

Jonelle removed the pistol from the locked glove compartment. After checking to make sure the clip was full and the safety on, she tucked the pistol into the black leather holster slung over her left shoulder.

She wanted to keep her hands free so she shoved her purse under the driver's seat and placed the car keys in the pocket of her jeans. A quick pull freed the navy blue windbreaker from the passenger seat. She shrugged into the lightweight jacket in an attempt to hide the gun from view. A quick look in the vehicle's window still showed the firearm.

Afraid the presence of a pistol would alarm Jorge, she zipped the jacket enough to hide the holster. Next, Jonelle set her cellphone to vibrate and slid the phone into the windbreaker's pocket.

The sun, so brilliant in the sky earlier that day, now rested low on the horizon. The air had cooled little from the heavy heat of the day, and she wondered briefly if the jacket would arouse Jorge's suspicions.

"No way I'm meeting him alone without backup," she mumbled to herself. She touched the holster for reassurance.

The digital readout on her watch indicated only ten minutes remained before the planned eight o'clock meeting time. Jonelle looked around and tried to orient herself to finding the landmarks in Marcia's directions. As the light faded, four overhead lights came on and illuminated the lot. She saw clearly where the grass that ringed the parking lot opened up, revealing a narrow gravel walkway.

Jonelle stepped onto the path. Tiny stones crunched under foot as she walked to the right of carved grave markers, several leaning haphazardly on the uneven terrain. Or were those headstones removed and replaced? The fading light cast odd shadows around the stones—shadows that seemed to move and dance, the more she stared at them. Jonelle shuddered. In a flash, Marcia's words came back to her . . . "some people get freaked out in cemeteries after dark." Jonelle touched the shoulder holster again.

A few minutes passed with nothing but the sound of her own breathing and footfalls, and the buzzing, whirring, and chirping of insects. She hadn't yet come upon the first landmark

Marcia had given her—a three-sided storage shed filled with equipment—and Jonelle wondered if she had misunderstood the directions. With eyes now accustomed to the dim light, Jonelle shivered and explored the surroundings. There were no other gravel paths, and Marcia specifically said to get on the path and “follow it above and to the right of the guest parking lot.”

Jonelle hurried on. Her breathing became labored as she rushed along the path. As the tightness in her chest threatened to stop her forward progress, the landmark shed, filled with tractors came into view. Jorge and the meeting place were nearby.