

Prologue

He watched as the housekeeper pulled out of the drive and headed down the road. The house should be empty now. Hoisting himself up over the wrought-iron fence surrounding the property, he stood blending into the thick cedar hedge, silent for a few moments. No dogs. He'd been told there would be no dogs. So far so good.

On light feet, he ran quickly across the lawn to the terrace and the French doors that led to the dining room. He tested a door knob with gloved hands. No sense in breaking in if some fool had been stupid enough to leave an unlocked door.

No such luck. He opened the small black backpack he'd brought with him and extracted a glass cutter. In a matter of moments, he had the panel removed. He reached in, unlocked the door, and stepped into a large room. The alarm system was off. He'd been told it would be off. Idiots. Did they think burglaries only happened at night? He looked around. There was a gleaming mahogany table surrounded by ten chairs and a sideboard covered with enough silver serving pieces to keep him in spending money for a couple of months. But that was small potatoes compared to what he was here for.

He moved stealthily across the Persian rug to the door on the other side of the room. Opening it a crack, he looked to the right and to the left. No sign of any life in the house. Crossing the hall, he entered a room lined with books. A large desk at one end was cluttered with papers.

He stopped and took stock. Paintings on every wall space that didn't contain bookcases. Which one was the bloody A.Y. Jackson? Ah, there it was. The one with the church tower, all painted in misty reds.

Crossing to it, he clicked the control that swung the painting aside. The safe was behind it as he'd been told it would be. He rubbed his fingers together before trying the combination. The door opened on the first try.

Quickly he scooped the contents into an IGA grocery bag. Who would think to question a man carrying a grocery bag? He laughed at his little joke.

Five minutes later, he was in the car he had borrowed solely for this purpose and headed for his rental rooms in an unsavory neighborhood on East Hastings Street. He ditched the car a few blocks from his lodgings and walked the rest of the way, carrying two million dollars' worth of stolen jewelry in a green and white bag with a stalk of celery he'd had the foresight to bring with him sticking out of the top.

Chapter 1

Sayuri looked around the arrivals terminal of the Vancouver airport in confusion. Why wasn't her father here? He'd called her in Paris just two days ago and assured her he would be. A small frown crossed her delicate features. It was unlike him to be late. Something unavoidable must have come up. She'd just have to manage on her own. She hitched the strap of her heavy cello case farther up on her shoulder and started pushing the cart piled high with her luggage toward the exit. As she struggled through the doorway and headed toward the taxi line, she heard her name called.

"Sayuri!" The grey haired man in a chauffeur's uniform rushed toward her. "Here, let me help you with those things. I'm sorry I'm late. Your father kept thinking he'd be through in time to come and meet you, but..."

Sayuri threw her arms around the man who'd worked for her family for more than eighteen years as handyman, gardener, occasional driver, and general factotum. He and his wife, Nora, their housekeeper and cook, were almost as much family as her father.

"It's wonderful to see you, Joseph. And I could use a little help with all of this."

"Did you leave anything behind?" Joseph looked in consternation at the huge pile of luggage on the cart. "I guess what doesn't fit in the trunk will go in the back seat with your cello. Did you enjoy Paris?" He started wheeling the cart across to the parkade.

"Oh, Joseph, they were the most wonderful years of my life. The work was intense, but I learned so much. I'm so much better a cellist than I was. Madame Lemont is an incredible teacher. And of course, there was Paris. It has to be the most beautiful city in the world."

"Still, we're glad to have you back. Your father has missed you. And Nora has, too. It's not the same without you in the house. And now there's..."

"Now there's what, Joseph? Why didn't my father come to meet me?"

"There's been a break-in at the house. The police are there now. That's why your father couldn't come to the airport."

"A break in? Was anyone home when it happened? Was anyone hurt?"

