

Hunted By Proxy ©

Quinton heaved a box of thick books onto the conference room table in the new Law Office of Quinton Lamar Bell in Houston, Texas. He'd recently moved to The Galleria area around Westheimer and Post Oak and opened a solo practice. Quinton was now what they called a loop lawyer, one who offices around and outside the 610 Loop. It circled the city from Interstate 10 to Highway 45 to Highway 59 surrounding the downtown high-rises poking out of the ground in the middle of the ring. He had been working downtown for the last year but, seeking distance and maybe a little safety from the legal community, found his perfect new office and began to make it his own.

Clients were not hard to come by as Quinton had created a reputation on his last big case, a murder involving the defense of his friend and lover, Joanne Wyatt. That seemed a lifetime ago, and he had become a loop lawyer in part to get a fresh start, but also to protect his former firm, Jamail, Powers & Kent, from his past life in New York City. That's another story, for another day, but it involved Quinton's pseudocide off the Staten Island Ferry.

Quinton Lamar Bell was not his real name, it was Byron Douglas, but only he knew that and one other person. A potentially dangerous person. When Quinton had opened his new office, he thought he was the only one on earth who knew he had faked his own death in New York and come to Houston to hide in plain sight. He looked different with a little plastic surgery, and had assumed not only the face, name, and demeanor, but the entire life of a childhood friend. He did so, not because he hated his prior life but because it was too dangerous to live it anymore. Besides, Q, as he'd dubbed his friend and benefactor, no longer needed his name or his face as

he had been cremated and sprinkled in the Gulf of Mexico. So, in essence, Quinton had been killed twice, and he wasn't even dead.

The new Quinton had worked for a downtown Houston firm at the insistence of his faux father, Judge Sirius Bell, who was also now deceased, in order to establish himself as Quinton. When he'd left the downtown firm, on good terms, he'd agreed to split any profits fifty-fifty on the files that were open prior to his departure. Any new cases were all his, even if they were referred by the old firm. It was generous to Quinton. He'd been supported a great deal by the three women partners in his prior office and would not forget their kindness. It was one of the reasons for the separation and move, to protect them, and to get out of their hair.

The women's firm didn't really want criminal cases running through their office and Quinton didn't want the firm to get caught in the crossfire, in the event that his past came back to haunt him. And his past did haunt him. He could never go back. He'd broken the law, lied, cheated, stole, and taken Quinton's legacy as his own. Now, he went through each day hiding in plain sight and living the life of a dead man.

After Judge Bell's death, he'd found that he, as Quinton, was the sole heir of the Bell estate. He'd put most of the inheritance into a charitable trust, but had kept one asset, and only one asset. He loved the Bell house in Galveston, a beautiful Victorian home near the beach, that he could not bear to part with. It was the source of many childhood memories with both his friend, Q, and mentor, Judge Bell.

Giving the bulk of the estate to charity was the right thing to do, but if the authorities found out about his true identity, his altruism would not stop them from charging him with crimes from fraud to murder. Yes, murder. That's the aforementioned part of the long story for another day.

With the help of Judge Bell, Byron had stolen Quinton Bell's persona, deliberately adapted to his new life in Houston, and felt that he had truly escaped the danger he'd left behind. After a while, it felt to the new Quinton like he'd learned another language and was now immersed in it. He actually became the new Quinton Bell, a fusion of his former self and new persona speaking the acquired language as if he'd been born to it. Still, he'd walked on proverbial eggshells every day for months, finally settling in, to what he thought was a fairly safe place.

That is, until a strange card arrived in the mail at his new office. It revealed his former name, Byron Douglas, shook him to the core, and left him wondering who knew about his past and what they wanted from him. It had been several weeks since the card had been delivered. One side was adorned with a photo of the New York skyline and the Staten Island Ferry. The other side had a cryptic note: "Hello, Byron. I know who you are, and I know what you've done. Be seeing you."

No demands, no further contact, and no requests of any nature. It was like waiting for the proverbial 'other shoe' to drop. Was he going to be blackmailed? If so, why send the card? The sender wanted something, but what? Would Quinton one day be arrested without further notice? Law enforcement wouldn't send a warning. Who was the sender, and what did they have planned for him?

"Be seeing you." It gave him a chill. Waiting to find out was worse than the many scenarios he imagined would flow from his discovery.

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