



SAFE  
&  
SOUND

*A novel*

*T.S. KRUPA*

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*Advantage.*

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*To B.A.—You believed in me before I did.*

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# CHAPTER 1

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I could hear him rustling in the bedroom. A hint of sunlight was streaming through the windows. The air was still damp and cool, telling me it was early, too early for a Sunday. I slowly stirred in bed, stretching my legs, trying to ease from my body the soreness of yesterday's long run.

"No. You sleep," he whispered as he leaned down, moving my long chestnut-colored hair out of the way and kissing my forehead. "I'm just going to run the short course today and I'll be back soon."

"Sounds good. Love you," I mumbled, rolling over in bed.

"Love you too," he said as he closed the door to the bedroom.

I could hear my phone ringing in the distance as I tried to bring myself out of a deep sleep. I wondered what time it was. The bedroom was now bright as the sun shone directly in through the windows, but I could feel the chill in the air. I squinted at the clock that sat on the nightstand. It was already past 10 in the morning. I must not have heard Jay come back from his run. Maybe he was letting me sleep in. I sighed and pushed myself up and out of bed. I found an old pair of sweatpants on the floor and pulled them up on my slender frame. Then I pulled a tank top out of the dresser and grabbed my robe from the end of the bed, wrapping it tightly around me. I made my way downstairs and as I entered the kitchen, I heard the loud chime from my iPhone, indicating someone had left a message.

"Jay?" I called out throughout the house. No answer. The smell of freshly brewed coffee hit me as I walked into the kitchen. I drew a deep breath in and instantly made my way over to the coffee pot. I drew my favorite oversized green mug out of the cupboard and poured myself a cup. I then fished through the drawer for a spoon and came up empty. I pulled the dishwasher open and grabbed a spoon and examined it closely, determining that it was clean enough for me. After I added two large spoonfuls of sugar to my morning coffee, it was finally ready for consumption. I took a sip and leaned against the counter, examining the kitchen and looking for Jay's running shoes.

Just then, my phone started to ring again. Sighing, I leaned over and grabbed it off the counter. An unknown number registered across the screen. I instantly hit *Ignore* and made my way to the living room, sinking into our oversized sofa with my coffee in one hand and my phone in the other. Turning the TV on, I found it was already on ESPN. Jay must have turned it on earlier to catch the baseball scores from the night before. Letting ESPN continue, I leaned back on the sofa, taking a big sip from my coffee and felt content in the moment. My phone chimed again as another voicemail recorded. Taking another long sip of my coffee, I wondered who was so persistent this morning. I made a mental list of who could possibly be calling. None of them really made any sense, so I quickly gave up. I shrugged my shoulders at my mystery caller and reached over and picked my phone back up. Only then did I notice that there were four missed calls and two voice messages. A knot started to form in my stomach as I punched the voicemail button to listen to the messages.

"This is Officer Patrick Thomas with the Greensboro Police Department. I'm looking for Jill Greenfield. Please call me at the following number as soon as possible."

Stunned, I felt cemented to my place on the sofa, coffee in one trembling hand and phone in the other. The next message started to play.

"Jill, it's Harry. Pat said that there was an accident this morning involving Jay and they were having trouble getting a hold of you. Listen. I'm going to send someone to your house. Call me back."

Involuntarily, I was on my feet. A low moan escaped from my lips. The coffee mug fell from my hands and shattered on the floor, sending hot coffee and shards of ceramic all over my feet. I turned and dashed into the kitchen, ignoring the sharp pain that I now felt on my legs. I grabbed my running shoes by the back door and jammed my feet into them. I grabbed my bag, which hung on the back of one of the kitchen chairs

and checked to see if my car keys were still inside. I raced to the front door, pulled it open, and tried to bolt down the sidewalk to my car, only to find myself running into a policewoman.

“Jill Greenfield?” the female police officer asked.

“Yes,” I stammered.

“My name is Officer Sarah Steely. Officer Henry Conner sent me to—”

“What the hell is going on?”

“Yes, ma’am, I understand you are upset. Please, Officer Conner sent me to bring you to the hospital as soon as possible. There has been an accident involving your husband.”

Not able to muster any more words, I just nodded.

“Do you have everything you need?”

