

CHAPTER ONE

"The Moon"

Hidden enemies; unforeseen trials.

Darien had hit the mother lode.

Looking at the body of the woman lying dead on the Chinese silk rug, he smiled. He had known she was rich - - he'd targeted her for that very reason - - but he hadn't realized she was stupid enough to leave this much wealth just lying around her townhouse. He turned back toward the safe not so cleverly hidden below a trap door under the hearth rug. Pulling his leather messenger bag closer, he loaded it with the bundles of cash and jewels he'd found.

"Damn her. Damn her!"

His voice echoed loudly in the room. If only Wilhelmina Fairchild, "Willie" to her close acquaintances, had left well enough alone. She may have been stupid about the security for her valuables, but had been smart enough to have him checked out prior to marrying him. Tonight, she'd taunted him with everything she knew and then committed the cardinal sin, she'd laughed at him.

"You stupid little man. Did you think I would marry just anyone?" She'd looked him up and down as if he were trash. "I have more respect for myself than that, and for the wealth my dear departed Edgar left me. The private detective I hired tells me you're a wanted criminal. Well, I'll tell you something, Darien Storm - - or should I say Bud Hoffman? - - whatever your real name is, you showed me a good time in bed and for that I have some affection for you. My parting gift to you is a head start. Go on, run, young man, and don't let the door hit you on that sweet, tight ass on the way out." Then, she'd laughed.

That was when he'd killed her.

He broke her neck before she'd stopped laughing and realized her danger. The shock in her pale blue eyes fixed for eternity.

Darien moved toward the silly French Provincial desk. He needed to find the name of the private investigator she'd used. He had to cover his tracks; no use getting away with the old biddy's murder if her hired snoop was out there, waiting with enough information to hang him. Did they still hang deserters and murderers in the Army? No matter. He didn't intend to get caught in order to find out.

Rifling through the drawers, he found a folder with his name on it. Yes, this was it. A business card attached said "Walter Nichols, Private Investigator." Darien turned toward Willie and threw her a kiss for being organized.

Taking the file, he stuffed it in his backpack. Before he left the townhouse, he'd check out the bedroom again. His gut, no, some extra sense which had saved his butt too many times to be ignored told him to check her bedroom for something else. He'd recognize it when he saw it, just as he had known the location of her secret hidey-hole under the hearth rug when he approached it. Walking through the bedroom, he responded to the urge to look in her bedside table. Yes, there it was. A journal. The pathetic old woman had kept a diary. He knew without looking he figured prominently in it, so he stashed it in his bag. His sixth sense told him it was okay to leave now. All evidence pointing a finger at him was gone. He would get away with this crime just as he had all the others.

He left the townhouse by the back door. He'd never used the front during the four-month-long affair with Willie. She'd called him her "secret lover," and that had been fine with him. He hadn't actually counted on her marrying him, so he'd kept a low profile. Good thing. Now, the only person who could connect him to Willie was the private dick. Well, he knew how to take care of that problem.

* * *

Morgan Smith ran to catch the subway train. She reached the door and squeezed through just as it closed. The next train wouldn't have arrived for another twenty minutes and she was already later going home than usual. Someday, she'd be her own boss instead of a clerk and closing time would be closing time.

Moving toward a seat at the back of the car, she stopped abruptly as she hit a wall of emotional energy of such power and darkness that she shivered in the overly warm subway car. A wave of dizziness swept over her. She moaned in distress and reached for a strap to keep from falling.

"Here, miss," a female voice called from behind her, "you look as if you need to sit down."

Morgan turned to a motherly woman who patted the seat beside her in invitation.

Attempting a smile, Morgan sank into the proffered seat and whispered "thank you" to the Good Samaritan. Feeling the need to explain her weakness with something mundane, she offered, "I must be more tired than I thought."

The sympathetic woman nodded and turned her attention back to the knitting in her lap.

The niceties taken care of, Morgan closed her eyes and turned her mind inward, knowing from past experiences the nausea and dizziness would settle more quickly that way. Fighting the visions did no good, so she'd learned how to control them. She had learned at an early age she wasn't the same as everyone else. She had a connection to a different level of communication with the world around her. After much trial and error, she'd also learned not to ignore the extra sense. The times she had, had ended in disaster.

