

CHAPTER 1 SUNDAY

I felt knocked back by the anger and tone of the man at the mention of Hannah Pickett's name. Sheriff's cars and trucks stood parked on the road I needed to take as far as I could see.

Two SUVs, latecomers, parked behind the others, had magnetic signs that read High Creek Search and Rescue, Cadaver Dogs.

My breath caught in my chest. Were they looking for Hannah's remains? She had disappeared four months earlier. That was why I was there. The chill of fear made me shiver.

The deputy standing by my window said again, "To go to the Pickett..."

The deputy who earlier had cursed at the mention of Hannah's name ran to my car yelling, "Don't mention that name. Fuck it. I told you this has nothing to do with the Pickett case. Don't mention it again." He strode away.

His tone about Hannah angered me. I was there for her father, John Pickett. This was a sacred mission. I wanted to attack that man. I felt my whole-body tingle and anger flooded through me. Then the familiar sea of calm that let me see things clearly, that had led me through dangerous situations, clarified it all for me.

I was at a T intersection on a road surrounded by huge second-growth cedar and fir trees. They rose above an undergrowth of luscious deep green plants. The beauty of the area contrasted sharply to the sheriff's cars with blue flashing lights, and SUVs for cadaver dogs.

I followed the deputy's detour and stopped when the GPS map showed that I was directly opposite of the T intersection. I stopped in a pullout, probably for a school bus. If Hannah's body had been found, that plunged us from waiting for her to return to knowing she wouldn't. We had talked about the knife's edge of emotional trauma that tainted every minute of my friend's life. Hannah's father had helped pull my and Egan's lives back together after we had fallen into a

legal and, moreover, an emotional abyss. John had been staring into his abyss since November.

Sheriff's cars and cadaver dogs seemed to confirm that all our hope had been in vain.