



MARK MYNHEIR

THE
CORRUPTIBLE

A RAY QUINN MYSTERY

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CORRUPTIBLE

A RAY QUINN MYSTERY



MULTNOMAH
BOOKS

THE CORRUPTIBLE

PUBLISHED BY MULTNOMAH BOOKS

12265 Oracle Boulevard, Suite 200

Colorado Springs, Colorado 80921

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ISBN 978-1-60142-074-9

ISBN 978-1-60142-286-6 (electronic)

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Cover design by Mark Ford

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Published in the United States by WaterBrook Multnomah, an imprint of the Crown Publishing Group, a division of Random House Inc., New York.

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Mynheir, Mark.

The corruptible : a Ray Quinn mystery / Mark Mynheir.—1st ed.

p. cm.

ISBN 978-1-60142-074-9 (alk. paper)—ISBN 978-1-60142-286-6 (electronic) 1. Private investigators—Florida—Fiction. 2. Ex-police officers—Fiction. 3. Orlando (Fla.)—Fiction. I. Title.

PS3613.Y58C67 2011

813'.6—dc22

2010043880

Printed in the United States of America

2011—First Edition

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

DYING ON THE TOILET was not how I envisioned leaving this world.

“Ray Quinn, you’re a dead man!” The behemoth’s rumblings reverberated off the bathroom walls like a fully throttled Harley-Davidson.

I locked the stall door and shuffled back against the wall, my good leg using the toilet to keep me upright. My balance was still suspect after the shooting that destroyed my hip and pelvis eighteen months before. I pulled out my phone and typed a hurried text message to my partner, Crevis.

Trapped in bathroom w/maniac. Get here now!

“Where are you, you gumshoe rat?” The goon kicked in the stall door three down from me. Keith Wagner, my large and socially challenged pursuer, didn’t possess much of a sense of humor. His wife suspected he was being unfaithful and hired me to follow him. It wasn’t a difficult job, as he possessed a predilection for young ladies and excessive amounts of booze. Easy money, I thought. Now it seemed Keith was going to extract from my body every dollar his wife paid me.

The lovely and gracious Mrs. Wagner hadn't thought it important to inform me that she confronted Keith and blamed everything on me until after she went to the gym and met some friends for a brunch date.

I got her flippant warning call as Keith followed me into the restaurant where I was meeting Crevis for lunch, so he was now on a quest to separate my head from the rest of my body. I ducked into the bathroom to avoid him. Not the smartest move I'd made in a while, because now I was cornered. And in my hobbled condition, I couldn't outrun anyone anywhere. I hoped Crevis got my message, or he would be looking for another employer soon.

"So you wanna ruin other people's marriages, do ya?" Another stall door fell victim to Keith's raging foot.

Pointing out that it was his serial adultery and boorish behavior that led to his personal problems probably wouldn't help the situation, so I remained quiet.

"You wanna stick your face into other people's business?" The walls rocked again as the stall next to mine endured his assault. I aimed the weighty brass handle of my cane toward the door. Whatever he wanted to do to me would come at great cost.

The door handle jiggled. "Thought you could hide, did you—Ray Quinn, private eye?"

The door exploded open, and I was face to face with Keith, who stood a solid six foot three with a thick lumberjack build that made me wonder if this whole private-investigator gig was worth it. He worked his hands in and out like he was warming up his forearms

to throttle me. He smirked, and I hammered the handle of my cane into his bearded face.

A meaty thump filled the air as one of Keith's teeth smacked the mirror behind him and swirled around in the sink. Keith staggered back, blood pouring down his chin. He snarled—minus a front tooth—and charged back into the stall and snatched me by the neck, smacking the back of my head against the wall. He growled as his beefy hands wrapped around my throat; his crazed eyes widened as he squeezed down hard.

While trying to break his stranglehold, I reached back to my waistband holster for my Glock 9mm. Magilla Gorilla thumped my head against the wall twice more, trapping my pistol between my back and the wall. An uppercut to his man-spot elicited only a groan from him. A follow-up shot caused him to release his grip and stumble backward, hunched over and clutching his groin.