“No. No one was home. Your father had gone to his office and he’d asked me to take the Porsche in for service. Nora was at Granville Market getting some salmon for tonight’s dinner. I’m not sure how they got in, but they got away with the contents of the safe in the library. Somehow they must have known where the safe was. The police were still there when I left.”

“My mother’s jewelry? They stole all my mother’s jewelry?”

“I’m afraid so.” Joseph was unloading her luggage cart, trying to fit everything into the trunk of the Mercedes. “Your father said they got all the jewelry and some legal papers dealing with his business. It happened just this morning, in broad daylight. The thieves must have been watching and waiting for a chance for some days. We’re rarely all out of the house at the same time.” Joseph’s face took on a closed almost disapproving look. “As for the rest, you’ll have to ask your father. It’s not my place to tell you.”

Sayuri was confused. What rest? And when had anything ever been not his place? Joseph and Nora practically raised her after her mother’s death. With her father so often away on business, Joseph and Nora became her family. It was to them she turned with all her adolescent problems. Come to think of it, why was Joseph wearing a uniform? He never wore a uniform. He was usually dressed in jeans and a flannel shirt. What was going on?

Sayuri placed her cello carefully across the back seat, climbed into the front seat of the car beside Joseph, and rested her head against the window. She’d slept little on the ten hour flight. Clearly something was wrong here, but she would just have to wait until she could talk with her father to try and sort out what it was.

As the car turned left onto Marine Drive, the heavy commercial traffic gradually fell behind them and they entered the area of parkland and spacious homes surrounding the University of British Columbia. A few minutes later Joseph paused in front of a high ornamental wrought iron gate and used his electronic opener. The gate swung wide and he drove through it, up the steep circular drive to the front of the large stone mansion in Point Grey where Sayuri had spent her childhood

“Go on in,” he said. “I’ll take care of your bags.”

“Thanks, Joseph. But I’ll carry my cello.”

“Of course.” He smiled at her. “You never let anyone else do that even when you were ten and the cello was bigger than you were. Go. Your father will want to see you right away.”

Sayuri mounted the marble steps. As she reached the top, the door was flung open and she was enveloped in a bear hug by a large, matronly woman.

“Oh Nora, how good it is to see you.” Sayuri realized with a start she had tears in her eyes. “I’ve missed you so much.”

“Well, we’ve certainly missed you around here.”

Was there an acerbic edge to Nora’s voice? Surely not. Nora didn’t have a mean bone in her body. What was going on?

She voiced her thoughts. “What is it, Nora? Joseph wouldn’t tell me anything. And why on earth was he wearing a uniform when he picked me up? I didn’t know he even owned one. And why are you wearing that ridiculous grey dress and little white apron?” Sayuri laughed. “You look like a maid in a French farce.”

Nora looked down at her clothes and frowned. “You can bet this isn’t my choice of wearing apparel and Joseph didn’t own a uniform until recently. But it’s not my place to talk about it. You’ll have to ask your father about it.”

There it was again. Not my place.

Nora sniffed. “Go on into the library. That policeman is still here, but I know your father wanted to see you the minute you arrived. Get some rest after you see your father. You look like you didn’t sleep much on the plane. I’m fixing your favorite dinner for tonight. Good west coast salmon and fresh asparagus. And a bumbleberry pie for dessert.”

“That sounds wonderful. I’ve missed your cooking.”

“I should hope so. All that French cooking. All them sauces and fancy names. Nothing like a good honest piece of fish.” With that Nora gave Sayuri an extra hug and headed back to the vicinity of her kitchen.

Sayuri put her cello case down carefully and walked across the hall to the library. She could hear the hum of masculine voices as she opened the door.

Her father looked up from his desk and jumped to his feet. "Sayuri." He crossed the room in three strides and enfolded her in his arms. "I'm so sorry I wasn't at the airport to meet you. This mess..."

"Daddy. It's good to be home."