Again I nodded, not allowing my mind to drift to the endless possibilities of what could have happened to Jay that had resulted in my getting a police escort to the hospital.

“Are you sure? Perhaps you’d like to get dressed?” She gave me a quizzical look as I stood in a bathrobe and tennis shoes in the doorway of my home.

“Um ...” I stammered, not knowing what I should do but ultimately decided that the officer’s suggestion was reasonable. “Alright, give me five minutes,” I said, holding up my hand.

She nodded and I dashed back into the house and up the stairs to the bedroom, leaving her in the doorway. I kicked off my running shoes and threw my bathrobe on the bed. I pulled off my sweatpants and put on a pair of blue jeans and a cream knit sweater. I tied my long hair up in a loose ponytail and slid on my beige boat shoes after cleaning up the blood and coffee that had been drying on my leg. Finally ready, I hurried down the stairs to where the officer was waiting.

“Ma’am, do you want to close up the house?” she shouted after me as I walked past her on my way out the front door. I stopped and turned around to face her. I was sure the look of desperation on my face convinced her that I was ready to leave. She closed the door wordlessly and came down the driveway. By the time she arrived, I had taken a seat on the passenger side of the patrol car. I wasn’t sure if I was allowed to sit up front, but I wasn’t about to sit in the back.

“Do you know what happened to Jay? Is he alright?” I asked as soon as she was seated in the car with me.

“I’m sorry. I don’t know very much. I owed Officer Conner a favor and I was on this side of town, so I told him I would swing by and bring you to the hospital.” She threw a sideways look in my direction as if unsure of what to say next. “I know that the accident involved your husband and another driver just after seven thirty this morning on Horse Creek Road.” Horse Creek Road was a dangerously windy road that Jay insisted on including on some of our running routes. It had always made me super nervous because of the speed of the cars and the lack of shoulder space.

I corrected her. “My husband wasn’t driving. He was off on a morning run.” She looked startled and unsettled by this additional information. Her slipup let me know that she truly did not know what was going on, nor was she going to give me any more details. I sighed and settled into the seat, staring out the window, trying not to let my mind wander to all the possibilities that awaited me at the hospital. Involuntarily tears formed and started to slowly stream down my cheeks. I was gripped by fear. My instincts indicated I should prepare myself for the worst.

## CHAPTER 2

---

When Officer Steely pulled up to the emergency entrance of the hospital, I was out of the patrol car before it came to a complete stop. I jogged in and located the check-in desk where the receptionist told me to speak with someone at the nurse's station. She pointed me down the hallway to my left. When I arrived at the nurse's station, there was no one around to direct me further. I waited impatiently for a nurse to return, drumming my fingers on the counter and frantically looking around for anyone who could direct me to where Jay was.

"Jill." I heard my name called from farther down the hallway. I turned around and saw Harry Conner walking my way. He was dressed in his police uniform, his black hair slicked back. I noticed that his normally tan complexion was pale under the fluorescent glow of the hospital lights.

Harry and Jay had been childhood friends and had done everything together since the age of five. Harry was the best man at our wedding and often a semipermanent guest in our spare bedroom, especially when Jay was out of town, traveling. When Jay and Harry graduated from Boston College, they vowed to move around the country together, enjoying bachelorhood and the open road. Plans changed when Jay's mom was involved in a plane crash and passed away. She was traveling from Boston to the Cape with friends in a privately owned jet when it went down. Jay suddenly felt a sense of responsibility to follow in his parents' footsteps. So he applied to various law schools and eventually chose to attend Wake Forest University. Harry followed him to North Carolina and decided to join the Greensboro police force.

"Harry!" I turned and ran straight toward him, embracing him in a giant hug. "What's going on? Where is Jay? Is he alright?"

"Whoa! Slow down. I just got here myself. I was waiting to speak with the officer from the scene or the doctor on duty. From what I gather, Jay was hit by a car this morning on his morning run on Horse Creek Road ... Damn him!" Harry said, referring to Jay. "I told him repeatedly that road was dangerous, but he can be so stubborn." Harry ran his hands thru his jet-black hair in frustration.