I stabbed the brass tip of my cane down on his foot with both hands, coaxing another yelp from him. He hopped backward on one leg, then fired a cranium-rattling punch into my cheek, knocking me down onto the toilet. He grabbed me by the shirt and jerked me out of the stall, launching me through the air and dropping me on the sink counter. My cane slid across the floor toward the bathroom door. One of the faucets snapped as we wrestled on the sink top, spraying water like a fountain.

As Keith raised his fist to pound me, the bathroom door smacked against the wall, and Crevis Creighton stepped in.

Crevis, in his gray suit and fedora, streaked toward us and nailed

Keith with his shoulder, driving him into the wall and off me. He locked Keith in a bear hug, pressing him against the wall. Keith pushed Crevis's face back and took a wild swing. Crevis broke away and bobbed under the punch, his much-loved fedora falling to the floor. He fired two deep uppercuts to Keith's floating ribs, just like I had coached him. Keith gasped and looped another much slower, feeble swing at Crevis, who stepped back out of range as the punch sailed past. Crevis snapped a round kick to Keith's jaw, knocking him back against the wall. He slid down to the damp floor, unconscious.

The water from the broken faucet drenched us as I lay on the counter like a slab of so much pounded beef, my hip throbbing in pain.

"You all right, Ray?" Crevis said as he snatched his hat from the floor and affixed it back onto his head. Oblivious to the torrents of water jetting around us, he was quick to my side, as usual. The kid was consistent if nothing else. The look of concern on his face was genuine, but he'd seen me battered and beaten before. I'd get up.

I always did—one of my many faults.

"I'll make it." I started to scoot myself off of the counter and swing my legs to the floor. A searing bolt of pain rocketed down my spine and hip. "Maybe I'll wait here for a minute."

The romantic notion of being a private investigator—righting wrongs, searching for justice, and all the other drivel that zipped through my brain on occasion—seemed a bit foolish as I rested on a bathroom counter, nearly drowning in cold sink water.

Crevis's gray suit was now a sooty black as the sink continued to spit water at us. Drops poured off the lip of his fedora like a rain

gutter in a hurricane. My already broken body cried out again, even more than usual. I hoped Keith hadn't destroyed any of the doctor's work on my damaged hip and pelvis. When I caught my breath, I'd try to stand and test it out. But for a moment, I was quite comfortable lying there, taking an unplanned shower.

"You might want to call OPD before this goon wakes up," I said. "I don't think he'll be happy."

Sliding his arm underneath mine, Crevis tipped me up into a sitting position. He eased me off the counter, then stepped over Keith, who was still taking a tile nap, to retrieve my cane for me.

Crevis had packed on about twenty pounds since we'd started working together. The kid had been in the gym every day, lifting weights and doing heavy bag workouts. I'd been coaching him on his boxing and kick-boxing skills, which I recognized now as an investment in my own health. A 9mm bullet to my side had ensured I would never hit the ring again.

"Whose idea was this PI thing again?" I asked.

"Yours," he said.

"Remind me to never listen to myself again."

2

“DOES THIS HURT?” the paramedic said as he dabbed my cheek with a medical swab.

“Only when you do that.” I pushed his hand back, antiseptic stinging in the wound. “I’ll clean myself up.”

The young, heavyset African American stood up and scribbled notes on his clipboard. “It’s your choice, but I really think you should go to the ER and get checked out. Your hip could be fractured.”

“I’m good.” I held up my hand. “I just need a breather.”

I’d don a tutu and enroll in ballet classes before I’d give Keith Wagner the satisfaction of knowing he’d put me in the hospital. I’d walked myself into this situation, and I was certainly going to walk myself out of it.

The paramedic had perched me on the stoop of the ambulance so I could keep the leg stretched out and drip dry in the afternoon sun. I worked the joint back and forth a few times, and even though it hurt—it always hurt—there was no need to get it checked out.