As her father released her, Sayuri became aware of the other man in the room. He was gazing into the fireplace, his back to her. He turned slowly and fixed his intense green eyes on her face. Sayuri felt a jolt of recognition then something more than recognition, something she hadn't felt since she was seventeen. Since the last time she'd seen Michael Donovan.

"Michael. What are you doing here?"

"There's been a robbery. I'm the detective assigned to the case." He smiled. "Detective Donovan, at your service. It's been a long time, Sayuri."

Her father, apparently puzzled, looked from one to the other of them. "You two know each other?"

"From high school," Michael supplied, drinking Sayuri in with his eyes.

Sayuri shivered inwardly. After all these years, how could he still make her feel this way just by looking at her? "Yes...well...It was a long time ago."

She sat down in the leather chair beside her father's desk, hoping her voice was steadier than her legs. "Michael was a class ahead of me, but we knew each other." She forced herself to shift her eyes from Michael to her father and to bring her mind back to the present. "A robbery?"

Sean McAllister sighed. "Some thief broke into the safe and got away with all the jewelry and some plans for one of our new electronic communication devices. The one we're hoping will compete with the iPod. The jewelry's insured, of course, but your mother's engagement ring, the little jade pendent your grandmother gave you...they're irreplaceable. I'm sorry, my dear."

Michael asked, "How much damage could the possession of those plans do to your company?"

Fortunately, not very much. We're scheduled to go into production next week. Once the product is on the market the plans will be old news. But the jewelry's worth a good deal. I believe the insurance appraisal on it's in the neighborhood of two million."

Michael was examining the wall safe standing wide open with the painting that normally concealed it swung back. "It's unusual they took both the jewelry and the plans. It may be they grabbed the papers simply because they were there, without knowing what they were. And I'm afraid we can't strictly say the thief broke into the safe. The door shows no signs of tampering. Whoever got into the house knew exactly where to look and must have had the combination to the safe. You say your housekeeper and caretaker have been with you for thirty years. That doesn't eliminate them as suspects but..."

"Nora and Joseph? Don't be ridiculous." Sayuri's voice resonated with anger.

Michael glanced at her and frowned. "We have to consider every possibility."

"Not Nora and Joseph. They're family."

His voice was mild. "Family members have been known to steal from one another."

"Not Nora and Joseph," Sayuri persisted.

Michael continued as if she hadn't spoken. "And then there's the matter of how the thief got in, and how he or she knew where to look."

Sayuri frowned. "What do you mean?"

Her father sighed and answered Sayuri's question. "You know we don't keep the alarm system on during the day when we're all coming and going. We set it in the evening, but apparently the thief had been watching this place and simply walked in and helped himself. How he knew where to look, or what the combination to the safe was, I have no idea."

Sayuri looked at Michael. "Can't a practiced thief figure out the combination just by listening to the sounds the lock makes?"

Michael smiled. "You've been watching too many Turner Classic Movies. In real life, and with a safe this good, that's pretty rare."

He turned his attention back to Sean McAllister. "You were about to tell me who had the combination to the safe?"

“I do, of course. And Sayuri, but she was in the air on her way back from Paris.” Sean hesitated. “And Alyssa, Alyssa James that is.”

“Alyssa James?” It was a name Sayuri had never heard before. “Who’s Alyssa James?”

Her father glanced sideways at Sayuri and cleared his throat. “My fiancé.” He turned to Sayuri. “I’m sorry, my dear. I didn’t intend you to find that out this way. I’ll explain later.”

Sayuri looked searchingly at her father. Then she turned to Michael again. “This house is filled with valuable art work.” She indicated the paintings on the walls and a glass cabinet filled with antique jade figurines. “Those are worth far more than the jewelry that was stolen. Why didn’t he take them?”

“We can’t assume the plans weren’t their objective. Industrial espionage is a big business today. But if they weren’t after the plans, if the jewelry is what they were after, it will be much easier for a thief to turn it into cash than art work. Once stones are removed from their settings they’re hard to identify. Stolen art work of any kind is more difficult. It takes connections an ordinary thief may not have. Everyone knows diamonds are valuable. Your thief may not be up on the value of paintings or antique jade.”