"This can't be happening," I whispered, letting go of Harry and wrapping my arms around myself. He led me down another hall, and we made our way to a smaller waiting room where several doctors and officers had congregated. As we drew closer, I could see several people shifting their eyes in my direction. An officer pointed at me as I approached.

"Jill Greenfield?" asked a middle-aged man with salt and pepper hair and wearing scrubs as Harry and I approached.

"Yes. That's me," I replied.

"Dr. Shippling." He extended his hand to shake mine. I quickly made introductions between Dr. Shippling and Harry.

"Dr. Shippling, can you please tell me what is going on?" I could hear the panic and desperation in my voice.

"Why don't we sit down?" He motioned toward a set of pale-green chairs by the window.

"No. I would prefer you just tell me whatever is going on," I said, raising my voice. I could feel the frustration radiate through me as my question seemed to be left unanswered.

"Mr. Greenfield was involved in a serious collision this morning. We have determined that he was struck from behind while he was—"

"He was running," I added. The doctor nodded that he understood and continued.

"The driver of the vehicle was under the influence of alcohol and was not able to react in time." He described the scene of the accident, but I felt the room spin around me and my knees start to buckle.

“Maybe we should sit down,” Harry suggested as he held me up and led me over to the chairs.

“Where is he now?” I asked Dr. Shippling.

“He is in surgery. Mrs. Greenfield, try and understand that Mr. Greenfield was in a very serious accident. We suspect possible complications occurring from the accident. It will be several more hours before we know the extent of Mr. Greenfield’s injuries.”

“He’s going to make it, right?” I asked.

“At this point ...” He paused, looking me straight in the eyes, “praying wouldn’t hurt. I’ll have more to report when Mr. Greenfield is out of surgery.” He frowned and excused himself. I could feel the tears streaming down my cheeks in desperation. My stomach was in knots and a wave of nausea swept over me.

“This can’t be happening,” I whispered to myself, folding my knees up to my chest and wrapping my arms around myself. Finally, after several minutes, Harry spoke up.

“We need to call Jay’s dad ... and maybe you should call Stella and Lanie.”

I must have looked like a deer in headlights at his suggestion.

“I’ll call Peter,” Harry said and I nodded in agreement.

“Will you stay with me while I call Stella and Lanie?” I asked, my voice trembling.

“Of course,” he said, giving my shoulder a squeeze.

“Stella,” I whimpered into the phone.

“Jill, what’s wrong?”

“It’s Jay ... He’s been in an accident,” and with that statement I was unable to continue. As had been the case with the phone call I had tried to make to Lanie, Harry reached over and took the phone from me and relayed the rest of the conversation I had had with Dr. Shippling and what the officers had determined from their assessment of the accident. This time I stood up and wandered to the window, looking out into the hustle and bustle of everyone moving around down below. The day was beautiful, not a cloud in the sky. The air was cool and crisp, a perfect October day for North Carolina. People were smiling, hugging, rushing about, completely unaware of the agony and grief that now engulfed my life, creating my own personal hell. The sensation was maddening. I felt a hand on my shoulder and turned around. It was Harry.

“Stella and Lanie are both making arrangements to be here as soon as possible,” he said quietly. Stella Conner (no relation to Harry) and Lanie Alexander had been my best friends since before kindergarten. We had all grown up on the same block, brought together by our own respective torments of growing up in broken homes. The three of us became our own little family and had been there for each other ever since.

“And Peter?” I asked. Jay and his dad, Peter, had not been very close since his mother had passed away several years earlier, but I knew that Jay would want his dad there, given the circumstances.

“Peter is going to try and catch a flight in the morning,” Harry said.

“He could stay—” I started to say.

“He will stay with me.” Harry finished my sentence and gave my shoulder another squeeze as I nodded. He walked over to greet several other officers who had just trickled into the room. After making the rounds and speaking to everyone, he returned to my side at the window.

“Before you leave the hospital today, you will need to give a statement,” he said.

“What?” I asked. “I wasn’t in the accident. Why do they need to speak with me?”

“It’s just procedure. They need to get as much background information about Jay as they can,” he replied, unfazed by the increased anxiety he had just caused in me.

The next hour dragged on and so did the hour after that. Finally, the doors opened and Dr. Shippling and another middle-aged doctor emerged, both dressed in mint-green scrubs this time.