The road was blocked with two ambulances and a couple of Orlando PD squad cars. Curious spectators lined the sidewalks. The

lunch crowd was thick, as both the federal and state courthouses were just a few streets over, and Church Street offered a diverse assortment of restaurants. Lots of suits and dresses hurried back and forth, gazing at the spectacle, like lawyers on parade.

Two more paramedics wheeled Keith Wagner out of the restaurant on a gurney, an Orlando PD uniform trailing him. His head jiggled as they rolled over the lip of the doorway and headed for the second ambulance. After he was cleared from the hospital, he'd be on his merry way to the 33rd Street Jail. At least his case was closed, and I could be done with him and his neurotic wife.

Crevis reenacted a blow-by-blow account to another officer on the sidewalk to my left, shadowboxing his way through the story in dramatic detail. I'd already given my statement and was ready to leave.

"Raymond Quinn," a female voice called from the side of the ambulance. "You're the only guy I know who can get into a fight at lunch. What did he do, cut you off in line for the salad bar?"

Pam Winters' voice was a welcome addition to the cacophony of emergency vehicles and passersby. She wore a blue skirt and a white blouse, and her sandy blond hair was pulled back. She'd apparently just left her teaching job at a local private school when I called her.

Pam's deep blue eyes narrowed at me, then eased up. "Are you okay?" she asked.

"I'll survive." I shrugged and pointed to Keith with my chin as he was being loaded into the ambulance. "I think I broke his fist with my face, though. That'll teach him."

“You’re a mess, Ray.” She rested her hand on my shoulder. “Can I do anything?”

“I’m gonna be out the rest of the day, so I figured you and Crevis could work together. And I have some phone records I need input on cases, if you’re up for that. The disk is on my desk.”

“I could use some more time to work on his grammar and reading.” She straightened my collar and brushed some debris from my shirt. “His test is only a few weeks from now, and we have a long way to go. At this point, he’s not ready. I can take care of the phone records too. I didn’t have anything else planned today.”

“It’d help me out a lot,” I said.

I’d known Pam since I investigated her brother’s murder six months ago. We started out on rocky footing, but she’d more than proved her mettle. Her brother had been a pastor at a ministry downtown and ended up shot to death in his condo alongside a prostitute—a salacious story the press had exploited. My old unit ruled the case a murder-suicide, but Pam knew her brother could never have done something as patently evil as that.

She convinced me to take the case. Although I gave her a ton of grief at first, she ended up being right. Her brother was a true victim and by all accounts the real deal as a pastor, a man every bit as committed to his faith as his sister and not the monster the papers made him out to be. While I didn’t believe what Pam and her brother believed, they were both as sincere as they came.

Along with helping Crevis prepare for his written test for the police academy, which he’d failed twice already, she did some part-

time work for me as well. I could always find something to keep her in the office a couple of hours a week, and she seemed amenable to the setup.

Maybe she hung around to pay me back for her brother's case, or maybe she was just a friend trying to help out our business. Either way, whenever I called, she showed up. That was big in my book. She was the only person other than Crevis who had a key to our office. She'd earned it.

Crevis joined us and pumped a couple of jabs in the air. "Not bad, huh, boss? I took that guy out with three strikes."

"Don't get cocky, Fist-of-Fury. You did all right, but if you were really on the ball, you could have dropped him in two." I stabbed my cane into the pavement and gripped the handle with both hands. Leaning forward, I eased off the bumper—planting both feet on terra firma. Crevis slipped his hand underneath my elbow and lifted. I shook him off and stood on my own power. I was unstable but vertical. My day was improving.

"There's just a little too much testosterone in this conversation for me," Pam said. "When you're ready to go, let me know. Do you want me to drive you back to your place? Crevis can bring me back here to get my car."

"I'll drive myself," I said. "If I let myself get stuck in the car with you, I'm afraid you'll spend the whole time praying for my heathen soul."

She smirked. "Maybe not the whole time. We could sing some hymns too."

