

Renoir's Revenge

Chapter One

New York City

Tuesday afternoon, Five-Thirty pm

J.C. Madden, the head of security for the Hotel Chatham, knocked on the door to the Gotham Suite as prearranged. No answer. She knocked once more again with no answer.

She expected a few stragglers to be chatting at the reception planned by Stuart Halperin, a wealthy art collector. He was showing a small sculpture for sale to a select group of art dealers and they should be a garrulous bunch. Instead, the hallway was eerily quiet and there were no sounds coming from the suite. Weird, she thought.

Mr. Halperin had specifically requested not to have security guards present in the room. Adhering to his request J.C. had left the suite at four, after all the guests had arrived, and told Mr. Halperin that she would come back at five-thirty to retrieve the sculpture and take it back to the hotel safe.

After she knocked for a third time, she walked around the corner to the kitchen door to see if anyone was still there. That door was locked as well and there were no sounds. She took out her passkey and opened it. Entering into the kitchen area she saw the detritus of the reception. While the bar cart was gone there were napkins, utensils, and even a couple of the serving trays. That didn't make sense. The staff was required to do the clean up as soon as an event finished. Kateryna, the hotel's sous-chef who had catered the affair, and her crew were meticulous.

She walked through the kitchen and into the hallway leading to the other rooms calling out “Mr. Halperin, it’s J.C. Madden. Mr. Halperin?”

The suite was unusually quiet until that moment when the air conditioning system kicked in with a loud roar. J.C. didn’t even notice because her eyes were focused on the table in the middle of the room where the reception had been held. The marble pedestal, upon which the sculpture had been placed, was empty. J.C.’s heart sank. Her first big assignment and her “charge” was missing. Or was it? Maybe Halperin had put the sculpture away for safekeeping. Could he have lent it to one of the guests?

“Mr. Halperin? Are you here?” She wondered if he had decided to join one of the art dealers for dinner and forgot to tell her.

It then occurred to her that Mr. Halperin might be resting or taking a nap. J.C. stepped down the hall to the bedroom and knocked softly at first, and then more forcefully. Not hearing anything she opened the door. There was no one there and the bed was still made.

She turned back toward the salon and, this time, strode towards the rear area of the L-shaped space. As she walked into the corner, which had not been visible to her before, she gasped.

There on the porcelain tile, she saw Stuart Halperin lying on the floor, face down, with a brownish red blotch on the back of his head. She rushed up to him, put her hand on the right front of his throat to check for a pulse as she had been taught in her military field training. She couldn’t feel anything, and even though his body was still warm to the touch, she knew he was dead.

Holy shit! thought J.C. She had stepped out of this room an hour and thirty minutes earlier and everything had been in perfect order. Now, upon her return, she was confronting a corpse not to mention a missing work of art. And most bizarre of all, she

realized that the prediction that her friend Cam had made when they had drinks yesterday evening had come true less than twenty-four hours later.

Chapter Two

One Day Earlier

Monday Morning, Eight-Thirty am

What is that line from “Grand Hotel” that Cam is always quoting? *Always the same, people come, people go, nothing happens.* I am beginning to feel as if I am a character in that movie, thought Jaycie.

J.C. Madden, aka Jaycie to her friends, had just arrived in the lobby of the Hotel Chatham to start her workday. Her walk across Central Park on this radiant fall day, with the autumn leaves at their peak, helped mitigate a growing restlessness that was all too familiar. As the head of security for the hotel during the last six months, she had discovered that her new job consisted mostly of administrative tasks, such as making endless schedules and reports, and it was almost completely devoid of action. It was a desire for new adventures that had led her to New York in the first place.

“Earth to Jaycie,” greeted Angela, the front desk clerk. “What are you thinking about? You seem a million miles away.”

“Oh, I was just musing philosophically,” said Jaycie wistfully.

“Well, Madame Aristotle, let me bring you back to real life. You have a phone call from Mrs. Schuyler, one of our guests. She said that it’s urgent and she sounds very upset. Do you want to take the call here or in your office?”

“I’ll take the call here, Angela,” and she picked up the receiver and intoned “This is J.C. Madden, Director of Security. What can I do to help?”

“Olivia is missing!” said Mrs. Schuyler in a weepy voice. “She wasn’t there when I woke up and I have no idea where she is.”

“And who is Olivia? When did you last see her?”

“Olivia is my companion, dear. We checked into the hotel last night. She went to bed before I did. She was snoring away when I finally lay down. And this morning she wasn’t anywhere in the suite. She doesn’t know this area and she could become very lost.”

Jaycie surmised that her friend must be new to New York. “Mrs. Schuyler,” Jaycie responded, “I would like to send someone to check around the neighborhood. Do you have a recent picture of Olivia that we could use to identify her?”