“Mrs. Greenfield, this is Dr. Matthews. He performed Mr. Greenfield’s surgery,” Dr. Shippling said.

“Mrs. Greenfield.” Dr. Matthews extended his hand.

“Jill, please.”

“Jill, your husband suffered a very severe traumatic accident and you need to know the surgical staff tried everything, but we have determined that Mr. Greenfield is brain dead,” Dr. Matthews paused to let the finality of his words sink in. I felt Harry stiffen next to me and in that moment my world crashed down around me.

“That’s not possible,” I whispered, staring in disbelief at the doctors.

“We would like to discuss with you whether Mr. Greenfield was an organ donor or if that is something you would be willing to consider,” Dr. Matthews continued.

“You just informed me that my husband is brain dead and now you want to know about cutting him up and giving away his organs?” My temper flared at the doctors’ audacity.

“Doc, why don’t we wait on that?” Harry whispered, wrapping his arm around me.

“Can I see him?” I asked, still glaring at the doctors.

“Yes. They are just finishing up after the surgery. I must warn you, Mrs. Greenfield, that Mr. Greenfield will be hooked up to ventilators and other machines that will make him look very much alive. But he has no brain function, so as soon as those machines are removed, his body will not be able to keep its systems going and he will flat-line,” Dr. Shippling said flatly.

“Is there any chance?” I asked again, looking at both doctors.

“I’m sorry. This is an irreversible injury,” Dr. Shippling said. Both doctors turned and spoke to Harry for several more minutes before leaving. All I could do was continue to stand where I was. I felt rooted to the floor, unable to speak, unable to breath as tears streaked down my face. This wasn’t supposed to happen to us. We were still so young, just beginning our lives together. We were supposed to have our whole life ahead of us.

Harry had suggested we go out and grab something to eat and then come back. But I refused to leave until I could see Jay. Not long after, a nurse came into the lobby and informed us that Jay had been brought down to his room and I was now able to see him. Harry motioned for me to go on ahead without him. I walked down the long corridor behind the nurse until we reached room 2357.

“You can go on ahead in,” she said to me when we reached the door. I slowly pushed the door open and walked into the small, bleak, dimly lit room that smelled of antiseptic. I could hear the respirator slowly moving up and down and the low hum of what I assumed to be a heart monitor. As I rounded the corner, Jay’s bed came into full view and my hand involuntarily rose to my mouth.

“Oh Jay,” I whispered as I walked closer. He had bandages wrapped around most of his head and several scratches and stitches that covered his once flawless face. I could tell his right leg was wrapped in some type of bandage and perhaps his ribs were also wrapped. I pulled up the hospital chair next to his bed and reached for his hand, careful not to disturb all the tubes and wires he was connected to. I let out a small gasp as our hands touched. His hand was so warm.

“Jay can you hear me?” I whispered. I don’t know what I expected, but part of me thought he would open his eyes and answer me. I remembered once hearing it was good to speak with patients who were in a coma. I wondered if the same principal applied to brain-trauma victims. Probably not, but that wasn’t going to stop me from trying to get through to him. He looked so calm and peaceful, just as if he were sleeping. I don’t know why a particular thought popped into my mind, but it did and I started talking.

“Jay, remember that time on our honeymoon? You had wanted everything to be so perfect. You planned out every last painstaking detail, down to what food we were gonna eat. It had taken you months to get it all down, but instead we both ended up with the flu. We spent the entire two weeks holed up in our beach rental, eating chicken soup and watching reruns of *Friends*. It wasn’t the honeymoon you planned, but it was the most magical trip I had ever been on. You know why? I was with you. I need you to know that.” I squeezed his hand. “My life means so much more because you came into it,” I whispered.

I rested my head on my arms, which were perched on the edge of the bed. Tears started to fall more heavily down my cheek. My chest started to heave and I could no longer contain the sadness that had been

building up. It poured out of me and I sobbed into the bed. I don't know how long I sat there, but I didn't hear anyone come in until I felt a hand touch my shoulder.

"Jill, it's time to go," Lanie's soft voice whispered, "Say good-bye ..."

"How do I say good-bye?" I sobbed and looked up at her.

"Say good-bye for today. We will be back in the morning. I promise."