“Funny,” I said. “But I think I’m going to have to pass on the ride. I’m fine now, anyway. You and Crevis do what you have to do, and I’ll get some rest at home. I feel better already.”

Pam raised an eyebrow and seemed instinctively to know that I had just lied to her through my loose teeth. “I *will* pray for you anyway, Ray.”

“I’d be surprised if you didn’t,” I said. “See you tomorrow.”

She and Crevis headed down Church Street as I carefully wobbled my way in the other direction. I was glad someone was praying for me, because I wasn’t inclined to do it for myself. Prayer, to me, was like surrender. And I’d rather be knocked out cold any day than quit.

“DETECTIVE QUINN,” the man said as he burst into my office. “We need your assistance.”

When I started the Night Watchman Detective Agency, I imagined a scenario like this, but it had played out a bit differently in my head: a leggy blonde wearing a sleek black dress sashaying through the door, easing a cigarette to her mouth in a sultry, alluring manner that hypnotized me—like something out of a Bogart film. She would entice me into a case that challenged me on every level.

A portly, balding guy in his late forties carrying a briefcase and wearing a crumpled suit didn't quite satisfy that expectation.

My chunky visitor sucked in a deep lung wheeze, as if the one flight of stairs to my office had winded him. He wiped his shiny forehead with a handkerchief.

“How can I help you?” I set down the book I was reading, *The Handbook for Private Detectives*, and swiveled my chair side to side. I'd spent most of the day skimming the book, recovering from my little donnybrook the day before with Keith Wagner, who went to

jail for attacking me. My ribs were bruised, my cheek swollen, and my hip in no mood to be hopping up and down.

“We are in need of your services.” He waddled to the edge of my desk and handed me a business card: Richard Wykoff, Esq., Mayer Holdings Inc. “My employer wishes to meet with you. It’s very important.”

“I’ll set up an appointment.” I tapped the top of my computer monitor with the tip of my cane. “I have some openings.”

“I don’t think you understand, Detective Quinn. Armon Mayer wants to meet with you *now*.”

He said the name like it should mean something to me. It didn’t. I checked my watch and feigned an irked scowl, like I had more important things to do. “What does your boss need my services for?”

“He’ll explain it when we arrive.” He turned his bulbous body to face the entrance he had just walked through, as if I should jump up and sprint to the door.

I wasn’t sprinting anywhere, but the urgency in his voice made a welcome addition to my office and hinted at a decent paycheck. Although I generally like to know what I’m walking into, I didn’t have a lot of options, given my lack of disposable income. And besides, my interest was piqued.

With all the good press from solving Pam’s brother’s murder, I had assumed cases would pour in. Some had, like that of the perpetually dysfunctional Wagners, but they were small cases—cheating spouses and one corporate employee misconduct case. They were mere trickles when I desperately needed a cash flood to keep the business open. I hated worrying about those things. I just wanted to catch

bad guys and do my job, but I couldn't neglect the business end—a consideration I hadn't fully evaluated before I opened the doors.

My office provided just enough space to accomplish the job without luxury and fluff. Crevis's desk stood next to mine, a computer on top of it. Several metal file cabinets lined the wall behind us. My front door had a glass window with a cool painting of a man with a cane and the words "Night Watchman Detective Agency" above it. The door faced Colonial Drive and the Amway Arena, the home of the Orlando Magic NBA team. Game nights could be loud and hectic outside—not necessarily a bad ambiance for the office.

A flat-screen television hung on one wall, and a large whiteboard covered the other, both for case presentations. My desk held two flat-screen monitors—one for my regular computer work and the other for any surveillance cameras I had out. Wireless remotes connected our entire system. I could place cameras at different locations and control them and watch everything going on from my desk. The newer technology made surveillance a whole lot easier. Our system had all the necessary—but pricey—accoutrements. Much better than sitting in a cramped car all night or hiding in a clump of bushes in the rain.

"Give me a second, so I can let my partner know I'm leaving," I said. I drew my phone from its pouch. *Find out what u can on Armon Mayer. We have a case*, I texted to Crevis.

