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# *Capture A Shadow*

by Leigh Michaels

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## CHAPTER ONE

SHE had never before seen the Old Man so angry, and it frightened her.

As Bob Jonas paced down the office towards the chair where she huddled, Shelby Stuart tried to talk herself out of that unreasoning fear. *After all, it isn't as though he's going to strike me*, she thought. *So he's red-faced, and swearing with a fluency I would never have suspected him capable of. I'm not exactly a lightweight myself. It takes more than one irritable man to scare me.*

But as he leaned over her chair to shake a well-manicured fingernail in her face, Shelby shrank back into the deep upholstery. She cursed the primitive instinct of self-preservation that had made her flinch, and tried to regain her position.

"In my judgment, Mr. Jonas—" she began.

He whirled around from the desk. "You have no judgment!" he snapped. "Your position here is an accident, Miss Stuart!"

"Mr. Jonas—"

He banged a fist down on the newspaper that lay open on his desk. "Did you or did you not send Natasha Winslow's last manuscript back to her?"

"I did, but—"

"And did she or did she not submit it to another publisher, who jumped at the chance to print it?"

"Yes, but—"

"And is it or is it not at the top of the *New York Times* paperback bestseller list this week?"

"I haven't any idea," Shelby said tartly. "You keep waving that newspaper under my nose, but you haven't yet let me look at it."

His jaw tightened. "Take it from me, Miss Stuart—it is." He leaned against the desk, his hands clenched on the edge. "Now, what is your justification for losing this author?"

Shelby kept her voice level with an effort. "The book was pornographic, and she refused to tone it down."

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“Pornographic by whose standards, Miss Stuart? Yours?”

“And the industry’s as well, come to that. It went far beyond the limits of taste for a romance novel, I can assure you. If you would read it yourself, Mr Jonas, I’m certain you’d agree.”

“But I can’t very well do that, can I?” he said, and the sudden sweetness of his voice was more threatening than all the bluster had been. “I can’t read it, unless I walk down the street to the corner bookstore and buy it—which is the whole point! *We* should have published that book.”

“Believe me, Mr. Jonas, it was not the kind of thing you want to be identified with this publishing firm.”

“It was written by the best-selling author in the field.”

“Oh, now I understand. You think that anything Natasha Winslow writes should be published just as it flows from an extremely cluttered mind, without benefit of editing?”

He glared at her. “We had an exclusive arrangement with the woman until you decided abruptly that her style was too risqué.”

“The word is *trashy*.” Shelby’s voice was clipped. “That kind of language is suitable only for pulp fiction wrapped in brown paper and sold from under the counter.”

“And not suitable for our readers, is that what you’re saying?”

“Absolutely. And I might add that when a lowly editor has to remind the head of the company of that fact—”

“That, my dear Miss Stuart, is why you are a lowly editor, and I am the head of the company.”

Shelby kept her temper with an effort, and tried to regain the ground she’d lost. “At any rate, it’s been a year since I sent that manuscript back. It’s all long gone.”

“Not exactly,” he said, tapping his finger on the newspaper. “It will be reminding us for years to come— every time we see Natasha Winslow’s name on this list.”

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Shelby shrugged. “I did everything I could,” she pointed out. “I’d tried for six months to tone that book down and make it something we could use. But it wasn’t only the language, you understand. The lead character had hopped into bed with six different men by Chapter Five, and our readers don’t want that sort of thing. They don’t expect it...”

“Spare me the lecture,” Bob Jonas snapped. “Frankly, I don’t care what the readers like, as long as they keep buying books.”

“But don’t you see? That’s the whole point! They’re expecting romance, and warmth, perhaps a little heavy breathing. How long will they keep buying our brand if we give them this trash instead?”

“They’ll buy it because it has her name on it,” he pointed out. “And now they’re buying it from another company. That’s the bottom line, Miss Stuart.”

*Good riddance to Natasha Winslow*, Shelby thought, and had to bite her tongue to keep from saying it.

Bob Jonas sat down behind his desk and folded his hands atop the empty blotter. “You are on probation, Miss Stuart,” he said matter-of-factly. “Another mistake like this one, and you’re out.”

Shelby jumped up. “You can’t do this to me!” she snapped. “I handle every million-selling author you have.”