She waited for me to stand. I gave Jay's hand one more squeeze and turned to follow her out. We walked back down the hallway, silently. When we reached the lobby, I could see Stella talking to Harry. I knew that Lanie had had a short drive from Raleigh and would have arrived pretty quickly after my phone call. Stella's appearance surprised me as she had farther to travel from Manhattan. But in that moment it didn't matter. The instant that Stella saw us leave Jay's room, she bounded toward us.

"Jill, I am so sorry," she mumbled through tears of her own. I felt another embrace and felt Lanie hugging us both. There were no more words. There didn't need to be. We just stood there, holding on tightly to each other.

## CHAPTER 3

---

As promised, before leaving the hospital, I spoke with one of the officer's working Jay's case. It took almost 30 minutes for me to collect myself before I was able to speak. Lanie and Stella both stood over me, questioning the officer about the appropriateness of these questions so soon after the accident. Harry, who stood off to the side, assured them it was just a routine procedure. It took another 30 minutes to answer the officer's questions before we were free to go.

Harry drove me home in silence as Lanie and Stella followed behind in Lanie's car. When we pulled up to the house, Harry got out of the car to give me one more hug. It was only then that I noticed his eyes were red and swollen. He must have been crying at some point. He said he would get Jay's dad from the airport in the morning and they would head to the hospital when visiting hours began. I asked if someone had informed him of Jay's condition and he let me know that he had called and updated him while I was in with Jay. I nodded and headed back up toward the house. Stella and Lanie stayed behind to talk with Harry about further details.

As I entered the house, it felt different, deflated. It no longer felt like home but an empty structure. What once used to hold all my hopes and dreams now just held the physical reminders of my short life with Jay. In reality, we had only been together about five years. We had celebrated our two-year wedding anniversary several months previously, in June. I wandered in and out of the rooms, staring idly at the pictures we had displayed throughout the house until I ended up in our bedroom. The bed was still unmade from that morning. Jay's clothes were laid out on the chair next to his side of the bed, waiting for him to come home. But he wasn't coming back. Having no more tears left to cry, I kicked off my shoes and crawled into bed, drifting into a dreamless sleep.

In the morning I stretched out, looking at the clock. It was past seven. I jumped up with a start. I was going to be late for work. I quickly stood and realized I was still dressed in the clothes I had worn the day before. Then, all the events of the previous 24 hours came crashing back and I sat down on the bed.

"I thought you might be up," Lanie said from the doorway. She came across the room and sat down next to me, placing her hand on my knee. "How are you doing?"

"How am I supposed to be doing?" I asked. Lanie had always been the most compassionate and sensitive of our group. So it was no surprise to any of us that she became a licensed child psychologist. She was already running a very successful practice of her own in Raleigh before the age of 30.

"Jill, it's not a question I can answer for you," Lanie replied, pushing her short blonde hair from her eyes.

"Don't psychobabble me, Lanie."

"I'm not. I am simply trying to see where you are at."

"Where I'm at? Let's see. My husband of a little over two years was hit by a drunk driver yesterday and the doctor informed me that he was brain dead." I paused to take a breath. "I'm not really sure what brain dead means, but I know he's not coming back, even though it just looks like he's lying there, sleeping." I stood up as the anger began to build. "How the hell am I expected to make all these decisions? Do you know they asked me yesterday whether I wanted to donate his organs? I mean he wasn't even out of surgery and they were already asking me these questions, and of course I have no idea how to answer them. Jay and I hadn't talked about stuff like that. We kept telling ourselves we had time, there was no need to rush. Now what do I do?" I said, facing Lanie and waving my hands in the air.

"Way to go, Lanie. Get her all worked up," Stella commented from the doorway. "I thought you were supposed to be the professional amongst us," she added dryly.

"This is normal. This is healthy," Lanie said, looking at Stella.

“Healthy? I’m standing right here, you know. I just lost my husband, remember? ... I’m not some patient you can just evaluate.” I paused and stared at the two of them. “I need a shower,” I finally said and stormed off toward the bathroom.

I stood in the shower, letting the hot water cascade over me until I had used it all up. I got out of the shower, dressed, and made my way downstairs. Lanie and Stella were both sitting at the kitchen table, hunched over, whispering to each other.