Morgan centered herself and concentrated, seeking the source of the dark emotions. Was the dangerous person near or far? More importantly, was he a threat to her and everyone in this car?

Breathing shallowly, she pulled images out of the maelstrom in her mind. The colors of the energy were dark so this danger was near. If the danger were farther away, the images would be shadowy, more grays and sepias like old-fashioned tintypes. These colors were black, brown, purple...and blood red. Murder. Pale blue eyes wide open in shock. Hands around a woman's neck. Death.

Morgan gasped.

The woman next to Morgan cast a wary glance her way then inched closer to the window of the subway car.

Get a grip, Morgan. Before you scare the whole darn car.

Her inner voice told her the danger wasn't directed toward her or anyone near. If the voice switched from "you" to "us," then she would start to worry. The little voice in her head was all about immediate survival. Right now, Morgan needed to chill out.

She glanced at her seatmate and gave her what she hoped was a reassuring smile.

Cautiously, Morgan looked around the car, seeking with all her God-given senses. The

hands which choked the woman in her mind's eye were here in this car. Now all she had to do was find the man to whom they belonged.

Yeah right, Morgan. Then what are you going to do, call Ghostbusters? 'Cause who else would believe you?

Spotting several young men in black leather, she opened her mind, fully letting in all sorts of images - - and found themes common to most hormonal young men. Violence. Sex. But no death.

As she directed her gaze and mind toward the other end of the car, she found the wall of blackness and ice once again.

The man looked so normal - - no, not normal - - civilized with his Italian silk sports coat and neatly combed blond hair. He could have been any businessman going home after a long day at work, carrying his brown leather satchel. But he wasn't. He was a murderer, and Morgan was the only person in the world who knew.

Well, what do you do now, Morgan? You've found him. How do you explain it to the police? You psyched him out? Read it in your tea leaves? Saw him in your crystal ball?

She shook her head. No matter how much ridicule she had withstood in the past, she knew she'd have to go to the police. If for no other reason than the dead woman was all alone and deserved better than rotting in her home like unwanted garbage. It could be days, Morgan sensed, before the victim would be found. Plus, she could never live with herself if she allowed a murderer to go free.

So, are you going to make a citizen's arrest? Tackle him and hold him for the police?

No, much better to memorize his looks and watch where he gets off, then go to the police.

Staring at the killer, she imprinted his face on her mind. She would never forget him just as she'd never forget the images soaring through her mind. The house. The dead woman, Willie. Yes, her name was Willie Fairchild. The stolen money and jewelry in his messenger bag. The file. Piles of nickles. More death to come. Yes, it was imperative to let the police know. Another life was in immediate danger.

Morgan closed off her mind like a door banging shut. As if the murderer had heard the psychic door slam, he looked directly at her. No! She breathed a sigh of relief as his cold, dark stare moved away. He was merely scanning the car. She turned her head away from him. She felt a weak probing from the man just before she closed her mind. He, too, had psi abilities, but not on the level of hers. Thank God. He couldn't read her. She was safe.

*

Darien felt itchy. Damn subway cars, always hot and humid, filled with the stench of humanity. Riding subways would be a thing of the past now. Once he eliminated the private detective, he'd head west. Wide open spaces, clean air, fewer people. He had an idea for a new con. He was done making love to old ladies for their money. The Bible Belt had better get ready for him.

A buzzing in his head distracted him from his plans. Looking around, he saw no insect - - nothing which could make the noise. Maybe a fluorescent light was going out. No. The sound came from someone in the car. His gut told him he was in potential danger and needed to leave.

Hearing the call for the next stop, he moved to an exit door, away from the source of the buzzing. Whatever it was, he wanted no part of it. He'd relied on his instincts all his life and they had never been wrong. He wouldn't start ignoring them now.

First things first, kill the private dick, then to the Bible Belt and salvation - - his salvation, definitely not his next mark's. Smiling, he exited the car.

