtight security system. We're safe once we get inside," Maggie reassured her.

Celeste watched in fear as Maggie pulled her Glock out of her purse. Maggie didn't want to frighten Celeste, but she knew she needed to have her gun ready for their safety.

Maggie and Celeste got in the elevator and Celeste let out a sigh of relief. Maggie's heart sank when the elevator opened in the interior hallway. The system wasn't armed. She knew she'd set it before they left that afternoon. Celeste noticed too. She gripped Maggie's arm.

The sun was below the waterline, and Maggie could barely see her hand in front of her face. The night was turning cloudy. With Celeste holding onto her tightly, Maggie headed through the building. By memory, Maggie moved along the walls to her bedroom. She could see well enough that a quick survey told her no one was in plain sight. She closed the bedroom door silently and led Celeste into the bathroom, Glock first. Maggie checked that it was clear.

"Keep your cell in your hand," she said to Celeste, keeping her voice low. "Get down in the bathtub, and don't open the door."

Celeste grabbed her hand and shook her head, a pleading look in her eyes begging Maggie to stay.

Maggie leaned in close and whispered in Celeste's ear. "They are here for me, not you. Stay safe, call Shep. I'll go take care of the intruders." Maggie kissed her mom's cheek and locked the bathroom door as she closed it. Then she closed her bedroom door and went out into the house.

Maggie wasn't alone. She could feel people around her in the dark. She slowly moved through the family room, staying away from the uncovered window. She was almost to the kitchen when she spotted the first intruder, lurking near the kitchen window. She didn't wait for him to spy her. She put a bullet in his gut. The noise from the Glock brought commotion from upstairs. Maggie dove behind the sofa and aimed toward the stairs in anticipation. Two men came running down. Maggie shot the first one in the knee and he rolled down the rest of the flight in agony. She got the second man in the upper arm and thigh and felt a stinging in the side of her neck. She felt for blood but there was none. It was a dart. She looked up to see a fourth man coming in from the front door. Her neck burned. Then the blackness set in.