”The ones I *still* have, don’t you mean?” he asked pleasantly. “Believe me, Miss Stuart, if it wasn’t for people like Maria Martin and Valerie St. John, you wouldn’t be getting this second chance. But they’re valuable authors, and I can’t afford to take the chance of them leaving with you. So I’m telling you this instead: be thankful you still have your job. Mess it up one more time—lose Maria Martin or Valerie St. John, or anyone else, and you’re done.” He pushed the best seller list off the desk into the wastebasket with a contemptuous finger. “Good day, Miss Stuart.”

There was nothing more to be said. Shelby retreated to her own office, biting her tongue to keep from saying all the bitter things she’d like to express. The Old Man had not spoken a word of praise for her discovery of Maria Martin and Valerie St. John. He had not given a breath of encouragement or appreciation for

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the hard work she did. Just a threat that would cripple her work from now on, and a dark cloud of doom that would hang over her.

She sat down at her desk, staring at nothing. "He might as well have blindfolded me," she muttered, "for all the work I can do now." What good was an editor who wasn't allowed to exercise her judgment?

"Is the Old Man in top form today?" It was another of the senior editors, coming in with a stack of mail for Shelby.

"You might say." Shelby took one look at the two-foot-high pile of manila envelopes and shuddered. Would she dare look at a manuscript just now? What if she made another mistake?

*And that's enough of that,* she told herself firmly. Turning down Natasha Winslow's last novel had not been a mistake. It was the Old Man who was wrong.

"Cheer up," the other woman said. "You're going on vacation next week, and leaving all of us here to slave away. To say nothing of the fact that today is your lucky day."

Shelby snorted. "Lucky day? That's easy for you to say. You weren't the one who was just threatened..."

Then she snatched up the pale pink envelope that lay on top of the pile. "You're right," she said, with a sunny smile, "it is my lucky day."

"Wish I'd been the one who discovered Valerie," the other editor said, and her tone was mildly envious. "None of my people are interested in intellectual conversations, they all want to talk about money. Unless, of course, they're writing to complain about ugly cover designs, or editing changes, or contract terms."

"I know. Valerie is the exception to everything."

"And then they run to ten pages. If they'd spend half as much time writing chapters as they do on letters..."

"I know, I know. Valerie can say more in two paragraphs than most of them can in a book." Shelby balanced the envelope on her fingertips. "Are you waiting around for me to open this?"

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“Of course not, I know you always insist on being alone. No one else in the whole office has to have privacy to read a letter from an author, for heaven’s sake! Are you going to that cocktail party tonight at Lora Wilde’s apartment?”

For an instant Shelby’s entire body rebelled at the idea of standing around Lora Wilde’s admittedly gorgeous apartment, balancing a champagne glass and a plate of tidbits and shouting above the rumble of meaningless conversation. The cigarette smoke alone would have her head pounding in fifteen minutes. Then, reluctantly, she nodded. “No one but a fool would miss one of Lora’s parties.”

“That’s what I thought. See you there.” The editor started for the door. “Enjoy your letter.”

*Besides, Shelby thought, every publisher in New York will be represented tonight at Lora Wilde’s party.* She could ask a few questions, drop a few hints—maybe find out which companies might be looking for a new editor. Lora herself might know. Lora Wilde wasn’t a high-powered literary agent for nothing; she knew everyone, and every speck of gossip, in the whole business.

Shelby waited, unwilling to share the letter she held, till the editor was out of sight. Who but Valerie St. John would have thought of a heart-shaped return-address label, Shelby thought as she carefully slit the envelope. It certainly got everyone’s attention, and the personality that sparkled from the hot pink label compensated for the coolness of the post office box number that was printed on it.

Shelby had commented about that, early in their correspondence. A romance writer’s mail, she had protested, ought to be delivered to somewhere romantic—not to a cold post office box in a little town in the Midwest. Valerie had answered with a laugh that could be heard through the crisply typed lines of her next letter. *After all, she had written, this is the Heartland of America. What more can we ask?*

Shelby smiled, remembering. Valerie never said much about herself at all—just her work. No matter what subjects Shelby asked about, Valerie’s answers were non-committal. She was a very private person, Shelby thought.

She pulled the sheet of stationery out of the envelope. She had just accepted Valerie’s sixth novel; this would be the warm acknowledgment of her letter, and

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the progress report on number seven, which was probably well under way by now...