CHAPTER TWO

*"The High Priestess"
Secret about to be revealed.*

Morgan's journey to report the death entailed changing trains and backtracking. She had a sick feeling in her stomach, anticipating the police's reaction. But during the ride, she didn't waver in her determination to do what was right. Images of the dead woman - - *Of Willie, she had a name dammit* - - were indelibly etched in her mind. She felt sad, grief-stricken, angry. The images wouldn't go away; the sightless eyes, the lonely body compelled her to act. Once she reported the matter to the police, she would be excused from reliving the woman's death.

Scared, but determined, Morgan entered the precinct in Manhattan. She knew her life would change now. It always did once people realized she was different. No matter. What was a little disruption in her life compared to the fact that the dead woman no longer had one? Willie didn't deserve to be murdered and left to rot. No one did.

Glancing around the precinct lobby, she almost turned and left. The mass of humanity with their problems and strong emotions made her nauseous. Abruptly, she cut off her extra sense. Even then, it took all her willpower to keep the whirlwind of feelings from overwhelming her. A debilitating headache was in her future if she didn't get away from the victims milling around in the close quarters of the cramped and dank lobby. But, she wouldn't, couldn't, leave; the images of Willie wouldn't allow it.

Approaching the officer on duty at the front desk, she waited until the man finished talking on the phone.

Breathe, Morgan, keep breathing. Center yourself and control the sensations. You can do it.

"May I help you, miss?" The officer, a slight smile on his lips, raised his voice to be heard over the din.

"I need to report a murder."

"Murder, miss?" The officer was no longer smiling, his emotions adding to the beating her control was taking.

She nodded and waited. Was it her imagination? Or did the crowd in the room suddenly grow quiet as if they knew that here was a drama greater than their own?

"You'll need to see someone in Homicide. I'll get a detective out here."

"Fine. I'm not going anywhere." She sat on a vacant bench by the water fountain. Massaging her temples, she wondered if it would be inappropriate to ask for aspirin. It promised to be a long and exhausting night.

As the officer spoke into the phone, she took a chance and opened her mind. Big mistake. There was too much emotion in the room. Plus, she didn't need her psi powers to know he wondered whether she was for real. Guess he didn't get too many women walking into his precinct and calmly reporting a murder. Well, after she told her story, he'd be able to state that he knew she was crazy when she first came in. All cops thought she was crazy - - at first - - then they believed. Cynical cops, suspicious cops, skeptics - - the whole lot of them. That distrustful

outlook was probably what made them good at their jobs.

A few minutes later, she observed the approach of an older black man wearing a rumpled suit. He appeared tired and grumpy. He nodded at the desk officer who pointed toward her. This had to be the homicide detective.

"Miss, I'm Lieutenant Riggs. Come with me, please." He led her to a small room off the lobby and shut the door. "I don't believe the Sergeant caught your name?"

Blessed quiet. Morgan sat in the chair the detective indicated and took a second or two to appreciate the relief the small room afforded her from the chaos outside the closed door. The Lieutenant did not sit; instead he leaned against the door and stared at her. She got the impression his patience was not infinite. *The sooner you tell him, the sooner we can go home.*

She took a deep breath and spewed out what she had come to say. "That's okay, Lieutenant, I didn't give the Sergeant my name. I'm Morgan Smith and, yes, I have a murder to report. The poor woman's lying there all alone and something needs to be done. The murderer is getting away and he's not done killing yet."

She not only saw, but also felt the Lieutenant's confusion.

Okay, Morgan, try to remain coherent. He's more likely to believe you.

He made a humming sound and frowned. "Where did this alleged murder take place?"

"That's the problem. I know who was murdered, how she was murdered, and saw the man who did it, but I'm not sure where the house is." Struggling to maintain a calm she really didn't feel, she looked Riggs in the eye and added, "You see, he left by the back door and I couldn't see the street or house number."

The Lieutenant hunched over Morgan and gave her a look she'd seen before from cops - - suspicion. "Just when did this murder take place? Who was the victim? Where were you when the murder took place? And where is the killer now?"