I acquiesced to my fleshy visitor and locked the office. The afternoon sun energized me and eased the soreness from my beating. I paused on the walkway and let the warmth penetrate to my bones, like a lizard sunning itself on a branch. My office building was in a

two-story complex just across Colonial Drive from Lake Dot, which was more of a pond. A computer repair shop, a telemarketing firm, and a CPA's office occupied the second floor with my office. The walkway and stairs were outside, which was pleasant when the weather was good and miserable when it was not so good.

I hobbled down the steps to my truck. Since my shooting, I didn't move with any kind of speed or efficiency. My right leg was a shriveled remnant of its former glory, the nerves and bone wrecked. The doctors had done all they could by inserting a plastic joint and enough metal to set off a security alarm at the airport. The leg did little more than fill my jeans and keep me from throwing one of my shoes away. Many years before, I used to kick-box and had a deadly right leg, rendering several opponents unconscious with well-timed, powerful kicks. Now the only thing I'd ever be able to kick would be the bucket when that time came.

Esquire Wykoff hurried over to his black Lincoln Town Car and opened the back door.

"How 'bout I drive myself?" I pointed to my blue pickup. I'd known this guy all of five minutes, so I wasn't about to get in the back of his mob-style car and ride anywhere with him. That was how people ended up in the trunk instead of the backseat. I'd made enough enemies in my nearly twenty years of law enforcement to be cautious. Although he didn't look like the Mafia thug type, I would just as soon give myself a ride to his place.

"I understand." He closed the door and circled around to the driver's side. "Follow me, please."

I loaded myself into my pickup, the only vehicle I could find

after I was shot that I didn't have to bend down to get in. It was more for convenience than for looks.

Wykoff drove east on Colonial Drive underneath I-4 to Orange Avenue, then south for less than ten minutes into the heart of downtown. We zigzagged through stop-and-go traffic to the corner of Orange Avenue and Washington Street.

He pulled into the parking garage of a red-faced glass-and-steel monolith that was the pinnacle of the Orlando skyline. In all my years on the force, I'd never been inside this building. Wykoff stopped at the gate and spoke with the security guard. The guard glanced back at me and raised the bar. We both drove in.

The darkness of the garage swallowed me as if I'd driven into the mouth of a waiting giant. I flipped on my headlights and continued to follow Wykoff. He pulled into a spot with his name on a placard next to an elevator. A black Lamborghini was parked next to it—Armon Mayer's name marked that spot. You don't see a lot of Lamborghinis in Orlando. Minivans loaded to the hilt with screaming kids en route to Mickey Land, yes. Cars worth three hundred thousand dollars, no.

I found the visitors' spot and took my time adjusting myself. My phone vibrated with a text from Crevis.

A very rich dude.

OK, I messaged back to him, as if I couldn't tell that now.

Wykoff held the elevator door for me. As I entered, he punched a security code into the keypad and pushed the penthouse button. I committed the code to memory. The elevator rose smoothly and effortlessly. Wykoff didn't speak but did smile on occasion.

The door opened to a view of a wall emblazoned with the Mayer Holdings Inc seal—two hands holding the world. Nice.

A secretary's desk faced us as we exited the elevator, an enormous set of oak double doors looming behind it.

"Richard," the brunette said in a professional tone. A gentle smile leaked out before she regained her stoic expression. In her early thirties, she had soft green eyes, and her hair was tied back off her shoulders. She wore a yellow dress and a wireless headset. She rose from her chair as we approached, and her smooth tan skin and lithe figure kept my attention.

"Megan, can you let Mr. Mayer know we're here?" Wykoff said.

She held her earpiece. "Mr. Mayer, Richard and the private investigator are here."

"Ray Quinn," I said. "My name is Ray Quinn."

"Excuse me." She grinned. "Private Investigator Ray Quinn is here to see you."

I winked at her. A coy smirk crossed her face as she opened the set of double doors that were easily twelve feet tall.