How lucky she had been, Shelby thought, on that long-ago day when she had opened a manila envelope and Valerie's first novel had slid into her hands! Her books were ones to savor and think about. They were consistently good, and so widely different that it was easy to approach the job with enthusiasm. If only some of the rest of Shelby's authors—the porno lady included—had half of Valerie's skill with words!

Shelby took a deep breath of the scented stationery.

She loved fragrances, but she wasn't sure if she liked this one so well for itself or because it had come to mean Valerie St. John. It had a hint of lilacs about it, she thought, and leaned back in her chair to savor the letter.

"I'm glad you liked the novel," Valerie had written. "It has become my favorite, and I think it's a good note to stop on; I'm without ideas at the moment, and frankly, I'm tired. Writing these things is harder work than I ever imagined, so perhaps a year off will freshen my outlook. I'll be in touch when the sabbatical is over. In the meantime, bless you for all your help, and..."

The letter dropped from Shelby's nerveless hand. "She can't do this to me," she whispered. "Dammit, Valerie, you can't quit now!"

But she could, of course. Her contract was fulfilled, and even if it hadn't been, there was no way to hold a whip over Valerie's head. She had merely promised to offer her work to Jonas Brothers first; no contract could force her to write faster or more than she chose.

Shelby put her throbbing head down on the desk blotter and breathed the heady scent of Valerie St. John's perfume. Valerie was finished with romance novels, and because of that decision made half a continent away, Shelby Stuart was finished as an editor at Jonas Brothers. It was as simple as that.

She hoped that Lora Wilde knew of a publishing house who needed an editor right away.

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The din was frightful. Shelby stood by the wide window, open to the Manhattan night, which provided nominal ventilation for the room. She took a sip from a Bloody Mary that had gone warm in her hand, and looked around at Lora Wilde's huge, luxurious apartment.

It had been redecorated again since her last visit, and this time was in restful silver and blue. Lora herself, her cloud of dark hair loose around her shoulders, was also all in silver tonight, but there was nothing restful about her. She flitted from group to group, her laugh tinkling above the rumble, a long cigarette holder in her hand.

"Don't you ever wonder," said a voice next to Shelby's ear, "how Lora explains this luxury to all her clients? After all, they're paying for it with their fifteen per cent agent's fees."

Shelby looked up at the tall blond man at her elbow. "I expect she tells them the truth. After all, Lora wasn't only born with the proverbial silver spoon in her mouth—she had cutlery for twelve."

"Ah, yes. Not fair, is it, Shelby? All this and she's pretty, too."

Shelby shrugged. "I never thought about it, Rodney. Lora is a friend, and I don't waste my time being jealous of my friends."

He shook his head. "You won't make it far in the cutthroat world of publishing if you take friendship at face value, Shelby."

He should know, she thought drily. Rodney didn't have a friendship in the world that wasn't milked for all the connections he could possibly make.

"Oh, look," he said. "There's Natasha."

Shelby looked around with distaste. Natasha Winslow had paused in the doorway, her scarlet sequined gown fitted so tightly to her voluptuous curves that Shelby wondered vaguely how the woman had managed to sit down in a taxi. Over her shoulder was a fur boa, despite the warmth of September's Indian summer. Her makeup was theatrical and heavy, and from across the room Shelby could see the stark eyeliner and the long false eyelashes. The woman was nearing forty, but her makeup artist was using every trick in the book to hold off the dreaded day as long as possible.

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“On her new promotional tour, I suppose,” Shelby said coolly.

“That’s right. We’re really promoting her new novel. I’m sure you saw it on the best-seller list this week.”

Shelby’s jaw tightened. Rodney never missed an opportunity to remind her that his company was Natasha’s new publisher. “She certainly draws attention, dressed that way.”

“Meee-ow,” Rodney murmured. “Just because the lady is no longer writing for you is no reason to be catty, Shelby. Try dressing for success yourself some time. You might be surprised what would happen if you stopped hiding in corners.”

He was right, Shelby thought reluctantly. Natasha Winslow was shrewd enough to know that only extremes drew the kind of attention she wanted—the kind that sold books. And he was equally right about herself. She had always felt stifled at cocktail parties, and she preferred tailored jackets to sequins. Her figure was adequate, her ash-blonde hair had a natural glow, and her eyes—her one unique feature—were precisely Williamsburg blue. But in a roomful of gorgeous women, Shelby thought, who was going to pay attention to one more blue-eyed blonde?

