

## Chapter One

### *Anne Compton, Almost Four Years Ago*

Anne placed the empty gun carefully on the table, then folded her hands next to it. Moments earlier, to prevent the judge from granting their divorce, she fired it at her husband. She and Peter had shared such wonderful dreams of their lives together. But that was a long time ago—before he broke their vows. For that, there could be no forgiveness. And yet, he escaped his sentence.

All because of her interfering lawyer.

Anne peered down at the floor at Attorney Josephina Jensen, the woman she hired to prevent the divorce, and who had failed her. To add to her treachery, Jensen stepped in front of the bullets meant for Peter. Now, the divorce would go forward, thrusting Anne with him into eternal damnation for his sins.

In the hallway outside, footsteps pounded the marble floors. The courtroom's double doors burst open, shattering glass and splitting wood.

Anne met the panicked eyes of her former fiancé, followed by the first responders. She smiled as a single tear dropped to her cheek.

## Chapter Two

### *Present Day, Josie Jensen, Thursday Afternoon*

“Face it, Josephina Jensen. You’re a divorce lawyer.”

“No, brother dear,” the almost forty-one-year-old corrected as she twirled the stem of her wine glass on the bar. “I have a shattered pelvis and an assortment of scars from a couple bullet wounds to prove I *was* a divorce lawyer.” She held her cane up in the air. “I am now a law school professor.”

Reaching for his beer mug, Dan Jensen flashed his perfect bachelor-of-the-year grin. “I’ve got a great case for you. The divorce part is over. Judge Myers awarded the wife six million, plus a few million more in assets that are all in the husband’s name.”

“Let me guess,” Josie interrupted, concentrating on opening the package of oyster crackers that arrived with her fish chowder. “The husband refuses to authorize the transfers.”

“Correct. All you have to do is help the wife, now the ex-wife, collect.”

Out of patience, Josie yanked the cellophane hard, spewing the contents in all directions. “Oh, good grief.”

Dan swallowed a forkful of baked scrod and rice pilaf as she retrieved the crackers. “The couple has a chain of high-end grocery stores. They made a ton of money over the years. Plus, the stores are still operating.”

When Josie didn’t respond, he stilled her hand with his and gave it a squeeze. “You got this. You’re a bloodhound when it comes to cases like this. It’s easy money for you.”

She glowered at him over her gold-rimmed glasses. “I remember you flying around the house in superhero costumes.” She removed her hand. “Those gorgeous eyes and that infamous charm get you nowhere with me.”

Deadpan serious now, Dan leaned in close, speaking fast. “The wife is Amy Castle. She’s a cousin on my mom’s side. Two years ago, I referred her to Barry Woodward because you were still recovering from your injuries. Barry did a fantastic job on the divorce. Sadly, he also put the moves on Amy, and they had an affair.” Dan shook his head. “Really poor form. She learned over the weekend that he was married, and she fired him. So, would you please help her?”

Josie sat back and tackled one piece of information at a time. First, their family tree. She and Dan shared the same father but had different mothers. Yes, that could result in unknown cousins. Next, she considered the aforementioned lawyer. “Isn’t Barry on his third wife?”

Dan resumed eating. “The fourth. She knows about the affair too. It’s a disaster.”

Josie balanced a piece of salmon on her soup spoon. “So, I’d really be doing this for you, right? To help ease your guilt over referring a family member to a brilliant, sex-addicted lawyer with commitment issues?”

He tilted his head. “Well, yes. And for Amy, an innocent victim of love, taken advantage of by her now ex-husband and deceived by her lover.” When Josie didn’t respond, he added, “She’ll pay you a hundred thousand dollars, upfront, and you can bill her a c-note an hour. There’s plenty more after that if you need it.”

As if on automatic pilot, Josie's mind started listing each step of the process needed to hang the ex-husband. Then the sane, less greedy side of her brain kicked in.

*Stop. You don't do that kind of work anymore.*

Dan squeezed her hand again. "Please?"

Her resolve wavered. This not-so-humble, lawyer-of-the-year-type guy who just offered her a case other lawyers would beg for, was her life-long best friend and confidant. He also rarely said please. Twice. She pushed aside the chowder and swiveled in the bar stool to face him. "I hate you."