"Lieutenant, you aren't going to believe this..." *That's it, Morgan, put ideas in his head. You want him to believe you.* "...but I was at work in upper Manhattan when the murder occurred. The victim is a woman named Willie Fairchild. I saw the murder images when I came across the killer as he rode the subway away from the scene of the crime."

Shaking his head, the Lieutenant swore under his breath, something about the full moon and crazy people. Morgan knew he couldn't help it, but just once, she wished someone would believe her the first time she told them.

"Miss Smith...just how did you see the crime if you were at work and this Fairchild woman was in her home?"

"I just told you I saw the images in my head. You see, Lieutenant, I'm psychic."

* * *

Listening to the stillness of the slumbering neighborhood, Darien left the protective shadows of the alley across the street from Nichols' brownstone where he'd been waiting for close to an hour. The streets were abandoned, dogs had stopped barking, and lights in the lower level of the residences were out - - the neighborhood had settled down for the night. It was time to kill the private dick.

He crept to the back of the brownstone in which the private detective had both his office and living quarters. Nichols had to be fairly good at his job; he had a nice building in a decently safe, upscale neighborhood to show for it. Plus, he'd traced Darien's identity. That made this guy damn good - - and a danger to Darien's continued freedom and good health.

Too bad, he didn't mind killing, but the destruction of good property always bothered him. Such a waste. Well, it was either destroy the building and the snoop in it or risk getting fingered for Willie's death. No contest there.

He'd noted the security alarm in his earlier walk-around of the area. No chance of getting inside without a lot of trouble, so he'd have to destroy the place from the outside. No time like the present. The private dick was home and all was quiet.

Some quick stops at a hardware store, a gas station, and a few dumpsters had provided the materials for enough Molotov cocktails to set two houses on fire. The gas line into the house was icing on the cake. Once this baby started to burn - - well, nothing or no one would survive the flames.

Keeping an ear tuned for a change in the neighborhood's nocturnal rhythm, Darien hummed under his breath as he assembled the homemade bombs. It still disturbed him that someone on the subway could've read him. In his entire life, there'd only been one other psychic who'd pegged him for what he was - - a woman in a traveling circus. She hadn't lived to tell anyone. Yet even she hadn't made him feel as if ants were crawling down his spine. The psychic on the subway had been different - - more powerful.

Whoever this person was, he or she posed a great danger to his very existence, and he needed to get out of New York...and fast. Sticking around and eliminating a psychic who could read him wasn't in his playbook. Plus, the mystery psychic couldn't point a finger at someone who wasn't there. Darien grinned.

His weapons of destruction completed, he moved silently to the gas meter and loosened the pipes. The hiss and smell of gas coming from the ruptured joint signaled his success. Now...for the pyrotechnics.

Jogging away from the escaping gas, he lobbed the first flaming cocktail at the gas meter and ran for cover. The explosion at the back of the house shook the earth. He stood and appreciated his work before moving to the side of the house where he lobbed another bomb. He proceeded around the house, throwing the homemade bombs until the building was fully engulfed by flames.

Lights came on in the adjacent brownstones, dogs barked, and voices shouted. Aware his sole ownership of the night was about to end, he walked briskly away from the burning building and didn't stop until he was a block away. Melding into the shadows of a doorway on the opposite side of the street, he watched the private dick's house explode several more times as the gas and other flammables within obeyed the laws of physics and sought maximum randomness. Damn, he loved entropy.

In the distance, he heard the sirens. Too late. The fire was fully involved. Exit one private investigator and any evidence which might have pointed the finger at his connection with Willie Fairchild.

* * *

"Listen, I am telling you. I. Am. A. Psychic. I see images, especially ones connected to strong emotions such as anger. This man was very angry at Willie Fairchild and he strangled her. He was still seething on the subway and planned on killing someone else. I can describe the killer and the inside of the house where the murdered woman lies, but nothing else makes any sense to me. Plus..." Morgan paused to collect her thoughts. The look on the Lieutenant's face was one with which she was highly familiar - - patent disbelief.

"Go on, Miss Smith, plus what?"