Maybe Rodney was right, she thought. Perhaps she was just a tiny bit jealous of the Lora Wildes and the Natasha Winslows of the world. It was a sobering thought.

“Have you heard who her latest conquest is?” Rodney asked, drawing her towards the bar and handing his empty glass to the bartender.

“Natasha’s?” Shelby shook her head as he raised an eyebrow towards her glass. “No more, thanks. “Who cares who Natasha sleeps with? We’ll all know next year when the new book comes out, that’s sure. He’ll have a starring role.”

“You wouldn’t be a woman if you didn’t want to know,” Rodney pointed out. He sipped his drink appreciatively. “Besides which, if you’re nice to me you won’t have to wait till the book comes out. I’ve already read it. Tell you what, I’ll trade you all the inside dirt about Natasha for one tiny bit of information.”

”Let me guess, you want Valerie St. John’s address.” It wasn’t the first time he had tried to pry that knowledge from her. The publishing firm Rodney worked for would give a great deal more than gossip if they could buy Valerie away from

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Jonas Brothers. Shelby had reached the point where she found it humorous in a tired sort of way.

“Phone number, actually,” Rodney said with a sleek smile.

She raised an eyebrow. “Sorry, Rodney, trade secret. Surely you aren’t surprised?”

“That you won’t give it to me? No. Rumor has it that the lovely Valerie has not divulged all her vital statistics even to you.”

Shelby wondered how that bit of information had leaked. How had Rodney known that her request for a telephone number where Valerie could be reached had been politely turned down?

It made her a little angry, but it wasn’t unusual for such knowledge to have spread, she knew. The publishing industry was a hotbed of speculation, and Jonas Brothers was no exception.

It would serve the Old Man right, she thought, if she did tell Rodney in which little town he could find Valerie St. John. But it wouldn’t be kind to the writer herself. Rodney was all right, even if he was a bit of a stuffed shirt, but the line of books his company put out were hardly of the consistent quality that Jonas Brothers produced, and Valerie would not be happy there, so Shelby dismissed the thought with regret. One did, after all, owe something to one’s friends, she thought. Even if Valerie’s action might cost her her job...

“Are you out to lunch?” Rodney asked briskly. “Or are you running through a list of staff members, trying to figure out who ratted?”

“When you’ve been around a little longer,” she said in a purposely patronizing tone, “you’ll learn not to believe everything you hear.”

He laughed. “How about having dinner with me over the weekend and we’ll discuss it?”

“Sorry, I’m off on vacation come Saturday.”

“Something exciting?”

She hesitated, then told the truth. “A New England tour. I’ve never seen it at this season, so..”

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“Ugh! Watch the leaves turn red, that sort of thing?” Rodney shivered. “Give me another drink.” He grinned and moved away towards the bar.

He was satisfied, Shelby thought. He’d gotten in his usual digs and unsettled her evening, and that was all he had wanted. She was glad for the easy excuse to avoid having dinner with him. According to Bob Jonas, cultivating the enemy was part of Shelby’s job— picking up whatever tidbits might fall if Rodney was less than careful with his drinks— but of course, the reverse of that was also true; Shelby had to watch her tongue carefully. The result was a war of nerves that always left her quivering by the evening’s end.

She set her glass aside and made her way to the powder room, where it might be a little quieter, if no less smoky. At least there she would only have to cope with the female of the species.

She kicked off her shoes and sank into a white wicker chair. Lora must be the only woman in New York who had a powder room built for a crowd, Shelby thought idly, and with this redecoration it had turned into a tropical jungle. She pulled a compact out of her handbag and winced as a crackle of paper and a drift of lilac perfume touched her senses.

Valerie St. John’s letter lay at the bottom of her handbag like a ticking time bomb. She hadn’t dared to leave it at the office; someone was always dashing in to check her files. She couldn’t even lock it in her desk because that would have created the very suspicion she wanted to avoid.

She propped her elbows on the arms of the chair and massaged her temples, trying to work out what to do. The entire office knew there had been a letter today. That in itself was no problem, because Valerie’s letters were seldom passed around. If asked, Shelby could say that the letter had just expressed happiness that the book had been satisfactory. No one would expect another manuscript for months; in fact, sometimes it was that long between Valerie’s letters. It was one of the charmingly unexpected things about the woman; there would be letters every week for a while, and then it would seem that she had dropped off the face of the earth for a month or two at a time.