His broad smile beamed. "You love me." He picked up his cell. "Can I call her? She's waiting in the parking lot to meet with you."

Josie grabbed his hand. "I'm making no promises."

"Agreed. Just speak with her."

She scratched the scar on her chest. "Who's representing the ex-husband?"

Dan's cheeks and neck blotted red. "Oh yeah. About that." He rose and tossed a bunch of bills on the bar.

Warning bells erupted in Josie's brain. She grabbed the hem of his designer suit jacket. "Daniel Gabriel Jensen. Who is it?"

"Um, do you remember Richard Diamond?"

## Chapter Three

### *Richard Diamond, Thursday Afternoon*

“Mr. Castle is holding on line two.”

“Thank you, Dana.” Attorney Richard Diamond ended the intercom connection and drained a bottle of water.

Divorce caused even the most reasonable people to act unreasonably. And yet, Richard suspected his client, Malcolm Castle, displayed his “unique” form of unreasonableness long before his divorce commenced. To date, he held the record for the longest divorce case in the county, and the pandemic had nothing to do with the delay.

Richard didn’t need to review Castle’s file to recall the judge’s final decision when he granted the divorce. With millions of dollars up for grabs, Mr. Castle was ordered to transfer six of them in investments, plus a beach cottage, a boat, and a car, to his former wife within thirty days. And here they were, a hundred days or so later, and no transfers. Richard wondered if his client intended to break the record for this post judgment phase of the divorce as well.

Was Richard ruffled? Not at all. Malcolm already paid him close to two million in legal fees for the divorce. And he said he would commit to spending another two million for Richard to run circles around his ex-wife and her lawyer in order to hold on to his fortune until the last possible moment. And then, only then, would he direct Richard to make a deal. He was not going to pay anything close to six million and it was up to Richard to make sure of it.

Richard inhaled a deep breath and held it for five seconds. Then he released a slow exhale. It had been a long day, and it was about to get longer. After another second, he pushed the phone’s button for line two. “This is Attorney Diamond. How may I help you?”

“Hey there, Dickie Baby. It’s me, Mal. I hear Amy’s getting a new lawyer. A broad this time. She must have figured out, with some help, that this last one, who she was screwing, Wood something or other, was married. She gave him the boot Tuesday night.”

Richard never asked why or how his client always had up-to-date details about his ex-wife’s life. He didn’t want to know. Malcolm Castle may be slick, but more important, his skewed beliefs about how the world should operate, including his marriage and his divorce, created the type of no-holds-barred challenge that Richard relished.

And Malcolm, along with Richard’s other character-flawed clients, often expressed many prejudices, but they were not stupid. They ignored Richard’s dark skin because of the favorable results he produced. As for being Jewish, the topic never came up. Black Jews were not common in this country. Black Jewish lawyers of Ethiopian descent were even less common.

Richard gave his well-appointed office an appreciative glance. Mal wouldn’t pay his ex-wife, but he always paid his legal bills without question or delay. And the instant he didn’t, Richard would fire him.

“What’s the lawyer’s name?” he asked, disappointed that Barry Woodward couldn’t keep his pants zipped, or at least avoid getting caught.

There were few other lawyers left in the state who could handle a case of this magnitude. Like him, they treated the law as a game. The goal was to define the rules in each case, then be the best at figuring out how to enforce them or bend them. Which strategy depended on whose side you were on and how much money your client was willing to pay you.

“Some fat bimbo named Josephina Jensen,” Castle answered. “I already checked her out. She teaches at the damned law school. She quit going to court a couple years ago after her wacko client, the wife, mind you, got a gun into the courthouse. Jensen tried to stop her from shooting it off and she got hit pretty bad. If she represents Amy, it will be her first time back in court, in the same building. With all that emotional garbage and you in my corner, I doubt she’ll last a week. What do you think?”

Castle kept talking as Richard’s memory replayed the nightmarish scenes that came to be known as the Compton Catastrophe around Hartford’s Hall of Justice. He’d been down the hall when he heard the shots.

“Hey, Dickie, answer my question,” Castle demanded, drawing Richard back to the present.

