

# Prologue

A silvery haze shrouded the streets of Geneva when Abby set out on her early-morning run. The sky was still dark, the air still crisp with the night's last breeze, as she stepped from her hotel into the quiet of the street. The doorman tipped his hat in greeting.

*"Bonjour, Miss Monroe. Another run?"*

"Morning, Claude. My last one here in Geneva. Tomorrow, I'm off to Pakistan."

*"Ah, good luck, miss. Enjoy your run."*

Abby waved as she glanced at her watch and eased into her morning routine. Since this would be her last run, she wanted

it to be her best. Tomorrow, she'd board a flight to Dubai and, from there, head to a UN program in northern Pakistan.

"No running there," she'd been warned. "Too dangerous. Probably no time for it anyway."

Abby would be evaluating an immunization program for UNICEF. It would be her first overseas assignment, and she wanted to make a great impression, show that she could do this kind of work, that she was capable and professional.

Geneva was deadly quiet this Sunday morning, and she ran in solitude, no cars or noise or people about just yet. The sun was just creeping over the horizon, the city still struggling to shake off the night's long sleep. The streets and the scenery faded from her view as she focused all her energies on pushing forward, step after step. With every footfall, her legs throbbed, and her heart pounded. She wanted to stop, but in a day or a week or a month, she'd ache for the misery she felt now, so she picked up her pace, willing her muscles to remember this final sprint.

Abby's legs ached with the exertion but she pushed harder, thrusting her arms out grabbing the air. She felt her breathing ease as she crested a small hill and coasted on a level surface. Here the street narrowed as she passed the graceful old UN buildings. The government buildings that had loomed large in the shadowy morning light soon gave way to quiet residential streets bordered by trees, hedges, and privacy gates.

She turned her attention back to the road, wishing she'd brought her iPod. Running to the sounds of her own panting was a distraction. She turned back toward the hotel and found herself running along a wider street lined with high-rise office buildings. The street, framed by the buildings, was deserted and utterly quiet this Sunday morning. Steam seeped from the buildings' grates and rose lazily before evaporating in the morn-

ing air. Abby inhaled deeply. This indefinable time, the hour between night and day, was her favorite time to run at home. Everything was so peaceful, and that was especially true here in Geneva. Lost in the steady cadence of her footfalls, Abby savored the way her body moved and felt.

Suddenly, voices raised in anger broke through the morning hush. Abby, her senses alert, came to a full stop. She looked around, but caught here in a street of soaring office towers, she saw only blank walls of granite and steel. She hesitated, the voices rising again, an urgency spiking the sounds, and she realized they were coming from somewhere above her. She looked up, and there, framed at the edge of a fourth-floor balcony, a man had a woman pinned, her back bent over the railing.

Abby's hands flew to her mouth. She was frozen to the spot, unable to move.

Suddenly the man leaned in to the woman. Was he kissing her? Abby couldn't tell. No, she thought, they're struggling. The woman pulled the man's eyeglasses from his face, and the man exploded in anger, reaching for the woman's neck. Just then the woman let out a piercing scream, and even from the street Abby could feel her terror. She looked around, desperate for help, for someone to stop whatever was happening. But this was a business district and the streets were empty, no buses or delivery trucks, not even a dog walker in sight. The woman screamed again, her arms flailing at the man. Was she pushing him away? With a twist, the woman seemed to free herself from his grasp.

A gout of steam from a sidewalk grate stung Abby's eyes, and she blinked away tears. When she opened her eyes, she gasped in horror—the woman was plunging through the air.

Everything seemed to happen then in slow motion, and Abby's heart pounded as she watched helplessly. The woman would fall directly onto concrete—there was no padding, no soft

ground, nothing to break her fall. Panicked and helpless, Abby heard her own scream, but it was lost in the sudden whoosh of air as the woman hurtled past and landed just in front of her with a sickening thud.

