

## Poetic Injustice

### Chapter One

The crimson-black stain spread from the woman's head wound and ended unevenly in the center of her blonde hair. It would almost look as if she'd been interrupted in the midst of a bad dye job, except she was lying face down, leaching more of the dark blood into the supple leather of the cream-colored sofa.

Detective Samantha Colby bent closer, trying to see the victim's face without touching the body. She couldn't. Nor could she see signs of any other injuries. Not that any were needed. The bloody gavel lying on the floor next to the corpse had been more than sufficient.

Sam rose and blew out a breath, resisting the urge to remove her jacket. The heat was oppressive, unusual for Cincinnati, even in July. The sweltering temperatures magnified the smell of decay, not something one would expect to encounter in a five million-dollar mansion. CSI techs wandered in and out of the room, cameras flashing, baggies opening and closing as evidence was neatly secured.

Sam's olive shell, minus the navy blazer, would be much cooler attire, but it would probably show her armpit stains. It wasn't the image a 'together' homicide detective should present.

She turned to the uniform, Walburn, and said, "Got an ID on the vic?"

His eyes glittered with excitement. "It's not confirmed, but the house belongs to Mona Morrison." He watched Sam expectantly.

"Mona Morrison?" Sam lifted a brow.

"You know, Judge Mona."

She'd heard of Judge Mona, although she'd never watched her program. Judge Mona was a television judge who tried 'real' cases in front of millions of people.

*Great.* If the dead woman turned out to be Judge Mona Morrison, this was going to be one of those high profile cases with the captain demanding it be solved yesterday.

Sam's partner, Frank Torino, peered over her shoulder at the victim. Frank was a stout man with dark, wavy hair and a booming voice he couldn't bring down to a respectable level, even at a death scene. He wore a fishing hat and a Hawaiian print shirt with a design almost as loud as his voice.

Frank removed the ever-present drinking straw from his mouth and squinted at Sam. "Shit, Spike. We'll have our hands full with this one. You ever watch her show?"

Frank had a nickname for everyone. Sam's was Spike because he said she was like a bulldog. When she got something in her teeth, she wouldn't let go.

She shook her head. "Don't watch much television."

"She's a tough broad. Real man-eater. I'd bet my right nut the doer is male."

"Wouldn't advise it," Sam said dryly. "You lost your left nut in our last bet. Don't want to be completely nutless."

"Smartass," he mumbled, only his mumble was more like a roar. He shook his head and grinned, chucking Walburn on the shoulder. "See, she's got a sharp tongue. That's why she can't keep a man."

Sam's face heated and a quick band of hurt squeezed her heart. She forced a chuckle, but it sounded hollow and phony.

It wasn't that she couldn't *keep* a man, it was just that she had extremely poor judgment in choosing them. So, she'd stopped trying and began concentrating on her job.

Frank met her eyes and the smile slipped from his face. "Ah, geez, Spike. I'm sorry. I didn't mean anything by it."

"It's okay, Frank."

She looked back at the corpse and felt guilty for her childish hurt feelings. This woman's life had come to a frightful, brutal end. A slap to the ego was insignificant compared to that.

"Is the ME here yet?" Sam asked Walburn.

“He’s on his way.”

As if on cue, the low din of a motorcycle sounded, growing louder until it drowned out the buzz of the blow flies and the clicking and chatter of the CSI techs and detectives.

Surely, he hadn’t... Sam clenched her jaw in irritation.

She stalked to the front door and stepped outside, ostensibly to greet the pathologist, but in truth, she was anxious to breathe a few precious molecules of air that was only slightly tainted with the stench of death.

Sam walked to the bottom of the steps and crossed her arms over her chest as she watched the ME, Doctor Dexter Hawkins, dismount from his motorcycle.

Dexter Hawkins had been the county’s Medical Examiner for two weeks. He’d transferred to Cincinnati from Boston, and Sam had only met him once. Something about him had irritated her then, but that couldn’t compare to the agitation she felt now. Even his good looks and charm grated on her. His tall frame moved with an easy grace, sort of a swagger/stalking motion, like that of a jungle cat. Green-blue eyes crinkled at the corners and the dark stubble covering his jaw wasn’t quite thick enough to conceal the dimples slashed in each cheekbone. He was the kind of good-looking that was just too obvious, the kind that made you know to stay away, as if a big red stop sign were embedded in his skull.

He slid his helmet off and walked toward Sam. He wore a black, button-up shirt tucked into well-worn Levis and his longish, dark blonde hair was tousled from the ride.

“Hey, Detective,” he said, giving a flash of white teeth as he stopped at the bottom of the steps.

Sam’s lips tightened. For God’s sake, the least he could have done was shave. “Doctor,” she returned primly.

“You look kinda pale. If I didn’t know better, I’d swear *your* body was the one I was here to examine.”