Richard typed Jensen’s name into the attorney directory located on the state’s judicial website, confirming what he already suspected. “You’ve got nothing to worry about, Malcolm.” He noted the calendar hanging on the wall and changed topics. “Are you all set for next Thursday?”

“You mean when I become unavailable?”

Richard cleared his throat. “Court starts at ten. It is my obligation to tell you to be there and on time.”

“Consider me told. Just be sure to cover my ass at all costs.”

“Consider your ass covered, Malcolm.” Richard hung up and jotted down the time spent during the call and its content. Next, he returned his attention to Josephina Jensen.

Holding his chin between his forefinger and thumb, he leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes. He recalled her body, wrapped in a white sheet and packed onto a gurney with an oxygen mask covering her nose and mouth. Two silent paramedics, ignoring the media’s flashing cameras and shouted questions, wheeled the stretcher out of the courthouse and down the ramp near the steps. They lifted her into the waiting ambulance and raced off, lights and sirens blaring at full blast.

The image, along with one other, never left Richard’s mind. Over time, they had faded, but now they reemerged fresh as the day they happened.

*Could Castle be right? Was she back?*

Chapter Four  
*Josie*

“Sit back down,” Josie insisted, tugging at Dan’s jacket.

The waiter returned just as her brother reclaimed his bar stool, interrupting the rant Josie was about to launch. “Shall I wrap your meal, madam?”

She looked at her barely eaten chowder and sandwich. “Do you want it?” she asked Dan.

He crinkled his nose. “After you played with it for the past half hour? No thanks.”

When the waiter left, Josie reduced her voice to a near-threatening level. “Richard Diamond is a monster, Daniel. Thirteen years ago, he roasted us alive in that Masterson case. Do you remember what happened when the judge read his decision, after that awful eight-day trial? Our client burst out of the courtroom and howled through the halls like a mama orangutang searching for her missing babies. And what did Diamond do? He stood there in his thousand-dollar suit, preening like a peacock, his feathers spread in full bloom.”

Straight faced, Dan pretended to study the dessert menu. “It’s not that we lost. The judge just didn’t give our client everything she wanted, the way she wanted it. Over time, the parents settled down and worked things out. And keep in mind, the playing field between you and Diamond is even now. You can take him. In fact, consider it your opportunity for payback.”

“We lost, Daniel,” Josie spat back. “And I don’t want payback. I haven’t handled a divorce case or any case for almost four years, and I don’t want to, ever again.” She hated that her voice started to crack mid-sentence.

Dan clutched her forearm and sought her tear-filled eyes. “Stop letting Anne Compton ruin your life. You’re an amazing lawyer and Amy needs you.”

Josie darted her attention to the nautical paraphernalia covering the bar’s walls. Even if he was right, she didn’t want to do it. “I doubt very much Richard Diamond has mellowed over the years. He’s like a clump of Roquefort cheese, its blue and green moldy disgustingness growing more and more pungent over time.”

Dan laughed. “That just makes it more challenging.”

Picturing Diamond in his element, Josie curled her upper lip. “He only represents wealthy, evil, greedy husbands and vengeful, spoiled, gold-digging wives. Their divorce proceedings last for years and always end with a trial. And for the rare times he loses, he files an appeal. There’s no end.”

“I agree.” He hugged her. “That’s why Amy’s divorce took so long.”

“And you want me to join that circus?”

He showed her his calendar on his phone. “Did I mention the contempt hearing against the ex-husband is scheduled for next Thursday?”

Josie straightened. “Are you listening to me at all? You act like we’re discussing a sale on one of your fancy suits.” She tapped her watch. “Luke and I are leaving for the Bahamas at eleven-fifty tonight. It’s his birthday present to me. We won’t be back until late Monday night.”

Dan’s grin and his eyes widened. “Then you’d better get started.”

Before she could stop him, he sent a text.

“I’m not doing it, Dan. I’m not stepping one foot into any courtroom with that fiend.”

Ignoring her, he stood and drained his beer mug. “You’re gonna love Amy.”

“I’m only agreeing to talk with her, Daniel.”

He waved. "There she is."

Josie followed his gaze to the bar's entrance.

A pretty, well-endowed and well-dressed older brunette stood in the doorway. With a worried smile, she waved back.

*Perfect. Just perfect.*