She really hated it when cops humored her, all the while thinking she was the nut of the month at Fanny May's.

Go ahead, tell him what you felt. He can't think you're any crazier than he already does. Yeah, right.

"Miss Smith, you were going to say?" The Lieutenant smiled, skepticism tingeing every aspect of his demeanor.

"He was psychic also." The Lieutenant muttered an obscenity under his breath, which Morgan ignored as she continued, "I blocked my mind to his. I was afraid he'd follow and kill me, too."

He still doesn't believe. Next comes suspicion again.

She sat back, folded her arms across her chest, and waited. She knew the police had found Willie. Macabre excitement exuded from the young officer about to enter the room. He'd seen Willie's body - - and she saw everything he'd just seen. The body. The carpet. The opening in the floor in front of the hearth. The rifled desk.

"Lieutenant, we found her." Not waiting for instructions from his superior, the young officer blurted his news. "She's dead all right. Strangled and her neck was broken. Coroner said she hasn't been dead more than a couple of hours. He'll know more later." The enthused officer ran out of words and breath at the same time and turned to stare in fascination at her, the woman who'd psyched out the murder.

"What in the hell are you staring at, Officer?" The Lieutenant growled.

The rookie cop stammered, "I've never been near a real psychic before, sir. She looks so normal."

"Oh, I doubt very much you're near one now...more like a murderer." The Lieutenant turned his frigid glance toward her.

Morgan returned his look calmly and remained silent. What could she say? They'd figure it out for themselves soon enough. There was no way she could have murdered the woman. No connection they could make. And, somewhere in New York, the murderer was killing again and somehow that death would connect to this one, and, well, she was here. Alibied.

"Nothing to say for yourself, Miss Smith?"

Waves of barely controlled fury emanated from the homicide detective. Images and names of other female killers he'd known flitted through his mind.

Go ahead, Morgan, show off. At least, it will shut him up and he'll only hold you - - can't arrest you if he doubts his own conclusion, now can he? Plus, he has no evidence.

Taking a deep breath, she stared Riggs in the eye and stated dryly, "I'm not like the other women whom you've arrested, Lieutenant Riggs. I am not Sally Blades, Peggy Liptack, or Ida Mae Brown. Those women killed during domestic disputes. I am Morgan Smith, a psychic...not a murderer. And Willie Fairchild's murder didn't involve a domestic dispute." Smiling at the shock and dismay on the Lieutenant's face, she went on, "May I have a soft drink, please, while you wait on a preliminary report?"

Her peripheral vision registered the young officer rushing out of the room, whether to get her a drink or to tell his fellow officers about her newest trick, she didn't know. She was too busy watching for the Lieutenant's reaction. It was memorable: Morgan had never seen a black man go ashen before, but she had now.

"How did you know what I was thinking?" Riggs gasped. She watched as the Lieutenant struggled to regain control of his thoughts and the situation. "No, wait, what the fuck am I saying? You couldn't read my mind...could you?" The Lieutenant looked at her, practically

pleading for an answer he could live with.

She shook her head. "Sorry, Riggs, I read your mind. You were angry and I read it, just as I did with the murderer." Taking pity on the confused man, she waited until he had his color back and breathing under control. Quietly, she suggested, "You might want to get a sketch artist in here so I can get the image of this guy out of my head and onto paper. I got the impression he wasn't going to stick around after the murders."

Riggs looked at her then at the fascinated young officer who'd returned with a Pepsi in his hand. Riggs shook his head, said a particularly foul word and stormed out of the room.

She uncrossed her arms and took a cleansing breath, accepting the soda from the young cop. Riggs would be back...with a sketch artist. He believed her now. Didn't want to, but he did. She knew it was already too late for the murderer's other victim. The images of death had been uppermost in the killer's mind - - his past and future kills. She also knew she'd have to be the one to find the connection between the two. Maybe once she got the murderer's image out of her mind and Willie laid to rest, she could remember more about the file and the stolen items. She'd recall better when she wasn't so stressed. It was no use forcing the images; they'd come back. They always did whether she wanted them to or not.