

Prologue

Allison tried to shake off the fog that muffled her mind. Shaking her head was a mistake. Her skull pounded with a throbbing pain. She squeezed her eyes shut and waited for the pain to subside. That's when the musty smell of old floorboards invaded her nose and seemed to reach deep into her stomach.

Ian grabbed her shoulder. "Oh, no. You're not passing out on me." He pulled her to her feet, holding her at arm's length.

The feel of his hands cupping her elbows was enough to lift the fog, as tears of humiliation and grief stung her eyes. All she wanted was to get out of the house, away from herself, and the terrible ache tearing her up inside.

Ian's hand tightened on her wrist. He moved towards the den, dragging her with him.

"I don't know why you pretended to . . . to love me. But it's all been a big mistake. All we can do now is forget about it all and go our separate ways." Her voice trailed off to a sob.

He didn't say anything, just kept pulling her along. She didn't want to go into the den—not ever again. Allison dug in her heels, throwing her weight back to stop him. "Why are you doing this? Ian, let go."

"Just a big mistake, huh?" He glared at her, his face tight with anger. "We should just forget about it, right?"

Allison stumbled over an end table and crashed into the wall. The tears she'd been holding back blurred her vision. She was cold to the marrow, her head hurt and her whole body felt sore, as if her heartache was a physical pain. Ian's face swam in and out of focus as she blinked back her tears. "What do you want from me, Ian? Why won't you let me go?"

He made no reply. Instead, he grabbed a fistful of her nightgown and steered her towards the fireplace. "There's your mistake," he said. "Now tell me you can walk away from it."

A young man lay sprawled on the rug, one arm thrown up as if to protect himself. His face was dappled with blood, part of his skull was crushed. Bits of scalp clung to the cast-iron poker next to his head.

"You were drunk," Ian said.

Allison shook her head, numb with shock. Her eyes were glued to the poker. She'd bought it at an antique shop a couple of

days after the wedding, only to find out that the fireplace wasn't working.

“Drunk, and choked with rage.”

“No.” Allison staggered back, shaking her head. “No! ”

“Yes. You killed him, Allison.”