“You shouldn’t whisper. It’s not polite,” I commented as I moved past them and poured myself a cup of coffee that someone had brewed that morning.

“We were just discussing what we should do today,” Stella said defensively.

“What do you mean, ‘what we should do’? We are going to see Jay.”

“And then what?” Lanie asked.

“What do you mean, ‘then what?’” I was confused. This wasn’t some vacation. We didn’t need an itinerary.

“We need to discuss your plans, Jill. What about funeral arrangements? Do you want to have a service? People need to be contacted,” Stella added softly.

“He’s lying in the hospital, hooked up to all those tubes. He’s still breathing you know! And you two are ready to throw him in a pine box and put him in the ground.” I was angry again, shouting at both Stella and Lanie.

“He’s gone, Jill,” Lanie said very firmly. “Those tubes and machines—they can’t bring him back. They are just trying to keep his organs going until you decide what’s next.”

“How can I decide what’s next when I don’t know myself. I’ve never done this before and I thought it would be another 50 or 60 years before I would have to.” I shouted less forcefully as the tears from the previous day started all over again. “We are ... were ... young ... we didn’t talk about this stuff. I don’t know if we even completed our wills,” I said through my tears.

“Don’t know?” Stella asked.

“We started them a couple weeks ago. Jay was updating several policies and doing his investment stuff when he brought it up. I think we filled out some stuff, but I don’t know if he ever sent them out.” I paused. Talking about mundane things seemed to be more calming.

“Jill, come sit down. Let’s figure this out as we always do, together,” Lanie said and moved the kitchen chair out so I could sit down.

Just then, my phone rang. Stella grabbed it from the table and handed it to me.

“Shit,” I said as I read the caller ID.

“What?” Stella and Lanie asked.

“It’s my principal.”

They both had alarmed faces as I answered the call.

“Jill? It’s Jennifer Bentley.”

“Hi Jennifer.”

“I was just concerned because you didn’t show up for school this morning, which is very unlike you. I have gotten someone to cover your class for the rest of the day, but I wanted to call and see if our communication lines got crossed.” In reality this was her passive-aggressive manner of asking if I were playing hooky. I could tell she was agitated. She did not like it when teachers missed school and she had to find subs at the last minute.

“Jennifer, listen. Jay was in a terrible accident yesterday and I forgot to call,” I stammered.

“Oh my! Is he okay?” She didn’t wait for a reply and started to give me her customary “Let us know if we can do anything to help you” speech when I interrupted.

“Jennifer, Jay is dead.” Renewed tears brimmed and threatened to begin flowing again. And just as she had at the hospital, Stella relieved me from phone duty and finished explaining the rest of the situation

to my principal.

“She’s kind of a really big bitch, but you are on indefinite leave from school,” Stella said as she put down the phone. I didn’t have any energy to question the decision. At that moment I couldn’t even think about standing in front of a class with 20 five-and six-year-olds staring back at me. We sat in silence around the kitchen table for several moments before my phone started to light up with text messages and calls from different teachers and parents throughout the school system. Apparently, news of my tragedy was now spreading and everyone was probably gossiping about how “tragic” the whole thing was and how “young” we both were, all the while being glad they could still go home and hug their loved ones.

I knew that Stella and Lanie were right: I needed to make some decisions. The logical part of myself told me Jay was gone and I needed to start making the proper arrangements. The other part told me to hold on and fight for him, that somehow, by some miracle, he was going to recover. He would be the exception. I stood up from the table and looked at my friends.

“What time are we allowed back at the hospital?” I asked.

“After 11,” Stella answered.

“What about Jay’s dad?” I asked.

“Harry called earlier and said that he got in alright and that he was going to take him over right at 11 like you discussed yesterday. Harry mentioned that Jay’s dad wasn’t dealing with the news very well,” Lanie said, adding, “Jay’s dad—”

“Peter. That’s his name,” I said.

“Peter said he would support whatever decisions you decided on.”

I knew that I should give Peter some time alone with Jay so there was no need to rush over to the hospital.

“Okay. I need a couple hours ... alone. I need to look through some things in the office and figure out what Jay’s wishes were and medically what my options are,” I said.