Although his eyes never left her face, it felt as though they raked her from head to toe. If they had, she was sure he’d have found her lacking in comparison to the

voluptuous, empty-headed types he no doubt dated. Sam wasn't sure why she was stereotyping him like that, but it made her feel marginally better to do so.

Ignoring his comment, Sam said, "Do you really think a motorcycle is appropriate transportation to a death scene, Dr. Hawkins?"

He turned and glanced at the bike, his arm making a sweeping gesture toward it. When he looked at her again, his eyebrows were raised, his expression that of someone who'd just heard a joke, or was speaking to a dim-witted child. "That's a Harley."

Sam let her lips curl into a contemptuous smile. "Sorry. I'd forgotten how sensitive boys can be about their toys. Do you think a *Harley* is appropriate transportation to a death scene?"

He stepped closer, until they were almost nose to nose, even though Sam stood three steps above him. She was fairly tall for a woman, just over 5'7, but Dexter Hawkins towered over her, his broad shoulders making his 6'4 height even more intimidating.

Sam flinched, and then went still, as if that would keep him from noticing she smelled like sweat and death. It didn't keep her from noticing he smelled of fresh air, some manly, musky soap, and mint.

"The only women I strive to please," he said softly, "are my mother and my sexual partners. So far, you're neither."

She flushed and took a step back, telling herself it was less a sign of retreat as an aversion to having her space invaded. The movement made her a few inches taller than him since it brought her to a higher step. It helped to restore a modicum of control of the situation.

Lifting her chin, she stared down her nose at him, aware of news crews and onlookers watching the exchange. There were several things she wanted to say, but discretion ruled, so she turned her back on him and headed up the steps.

She heard him chuckle softly behind her. "You know, you might be a little more comfortable if you took off that jacket and unclenched your butt cheeks."

Sam stopped and whirled, almost bumping into him. Fury oozed forth like the sweat that leaked from her pores. His expression was one of challenge and

amusement. At that moment, even though she barely knew him, she hated him. She choked back her response, refusing to let him bait her in front of half the city.

He peered up at her and she was acutely aware of the fact that her makeup had probably melted and her dark hair must be plastered to her head with sweat.

Great, just how she wanted to appear for the cameras...not to mention Hawkins' eagle-eyed attention.

“You know,” he said thoughtfully, “when we first met, I thought your eyes were brown. But out here in the sunlight, they're more of a mahogany with a hint of black cherry. I also didn't notice the freckles sprinkled across your nose.” He smiled. “Cute.”

If her face could warm any further, it did at that moment. She wasn't sure of his intentions, but it seemed like he was making fun of her. Clenching her teeth, she snapped, “Let's not forget that my nose is slightly crooked and my chin is too pointed and my eyes are too far apart.”

He shook his head. “Flaws are what make a person unique, make their features more interesting. You're a very attractive woman.”

Momentarily disconcerted, she met his eyes, losing her breath for a split second.

*He's testing you, playing you...ignore him.*

Releasing an agitated sigh, she said, “This isn't exactly the time or place for flattery, Doctor Hawkins. Please follow me.”

She turned and he followed her inside without further comment. She led him to the body and he pulled on latex gloves, squatting next to the corpse.

After a few moments, he rolled the victim over and gave a low whistle. “Wow, Judge Mona.”

“You recognize her?”

“Yeah, I've seen her show.”

That was pretty much an I.D. Yep. *Definitely* a high profile case.

“We knew this was her home, but we weren’t positive she was the vic since she’s lying face down.”

“No doubt about it.” He continued the exam. “Rigor mortis has begun to set in. Hard to pinpoint the time of death, but I’d say it was sometime before midnight last night.”

Sam was reluctantly impressed with the air of professionalism he now displayed. “Can you be a little more specific?”

He shook his head. “Not right now. Once I do the autopsy, I can narrow it down some, but probably can’t get exact. Maybe within a few hours. I’ll check stomach contents, body temp, things like that. Then, with the data your people gather about how she spent her last hours, we can come up with a fairly close time of death.”

“We’re talking to neighbors now, then we’ll branch out to friends and family. I’d like to attend the autopsy, by the way.”

He straightened and slipped off the gloves. “Okay. I’ll probably do the autopsy in the next two or three days. I have a few ahead of this one.”

Playing the captain’s tirade in her mind, Sam said, “Can you move it up? This will be a priority, considering she’s a celebrity.”

“I understand, but the other cases I have are just as important to me.”

His sensitivity conversely annoyed her, even more than his nonchalance had. “I agree, Doctor, but the chief and the mayor—”

“Can wait,” he interrupted. “I’ll call you when the autopsy’s scheduled.”

She didn’t respond, although there were several responses clamoring for release. Yes, most definitely, she did *not* like this man one bit.