Wykoff and I entered a boardroom two stories high with rectangular windows on either side that stretched from floor to ceiling like enormous fingers holding the penthouse aloft. An oblong walnut table large enough to double as an indoor track dominated the middle of the room. More than two dozen plush black chairs surrounded it.

A set of smaller doors stood at the opposite end, probably Armon Mayer's office. Photos of Armon with famous folks dotted

the room—several actors and sports figures, and many others I didn't recognize but probably should have. All the photos appeared to have been taken in this room.

Two men peered out one of the heavily tinted windows, surveying the Orlando skyline below. Another younger man sat at the end of the table with a laptop computer open before him.

Armon Mayer stood farthest from me. Although not a large man—several inches shorter than me, with a modest build—his bearing and poise were those of someone in charge. Armon wore an olive green coat with an unusual weave—hemp, I suspected—and a black pullover shirt, and his hair was dark, though thinning along his forehead. A tightly woven ponytail hung just past his shoulders, and he had a close-cropped, salt-and-pepper beard. An impressive array of shimmering gold rings with thick stones adorned his manicured fingers, and a single diamond stud pierced his right ear. He turned toward me and then focused again out the window to the world beneath him.

The man next to him, a little taller than my six feet, approached us.

“Jack Gordon.” He extended a hand. “Chief of Security for Mayer Holdings Inc.”

Like I couldn't tell. A pistol bulged underneath his navy blue suit coat on his right-hand side, and unless he had elephantiasis of the left ankle, he stashed his backup there. A folding knife was clipped to the inside of his belt next to his cell phone. He was in his late thirties and sported the kind of build that could only be honed by an hour or two in the weight room every day. He had a brown

flattop haircut as tight as a boot brush and a chin cleft deep enough to hide a TV remote. A Marine Corps pin kept his tie from flopping around.

He squeezed my hand harder than necessary and locked me into a stare. “Thanks for coming. Please have a seat.”

Wykoff pulled out a chair for me. I regarded it but caned down two seats closer to Armon and took my own chair, the Wagner beating still fresh on my bones. Armon made no effort to extend a greeting and shuffled even farther away from me.

“I am looking for someone.” Armon twisted one of the rocks around his pinky. “I’ve been told you can help me find him.”

“You can find just about anyone on the Internet,” I said. “There’s a number of sites that will help you do that. I solve cases.”

Armon side-eyed first me and then Jack Gordon.

“Do you know an ex-cop named Logan Ramsey?” Jack picked up a file from the table. “He used to work for the Orlando Police Department.”

“I do,” I said. “We ran in some of the same circles. I had just started in OPD’s narcotics unit when he was leaving, maybe a dozen years ago. He did the undercover operation that brought down the Rebel Soldiers motorcycle gang. It was a great case.”

“Yes, he was a hero for his undercover work and was fired soon after for leaking information to a drug dealer about ongoing police operations.” Armon sauntered to a small shelf in the corner of the room, pulled an antibacterial wipe from a dispenser, and rubbed it across both hands. I spotted at least two more such stations around the room. He tossed the used towelette into a wastebasket.

“I think we’re talking about the same guy.” I rested my cane against the smooth table. Logan had ridden the publicity of that case for a couple of years. He’d been featured on all the top cop shows and documentaries as one of the few police officers to ever successfully infiltrate a criminal biker gang undercover.

I knew Logan better than I let on. We worked a couple of cases together when I first started in the unit. He could walk into any bar and in an hour have everyone there buying him drinks and selling him a kilo of cocaine.

“Why are you looking for Logan?” I asked.

“Even though Logan showed an extreme lack of ethics and sound judgment during his time as a police officer, *someone* in my employment still thought it would be a good idea to hire him as a security officer here at Mayer Holdings.” Armon shifted his body toward Jack Gordon. “Logan’s ways have not changed. He has stolen some assets that must be returned.”

“What kind of assets?” I asked.

“The valuable kind.” Armon looked at Jack, who handed me the file. “He’s commandeered a large number of clients’ personal and investment information. We don’t know if he’s going to sell the information or try to exploit it in some other way for his own gain. Find Logan, and you will find what he stole.”