“Do you want to call Dr. Matthews or Dr. Shippling?” Lanie asked.

“No. I need to do this on my own. In the meantime, I need you to manage my phone,” I said, pointing to my iPhone on the kitchen table. “I can’t deal with all the calls and the pity. I don’t care what you tell them but I don’t ... I can’t handle it right now.”

I turned and headed to the small office we had made at the back of the house. It was probably the place Jay spent the most amount of time. Technically, he was employed by a large law firm back in Massachusetts, but since he spent most of his time on the road, traveling, making deals and negotiating mergers, they didn’t care where he lived, so we ended up staying in Greensboro. I had grown up in the area and Jay fell in love with the area during his time at Wake Forest, so we decided to stay. Jay once told me he felt guilty after Harry followed him down there. Because of the pact they had made about traveling and being bachelors, he just couldn’t get up and move away after Harry had established himself on the police force. Moreover, Jay had no interest in going home after his mother died.

I now sat in his big leather chair behind his oak desk. His papers were still all spread around the desk from whatever he had been working on that Friday. We were going to dinner with friends and Jay had worked until the time we needed to leave. I had been rushing him so that we wouldn’t be late. I turned the computer on and as I waited for it to load up, I started shifting through various items, looking for the draft will we had discussed. I remembered we had just completed a rough outline and had to go back and make some major decisions. Not having any kids or large amounts of property or investments, it seemed to be a simple process. Jay was worried about some of his investments and said he wanted to discuss them further with me. But we hadn’t had the time with all his business travel and my school year starting back up.

I finally located a copy of the document and noticed it had already been faxed to a lawyer’s office. The name scribbled on the sheet read “Paul Wellon.” When the computer finally loaded, I pulled up

Google search and typed in the keywords that the doctors had used the previous night. I pored through various articles about brain trauma and vegetative states. Feeling deflated and more depressed than when I started, I changed my search to organ donation. The more I read, the more overwhelmed I became by all the wonderful stories from both the survivors and those who had lost loved ones. I glanced down at the clock and saw that it was after 12. I turned off the monitor and searched for a few more important numbers before heading back into the kitchen.

Stella and Lanie still sat at the kitchen table, both in deep conversations on their phones. It gave me a moment to observe my friends. Lanie still wore her sweats from the morning and an oversized Chapel Hill sweatshirt. Her short blonde hair was tucked behind her ears and she absent-mindedly picked at her cuticles. Stella on the other hand was dressed in designer jeans with a dark burgundy silk blouse. She looked as if she were ready to negotiate a deal anywhere on the planet. Her brown locks were styled in a trendy bob and her make-up was flawlessly applied. I smiled slightly to myself as I observed that she and Lanie had the same vice: Stella was also picking away at the paint on her manicured fingers. On the kitchen counter sat several sandwiches and snacks, none of which had been in the house earlier. Someone must have gone out, I thought.

“Hungry?” I whispered, motioning to the food.

“Your neighbors brought those by,” Lanie said as she got off the phone. My neighbors? How did they know? I hadn’t even heard the doorbell.

“News travels fast,” I said with disdain.

“So what did you find out?” Stella asked as she hung up her phone and wandered over to the counter to fix herself a plate.

“I still need a little more information. First, I will need to talk to Dr. Shippling and Dr. Matthews. Second ...”—I turned and faced Stella—“can you do me a favor? Actually two?”

“Sure,” she replied.

“I need you to call Paul Wellon. He’s the lawyer Jay was dealing with about getting our affairs in order. I need to know if we had any paperwork that might have indicated Jay’s wishes. Then I need you to call Jay’s office and let them know about the accident. They will probably want his files or computer or something crazy.” I paused. I was already feeling drained and we hadn’t even gone back to the hospital. “You’re a lawyer. They are lawyers. It just makes sense.” Lanie nodded in agreement.

“No problem,” Stella said as I handed her the papers I had found and the numbers I had written down.

“Now, I’m ready to go back to the hospital.”

“No. First you eat and then you can go to the hospital,” Lanie instructed. I didn’t know how to tell her that I had no appetite and food was the last thing on my mind. But in order to expedite our departure, I quickly ate a turkey sandwich and washed it down with a bottle of water.