*I’ll send her a letter, Shelby thought. I’ll tell her how very important it is that she write just one more book for me. Even if she’ll only pretend to write another*

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*one—if she’ll just keep writing letters, so that everything looks normal for a while—*

She was beginning to sound panic-stricken, she reminded herself. If she could just keep her head for one month and pretend that all was well, she was sure Valerie would get her off the hook.

If, she thought, this wasn’t one of those times that Valerie disappeared. *In any case*, Shelby thought, *I’m only buying time. The Old Man has made up his mind that I’ve got to go—*

*That’s defeatist thinking*, she told herself roundly.

She had to try at least. So she swallowed hard and started composing her letter to Valerie St. John in her mind.

She was just finishing a passionate appeal that would have melted the heart of the Abominable Snowman himself when Lora came into the powder room in a swirl of silver tissue. “I thought you’d gone off with Rodney,” she said. “You aren’t ill, are you?”

“No, I’m fine.”

“Well, do come out of the john or I’ll have to start charging you rent. Everyone’s gone home.”

Shelby glanced at her watch. “Oh—I am sorry. I sort of lost track of the time. I was—umm—admiring your plants.”

Lora lifted one elegantly-shaped eyebrow. “My decorator will be flattered beyond words,” she said. “Let’s have coffee, and raid the refrigerator. Unless you have somewhere else to go?”

Shelby’s stomach reminded her that she had passed by the table of hors-d’oeuvres, Lora’s sudden down-to-earth sanity relaxed her tension, and she smiled. “Come to think of it, I hadn’t planned a thing.”

“The caterers left everything, of course. I’m sure we can find enough to nibble on.”

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The rooms looked absurdly big, with the clutter of a hundred guests scattered from end to end. “Leave it,” Lora said with a wave of her hand, “let’s retreat to the kitchen where it’s clean.”

They found a deli platter in the refrigerator. “Devastating to my diet, you know,” Lora said with a smile, as she assembled a motley sandwich and drizzled horseradish sauce over it.

“Also devastating to your diamond rings. Do be careful, Lora, or you’ll get crumbs down in those tiny cracks and your jeweler will never speak to you again.”

“I know,” Lora sighed. “He got very angry with me when I cut my fingernails. Said my rings deserved a better display than this. But really, Shelby, I couldn’t type when they were two inches long, and one does have to make a living.”

“Haven’t you found a secretary yet?”

“None that suits me.”

“Where do I file an application?”

There was a brief silence while Lora finished off her sandwich and helped herself to potato salad. “I thought there must be a reason for you to be hiding in the powder room.”

Shelby told her. “I’m in deep trouble,” she finished. “Unless you know of someone who needs a good editor...”

Lora sighed. “And I thought it was just another unsuitable man and freshly broken heart.”

“Lora, I haven’t fallen for a man in at least six weeks.”

“How well I remember, darling. I thought even you would draw the line at the stand-up comic—I know, he was cute. If you’d just find a suitable man—”

”One with money?” Shelby interrupted.

“Of course.” Lora was unperturbed. “Then you could tell Bob Jonas to go jump into the East River. But instead, you keep dating all these freaks.” She looked at Shelby thoughtfully and added, “I know some really nice young men, Shelby. If you’d just let me set you up—”

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“You know that every time you arrange a blind date for me, it falls flat,” Shelby reminded. “They all expect me to be like you.”

“Not all of them,” Lora demurred. “There was the stockbroker.”

Shelby rolled her eyes. “Oh yes, I remember the stockbroker. Well, I’ve never met a stockbroker—or anyone else, for that matter—who would put up with the hours I work.”

“Slave labor,” Lora murmured.

“I do it because I like it. And if you’re going to suggest that I quit working altogether—no, thanks. Even if I could afford not to work, I like my job far better than I like most men I’ve met. At least I would, if Bob Jonas would leave me alone and let me work.”

“There is that problem,” Lora mused.

“At any rate, Lora, I need a new job, not a man.”

“That’s what you think, dear.” She thought it over and shrugged. “It’s tight, right now,” she warned. “No one is hiring. I know a dozen good people who are out of jobs at the moment.”

“Please, Lora, must you be so encouraging about it?”

“And nobody wants an editor with a reputation for making trouble, which you’d have if you left Jonas Brothers just now. You’d better stay right where you are for the present. We can keep our ears open, and as soon as the right job appears...”