Sayuri nodded. “I suppose that makes sense.”

At that moment a uniformed officer opened the library door and stepped in. “The Ident team is finished here, Mike. We can head back to Graveley Street as soon as you’re through.”

“Thanks, Pete. I’ll be along shortly.”

“Ident team?” Sayuri looked puzzled.

“Integrated Forensic Identification Services,” Michael supplied. “In the old days they’d have called them the fingerprint team. They look for a lot more now. If your thief left DNA traces anyplace, the Ident team will have found them. That can lead us quickly to anyone with a pre-existing record.”

“That’s encouraging.”

Michael turned toward Sayuri’s father. “That seems to be about all we can do at the moment, Mr. McAllister. The forensic team has done what they need to. It seems pretty certain the thief entered by simply cutting out a pane in the French doors leading from the terrace to the dining room, after which he crossed the hall to the study, and helped himself to the

contents of the safe. What isn't clear is how he knew where the safe was, or what the combination was. You've notified your insurance company?"

"Not yet. I called the police immediately."

"They'll want a copy of the police report and, of course, a complete list of the missing items. I hate to admit it, but sometimes insurance investigators are more successful at getting stolen jewelry back than the police are. They're in a position to negotiate with thieves. We can't do that."

"I'll call them right away. Thank you for responding so quickly."

"We try. I guess I'm through here for the moment. I have the list you gave me of the missing pieces. We'll put that out to the various dealers and pawn shops in the area, but I wouldn't get my hopes up." Michael moved toward the library door.

"I'll see you out," Sayuri surprised herself by saying. The two of them walked down the hall in silence.

At the front door, Michael paused and turned to her, looking searchingly into her eyes. He rested his hand gently on her arm. "It's good to see you again, Sayuri. I've thought about you over the years. I suppose it's late for an apology, but I'm sorry for the way things ended. What can I say? I was a stupid high school jock with more hormones than sense."

In spite of herself, Sayuri laughed and felt the last small residue of anger disappear. "It was a long time ago."

He dropped his hand and turned away.

She watched him trot down the steps, get behind the wheel of the nondescript Ford beside his waiting colleague and drive away. No police car, she thought. Plain clothes. He'd made Detective. Good for him. It's what he'd always wanted, to be a cop.

She squared her shoulders and marched resolutely back toward the library. What was going on here? Her father was engaged? To someone named Alyssa James? And he'd said nothing to her about it?

Her father was speaking on the telephone with the insurance company when she entered the library.

While he was on the phone, Sayuri studied him. He had a bit more grey at the temples, but at fifty-eight that was to be expected. He looked young and physically fit. He'd told her he still liked to kayak when the weather permitted and she knew he swam laps every day in their pool. She remembered how his eyes used to crinkle at the edges when he laughed. Did they still? He was tall and strong with polished but rugged features. All in all he was a handsome man. No wonder some woman had found him. The surprise was that it hadn't happened before.

He was finishing up with the insurance company. "Yes. The police have been here. They've just left. Yes, I can see you this afternoon. Two o'clock then? Fine. Thank you. I'll be here."

He looked up at Sayuri and sighed. "There shouldn't be any trouble over the claim. God knows I've paid high enough premiums to them over the last thirty years. I think they're relieved it's just the jewelry and not the art work." He paused. "It's good to have you home. We've all missed you."

"Daddy, what was that you said about a fiancé?"

"I meant to call you or write to you, but then I thought I'd just wait until you got here."

"But you didn't say anything when you were with me in Paris at Christmas time. And you didn't say anything on the telephone when we spoke two days ago."

"Alyssa and I weren't engaged until just recently, and I didn't want to tell you over the phone. Look, I know it's always been just the two of us and Nora and Joseph, but when you left to go to Paris to study..." he sighed.