“Of course, dear. I should have thought of that. I will look for a photo and let you know when I find it.”

After hanging up the phone, Jaycie caught the eye of Robert, one of the security guards who worked for her. He was making his rounds through the hotel lobby and rushed over to Jaycie when she signaled him.

“What’s up?”

“Robert, I just had a phone call from Mrs. Schuyler who is staying in the Lenox Hill Suite. She said that her companion, Olivia, is missing. It sounds as if Olivia may have gotten lost. She said that the woman is not familiar with New York. I know it hasn’t been the full twenty-four hours for a missing person. Even so, maybe we need to bring in the police.”

“I have a buddy at the local precinct. I’ll call him right now,” and he pulled out his cell phone. After a brief conversation, he reported that the precinct was short staffed, so they referred the incident to the Robbery/Homicide Squad in the event it evolved into a criminal case.

“Good work,” said Jaycie, “but let’s not tell Mrs. Schuyler that it is a Homicide Detective that is coming to take her statement.”

Fifteen minutes later, Jaycie noticed a man entering through the revolving brass door. He didn’t seem to behave like a guest who was familiar with the hotel, though he was very sure of himself as he approached the front desk. She watched Angela point in the direction where Robert and she were standing in the opposite corner of the lobby. “Ah, here is our detective, now,” she remarked to Robert.

“Detective Riordan, Homicide and Robbery,” he introduced himself, reaching out to shake Robert’s hand. Robert immediately replied, “Detective, this is J. C. Madden, our Director of Security,” nodding at Jaycie. She extended her hand and noticed that Detective Riordan was taken aback. She was used to that reaction given that she was one of the few women in her profession. She was also younger than most of her counterparts.

“Whatever,” he replied gruffly. “So, what do we have here? I don’t usually handle missing persons.”

Jaycie took the lead and gave him a quick overview. “We don’t have a description yet. Mrs. Schuyler was somewhat incoherent, although she just called to say that she has a photo of her missing friend. I suggest that we go up to her suite and look at the photo. From what she told us, her ‘companion,’ Olivia, may have wandered away. Hopefully, this will not turn into one of your homicide cases.”

“Okay, we will want to get out in front of it. As soon as we talk to Mrs. Shyster and view the photo, I can take it back to the Squad and put out an alert. I especially want to get it to the beat cops in the area. If she is walking, she shouldn’t be that far. Let’s just hope she didn’t make it into Central Park. Not only would it be harder to find her, but that’s a different jurisdiction.”

"I understand. By the way, the name is Mrs. Schuyler, not Shyster," Jaycie corrected as the three of them rode up the elevator to the seventh floor where the Lenox Hill Suite was located. Mrs. Schuyler, a small yet distinguished lady in her mid-seventies answered the door when they knocked. She was dressed as if ready for the day in a high neck silk blouse and matching wool trousers in a shade of navy that highlighted her luminous white hair.

"I couldn't find it at first, but here she is," said Mrs. Schuyler as she held up a very formal photographic portrait. Her Olivia had large ears, streaks of red in her predominately white hair, and big brown eyes. She was also a King Charles Cavalier Spaniel.

Robert had to turn away to stifle his urge to guffaw. Jaycie was mortified that she had urged that they call the police. Maybe it really is better when *people come, people go and nothing happens*, Jaycie reprimanded herself. Meanwhile, Detective Riordan endeavored to maintain a stern face while he also was trying very hard to refrain from snickering.

Jaycie, keeping a composed demeanor despite her *faux pas*, attempted to rectify the situation by drawing Mrs. Schuyler away from the detective. She gently asked, "Mrs. Schuyler, how could Olivia have gotten out by herself? If you were still asleep, wouldn't she have barked to let you know she wanted to go out? And she couldn't open the door."

"I hadn't looked at it that way. Nonetheless, she isn't anywhere in the suite. Maybe someone came in and stole her. I had taken a sleeping pill."

"I certainly hope not," Jaycie sighed. "Our guests, human and canine, should be safe in their rooms. I think that I know what might have happened. Our hotel offers a dog walking service. I will talk to the staff and find out if they arranged to have a local dog

walker take Olivia for a stroll this morning. In the meantime, why don't you try to have a nice breakfast and I will keep you up to date."

Jaycie turned back to the two men. Robert was explaining the chain of events to Detective Riordan who looked bored and then snapped at both of them, "I better not get called for the next missing pet. And if I do, I guarantee that the two of you will end up in the dog pound. The worst part is that I have to write a report about this. I will never hear the end of it, especially from my new partner. Maybe Mrs. Shyster is the right name after all."

And with that he turned on his heel and marched toward the door, almost colliding with a young woman carrying a King Charles Cavalier Spaniel that Jaycie hoped was Olivia.