“But don’t you see? I don’t have the luxury of time, unless Valerie St. John will produce one more book for me. I’m going to write to her tonight, but—”

“Why waste time on a letter? Don’t be proud—call the woman and beg. Do it right now.”

“That’s just it. She never gave me her phone number.”

“Haven’t you heard of directory information? Really, Shelby.” Lora reached for the telephone that was never more than an arm’s length away from her. “Which

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town?” she asked, the handle of her spoon poised over the number pad so she wouldn’t scratch the lacquer on her nails.

Shelby sighed and told her. There was no use arguing with Lora.

Ten minutes later Lora put the phone down and bit her elegantly painted lip. “There is no one named St. John in that town, Shelby.”

“If you would have listened to me, I could have told you that. It’s her pen name. Everybody uses them, and so long as our writers produce for us, we don’t care what they call themselves.”

“You don’t even know the woman’s name?” Each word was crisply enunciated and unbelieving.

“We never needed to know. If Valerie St. John didn’t want to tell us...” Shelby shrugged. “It was really none of our business.”

“The only thing you have is a post-office box number?”

“That’s right.”

Lora scowled, threatening her perfect skin. “Don’t panic, darling,” she drawled, “but I think you’re in the soup. If she isn’t planning to write any more, what makes you think she’ll even keep the post-office box?”

“That’s how we pay her royalties.”

Lora lit a cigarette. The long holder gleamed silver in her hand. “And when is the next check due?” she said, blowing a cloud of smoke.

“Three months. It’s...” Shelby stopped dead. “You don’t think she’ll even look at the mail in the meantime, do you?”

“Would you?” Lora asked dryly. “The next letter she gets from you will be a plea, which is exactly what she doesn’t want to hear. Besides, she may have gone off on a world cruise or something.”

“Valerie’s not the type.”

“Just what do you know about this woman?”

“Well—” Shelby thought about it. “She’s very clever with words, she likes to play with them. She doesn’t like French food—”

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“That should come in handy, since she insists on living in the back of beyond,” Lora mused. “Which reminds me, there’s something familiar about that town. . .” She thought about it, her eyes half-closed, her head tilted back, smoke hovering around her head. “Warren’s Grove . . . I’ve heard of it before.”

“Not from me. You’re the first person I’ve ever told that much about Valerie St. John,” Shelby warned, “and if it slips out, Lora, so help me heaven, I’ll—”

“What does it matter?” Lora asked brutally. “She’s stopped writing—so I’m certainly not going after her. What good is a retired writer to an agent? The net result, my dear, is that you know nothing about this woman.”

“I suppose you’re right,” Shelby admitted.

“Well, someone there has to know who she is. No one can keep that big a secret in a town that small.”

“But how do I find out?”

Lora drew on her cigarette. “You’re due for a vacation, aren’t you?”

“Yes. I’m going up into New England next week.”

“No, you’re not. You’re going out to Warren’s Grove and look for someone who isn’t eating escargot.” She frowned. “I must admit it would be easier if it was the other way round, but we have to take what we can get.”

“You’re joking. It would be impossible!”

Lora shrugged. “The alternative is to sit here and fret about whether she’s going to pick up her mail. Besides, I just remembered where I heard about Warren’s Grove.”

“Oh?”

“It might make it easier. And then again, it could be much, much harder.”

“Lora—”

“Warren’s Grove is a Mecca of sorts for writers. There’s a sort of summer camp where the literary folk gather to inspire each other. I frown on that sort of thing, but at least one of my writers goes anyway.”

“What do you mean, at *least* one?”

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“If the others go, they don’t have the nerve to tell me,” Lora said. “Mark might lend you a hand.”

“Who’s Mark?”

“You have heard of Mark Buchanan?”

Shelby frowned. “Is he the one who writes the abstract poetry?”

Lora sighed. “God in heaven, Shelby, no. He’s the political thriller. And I might add, quite good at it. I spent a month in Europe on my fifteen per cent of his last advance.”

Shelby whistled. “If he’s in that bracket, he probably won’t want to bother with me.”

“Don’t underestimate yourself, love. Or me. He owes me a favor. Besides, he might use it in a book himself someday— *The Search for Valerie St. John*, or some such nonsense. I’ll call him. Now get your New England reservations cancelled, and pack your bags!”