"Daddy, if you've found someone to share your life, I think that's wonderful. Mother died almost eighteen years ago. You've been a widower for far too long. It's just that I didn't know about it. It was a bit of a shock, that's all. Tell me about her."

"Her name's Alyssa James. She's a Brit. Emigrated to Canada a few years ago. Some months back I hired a consulting firm to do some work with our staff. They sent Alyssa. We had dinner together and, I don't know, one thing led to another, and there you are. I know you'll love her."

"If you love her, I'm sure I will. I'm happy for you, Daddy."

Her father sighed with relief. "Why don't you go unpack, then try to get a little nap? You look tired. Alyssa will be back in time for dinner. You can meet her then."

"I'll do that. And Daddy, I'm glad to be home again. I've missed you."

Sean walked over to his daughter and hugged her close. “I’ve missed you, too, Baby. The house hasn’t been the same without you.”

Sayuri picked up her cello case and climbed the steps to her room. Her father no doubt thought he that he had told her all about Alyssa James in that brief conversation, but in point of fact, he’d said nothing. Oh well, she’d see for herself this evening.

Michael Donovan drove away from the McAllister place with his stomach churning and his emotions in turmoil. How could she still do this to him after all these years? It’s not as if there hadn’t been other women. Women, he scoffed. Sayuri hadn’t been a woman. She’d been little more than a child. A sweet, unbelievably innocent girl. And he’d hurt her. She’d never so much as spoken to him again after that. Until today.

Pete interrupted his thoughts. “Quite a dish, the daughter. You seemed pretty familiar with her back there. How’d you come to know somebody like that?”

“We went to the same high school. We were just kids.”

“Well she’s not a kid anymore.”

No, she wasn’t. Michael thought back to the moment when Sayuri had walked so unexpectedly into the library. He’d turned around and there she was, tall and slender, just the way he remembered her, but with a bit more in the way of curves. The jolt to his system had been sudden and hard. He replayed the moment in his mind. How she’d looked. Her long hair, fastened at the nape of her neck in some kind of a twist, rather than flowing freely as she used to wear it when she was seventeen, but still that silky blue-black color. He supposed that came from her Japanese mother. That and those soft, doe-like brown eyes. Her oval face and creamy complexion. She still wore no make-up. She didn’t need it. The way she walked. She carried herself like a dancer. She always had. He tried to recall what she was wearing, but all he could remember was that it was something blue, soft, and casual. What would she be now, twenty-nine, thirty?

“Hey, Mike, where you going? You’ve passed the Grave.”

Michael realized with a start that he had indeed passed police headquarters on Graveley Street. “Sorry.” Grinning sheepishly he went around the block and tried again. He’d better get her out of his mind before he spoke to the Staff Sergeant.

Once in his office he started writing his report and working out next steps. He hadn’t been lying when he told Sean McAllister they’d be unlikely to recover the jewels. He hoped the insurance investigator would have better luck. Still, there were steps to go through. Most thefts of this kind were perpetrated by somebody close to the situation. Often an insurance pay-out was the goal. He’d have to look into McAllister’s financial status. Sure, he was an important man and he had a big house, but big houses could be mortgaged to the hilt. And while McAllister Technology was a major player in the industry that was not to say his business couldn’t be in financial difficulty. For Sayuri’s sake, he hoped that wasn’t the case.

Where had that thought come from? Stop thinking about Sayuri.

He focused on his computer. There was the couple who worked for McAllister.

What was their name? He looked at the notes he’d made. Banks, Joseph and Nora. He’d have to look into their financial situation. And the fiancé, Alyssa James? How’d she fit into this? Come to think of it, why would she have the combination to the safe?