I opened the file. A picture of Logan lay on top of the stack of papers.

“This is Derek Strickland from our IT department.” Jack pointed to the anemic-looking young man with the laptop. He had light brown hair and skin the color of skim milk. He had yet to look

up from the screen since I entered the room. “He can fill you in on the sequence of events.”

“Two days ago, Monday, Logan downloaded some very sensitive material from his computer to a portable storage device,” Derek said, still not engaging me with eye contact. “It’s a 300-gig hard drive that can store up to—”

“No need for the computer mumbo-jumbo,” Jack said. “Just stick to the facts.”

“Okay. He penetrated a firewall-protected area of our network and downloaded all the client files at 9:47 a.m. According to our surveillance cameras, he left the building at 10:02 a.m. and has not been seen since. He was carrying this satchel when he left, and we believe he had the external hard drive in the satchel.”

I examined the security photo—Logan Ramsey walking with a brown satchel in his hands. His once sharp and hard facial features appeared softened by time and the weathering effects of his hedonistic approach to life, but he was still built like a Viking, imposing and dominant in any room he entered. His blond hair was short now, and he wore blue jeans and a brown leather coat. He was walking through the downstairs lobby.

Armon dipped his head to Wykoff, who pulled a check from his top pocket and laid it on the table before me. As I picked it up and assessed the number, my stomach fluttered. The ability to finally swim out of the ocean of debt lay before me.

For a few embarrassing seconds I brushed aside my many questions and the cop alarm sounding off in my psyche. I paused with the tantalizing piece of paper in my hand, tickling my expectations.

I swallowed hard and placed it back on the table, facedown, and slid it toward Wykoff.

“The amount does not suit you?” Armon said.

“It’s not the amount.” I drew my cane toward me and rested both hands on it. “I don’t take cases where I’m not being told everything up front. Client information can’t be worth what you’re looking to pay me for this job, especially when you can shoot off one call to OPD and have Logan picked up for grand theft. You have all the evidence you need. They’ll put a warrant out for him, and he’ll be arrested. Problem solved.”

“Do you know what Mayer Holdings Inc. does, Detective Quinn?” Armon steepled his gaudy hands but still remained at a distance.

“I can’t say that I do.”

“I will give you a brief overview. We invest, support, and manage assets from all around the world. Many prominent people in the public spotlight are our clientele. Do you know why we are able to do this?”

“Enlighten me.” I shrugged, already tiring of his babble.

“Reputation. Mayer Holdings has a stellar reputation for the safety and security of the assets we manage, and I will not allow our standing in this industry to be destroyed by a rogue, morally challenged ex-cop. I don’t want law enforcement involved, or any publicity. I want Logan found and my assets returned—discreetly. And I do not care how you do it. My security is not suited for situations like this.”

He stopped his soliloquy and glanced toward Jack with a not-so-veiled look of disgust. “You have contacts with the police department

and are familiar with Logan. I am prepared to compensate you generously and cover your expenses because I want results, and I want them now. I know my business, Detective Quinn. You're the right person for this case."

The bloated check lay before me, but Armon's homily had not alleviated all of my concerns. On the other hand, I really did need the business. If I opened that door, I would discover what they weren't telling me soon enough.

I grabbed the check, folded it, and slipped it in my pocket. "I'll call some sources and start tracking him today. I'm gonna need his employee file, any notes or personal information on him. I'll fax you a contract. I can take this case."

"Very good," Armon said. "Jack will help you with what you need."

He eyed the door, which told me our meeting was over, and I had a new client. Armon made no attempt to cover the forty feet to shake my hand and see me out. I gathered my carcass and headed for the exit.

Jack outpaced me and held open the door for me, pseudosmile in place. He followed me out into the lobby.

"Call me first if you stumble onto anything." He handed me his business card, which listed his cell and office numbers.

"If I stumble onto anything, you'll be the first one to know."

Too bad for Jack that I never "stumbled" onto anything.