Abby was paralyzed. She closed her eyes and tried to rub away the image, but when she opened them, the woman's body was lying at an impossible angle, her neck twisted and broken. Abby edged closer and bent to the shattered form. She leaned over the body, and though her hands trembled wildly, she felt the woman's neck, checking instinctively for a pulse. Of course there was none. The woman's olive skin was laced with cuts and bruises, and blood seeped out from beneath her head. Abby reached her hand gently under the woman's head and felt a large depression—her skull was shattered. Bits of gray matter leaked onto the street. The woman had landed on her back, her arms thrown out, her legs broken and bent, her face still contorted in fear, blood oozing from her ears and nose. One bloody wrist was adorned by thin, brightly colored bangles, and the other bore an ornate and intricately jeweled cuff bracelet. In her hand, she clutched a pair of splintered and shattered eyeglasses, the wire cutting into her skin. The woman's long black hair, splattered now with blood, spilled around her, framing her face. Her clothes, loose and colorful like so many of the exotic dresses Abby had seen at the UN, were stippled with blood. Abby leaned over the woman's chest and listened for any breath sounds. But there was nothing. She was dead, already beyond CPR.

Abby sat back on her heels and tried to think of what to do. She was a pediatric nurse, but she knew traumatic death when she saw it. The woman's bracelet sparkled in the streetlight's glow, and though Abby wanted to look away, she found herself riveted by the flashing gems.

"You!" A menacing voice cut through the quiet, and Abby looked up to see the man who'd thrown the woman. He was leaning far over the balcony, his hands planted firmly on the ledge. He teetered there for only an instant. "Don't move!" he shouted, and Abby rose and stepped away from the body.

"You!" he called again. "Stay there—I'm coming down!"

Abby's heart thumped wildly, and her eyes scanned the street. Surely, someone had heard the commotion, but the street remained empty, making the quiet seem all the more sinister.

*Where was everyone?* She had to get help. She stepped back and looked warily around. Should she run? Should she hide? She couldn't think. There wasn't time. She wouldn't get far out in the open. She hurriedly looked for a place to hide. A row of full, unclipped hedges bordered the building just to her left, and she pushed her way through them to a spot low against the wall. She crouched low, pressed against the granite, willing herself to be invisible.

She huddled and waited, and then he appeared in the doorway, looking around, his head twitching as his eyes scanned the street. Abby watched as he bent over the body, pulling at something on the woman. Suddenly he stood and turned. Abby pushed herself against the old building and watched through the tiny gaps in the lush shrubbery. She tried to memorize the details of him—his slight build, the soft woolen sweater in a charcoal hue, the thinning gray hair. The man hesitated, then walked right toward the hedges where Abby hid. She held her breath and her thoughts raced. Did he see her? Surely he could hear the pounding of her heart. The street was still empty, Geneva was not yet awake. Even if she screamed, no one would hear her cries for help.

His footsteps drew closer. She held her breath and prayed for the pounding in her heart to stop. . . .

Abby crouched lower and watched as, inexplicably, he walked right past the shrub where she cowered. *He hadn't seen her after all.* She listened as his footsteps faded and moved away. Abby squinted and kept him in her line of sight as he peered up and down the street, searching, she was certain, for her. He reached into his pocket and pulled out a cell phone, furiously punching in numbers. He turned then, and almost facing her, he spoke into the phone, his tone urgent and forceful.

"*Allez, allez!*" he barked. "*Tu comprends?*" He scratched at his head, his eyes locking then on the body in the street, and almost in response his voice rose, a swelling anger evident in his tone. "*Immédiatement!*" he shouted, turning abruptly. Abby watched as he headed back to the building, his footsteps fading, his silhouette lost in a sudden surge of steam from the grates. He disappeared into the building from which he'd just emerged.

Abby didn't hesitate. This might be her only chance to escape, and she sprang to her feet, pushing through the hedges before taking flight, running madly through the streets and back to her hotel. After what seemed an eternity, she spied the smiling Claude at the door. Panting, she almost fell into him.

"Oh, miss, slow down. You've had a good run?"

"Oh, Claude, call the police!" Abby gasped for air. "Something terrible's happened."