He shook his head in disgust. How could people living in a multimillion dollar estate in Point Grey be so careless about protecting their valuables? True, the place had a high fence and an electronic gate, but that wouldn’t stop a determined thief. He could just have clambered up and over the fence where the cedar hedge was dense and no one would have seen him. Or her. It could just as easily have been a woman. And those French doors into the dining room wouldn’t have stopped a child. It only took breaking one small pane to open them.

Sayuri had been so sweet and normal back then. She’d gone to a public high school, for God’s sake, just like the kids from his neighborhood. No one suspected she came from so much money. He himself hadn’t known until one afternoon when she’d invited him to come home with her. She wanted to play one of her pieces for him. She said she wanted to play it for an audience before playing it for an examination. If it hadn’t been for that he’d never have known how rich her family was. She certainly never let on in school about how she lived.

Damn it. He was doing it again. He had to get Sayuri out of his mind. He had work to do. He pushed his chair back and closed his eyes.

Of course she was never able to come watch him at hockey practice after school. All the other girls had. But Sayuri couldn't. Three days a week after school she went to the Vancouver Academy of Music. She had classes and lessons. She'd told him about them. Music history and theory. She had exams to take in music every spring. And cello lessons twice a week, and practicing, always practicing. She told him she practiced four hours a day, every day. He'd loved it when she let him listen to her practice. He'd never heard music like that in his life before. There was one piece in particular. She told him it was a Cello Sonata by Brahms. He'd bought a CD of it. Still had it. Still listened to it from time to time.

Back then he came to watch and listen to her practice as often as he could. He loved the way she seemed to caress the instrument and was spell-bound by the sounds she was able to evoke from it. Michael smiled as he remembered entertaining fantasies about having those beautiful legs wrapped around him rather than the cello.

He could always talk to her. She was the only one he told about wanting to go to the Police Academy. About wanting to be a policeman, a detective, like his dad. His dad who'd been killed in the line of duty when Michael was barely into his teens. He'd managed to get into trouble a lot after his dad died. Sayuri had pulled him out of those dark days. He remembered the afternoon she reached up and kissed him, a gentle tentative kiss. He'd walked home on clouds. He'd believed himself to be in love with her by that time.

But she was just in her third year and he was a big jock in his senior year, he thought back in disgust. His team mates had teased him about her. About hanging around with a girl of mixed Japanese-Canadian parentage. A girl who was only seventeen, and clearly an innocent. The jeering had stung.

He'd been surprised and flattered when Sheila Malone asked him to take her to the Senior Prom. How could he say no to a girl the whole team thought was hot? He liked the idea of being seen as a big man.

When push came to shove he'd opted, idiot that he was, to be seen by his buddies with a twelfth grade sex-queen rather than with Sayuri. He'd given Sayuri some lame excuse so that instead of taking her, he could take a girl that every guy in his class had been sniffing after.

He remembered that night as one of the worst in his young life. His date got drunk early in the evening and when, much to his own surprise, he wasn't interested in going out to the car with her for a little fun and games, she came on to half the other guys in the room. He'd finally left in disgust without her. And Sayuri had never spoken to him again. Not until today.

Of course he went off to college soon after that and then a year later, when Sayuri graduated, he heard she'd gone east, to major in music at McGill.

Life was funny. Here he was working on a case involving her family.

She did smile when she saw him out. Maybe she'd finally forgiven him.

His phone rang, bringing him abruptly back to the present. "Yes sir. It's almost finished. I can be in your office with it in ten minutes."

Back in his grubby room the thief dumped the grocery bag out on his bed. He looked at the indecipherable symbols on the papers he had scooped into his bag along with the rest of the contents of the safe. What were they? They were of no use to him. He'd dispose of them in one of the large trash cans in back of the supermarket over on Broadway later.

Then he looked at the jewelry. He ran his fingers through the pieces. Nice. Very nice. The fence he knew in Macao would get a good price for the stones once they were separated from their settings. He'd sell just a few stones at a time, starting with the emeralds. He'd get more for them that way than if he tried to dump the whole lot at once. This haul should set him up for some time to come.