# JEN J. DANNA WITH ANN VANDERLAAN

ABBOTT AND LOWELL FORENSIC MYSTERIES

# TWO PARTS BLOODY MURDER

"A tricky mystery rich in intriguing suspects and forensic detail."

-Kirkus Reviews on A Flame in the Wind of Death

### ABBOTT AND LOWELL FORENSIC MYSTERIES

# Two Parts Bloody Murder

#### Jen J. Danna with Ann Vanderlaan

**FIVE STAR** 

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#### **AUTHOR'S NOTE**

The title of this novel comes from *The Devil's Dictionary*, a series of satirical newspaper columns published by Ambrose Bierce (1842–1914) beginning in 1881. Originally collected and published in 1906 as *The Cynic's Word Book*, it was retitled as *The Devil's Dictionary* in 1911.

BRANDY, n. A cordial composed of one part thunder-and-lightning, one part remorse, two parts bloody murder, one part death-hell-and-the-grave, and four parts clarified Satan. Dose, a headful all the time. Brandy is said by Dr. Johnson to be the drink of heroes. Only a hero will venture to drink it.

# Prologue: Bottling

*Bottling:* the process by which a bottle is filled with wine or beer, and then corked, plugged, or capped.

Sunday, 3:10 a.m.

Many years ago

Lynn, Massachusetts

He stepped back from his handiwork, the wooden handle slipping from his damp fingers as the tool fell with a clatter to the scarred wood floor. After wiping his gritty hands on his coarse wool trousers, he reached into the breast pocket of his threadbare shirt and retrieved a small leather pouch. He pulled out a cigarette paper, sparsely sprinkled on a ration of tobacco, and then rolled it.

It took three matches before he could still his shaking hands enough to light the end.

He pulled a deep draft into his lungs, feeling the smoke almost instantly calm his nerves.

It had to be done. It was only right.

He closed his eyes, still hearing the voice in his head—the curses, threats, and bribes that eventually changed to shrieks of terror. Until even those were finally muffled.

Not so brave now, are you? Take away your power and you're no better than the rest of us.

Standing before the wall, he calmly smoked the last of his cigarette. Then he dropped the butt to the ground, grinding it

#### Jen J. Danna

under the heel of his heavy boot. There was still work to do.

When he was finished, he stopped at the bar, eyeing the array of bottles. He contemplated for a moment, and then poured himself a large tumbler of pale, aged brandy. Turning back toward the tomb, he raised his glass in a final toast.

And drank deeply.

#### CHAPTER ONE: EIGHTEENTH AMENDMENT

Eighteenth Amendment: a constitutional amendment banning the manufacture, sale, import, export, and transportation of alcoholic beverages in the United States and its possessions beginning in January of 1920. Contrary to common belief, it did not prohibit the purchase, in-home preparation, or the consumption of alcohol. It is the only amendment to have ever been repealed.

Friday, 12:24 p.m. The Adytum Building Lynn, Massachusetts

The wind caught the door as it opened, sending it crashing into the antique brick wall hard enough to rattle windowpanes several feet away. Startled, Massachusetts State Police Trooper First Class Leigh Abbott braced a hand on filthy wood and glanced up from where she crouched on the floor. Raising her free hand to her forehead to block the glare from the tripod lights, she focused on the tall, burly man coming through the door. Then she pushed to her feet and stepped back from death.

"When I called the ME's office for a pickup, I wasn't expecting them to send you." Meeting him halfway, Leigh lifted one of the bags from his arms.

Dr. Edward Rowe cocked a single bushy, white eyebrow at her. "No one *sends* the medical examiner for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Abbott." His gaze shifted to the victim across

the room. "But the call came through, and when I heard it was your case, I decided to follow up. It's been a few weeks since I attended to a case myself."

Leigh was well aware that standard protocol in Massachusetts was to send techs out to death scenes and for bodies to be transported without on-scene processing. Rowe was running a few cases on his own to prove to the funding Powers That Be that murder conviction rates improved with timely and thorough victim processing. But this was the first indication her victims were receiving special attention. Warmth at the implied compliment rushed through her. "Thanks. You know I'd always rather have you on-site than one of your techs."

"Don't say that too loudly. The tech will be in right behind me after he's parked the van." Rowe set another bag down on the dusty, debris-littered floor, fifteen feet away from the body. He opened the bag and pulled out a disposable Tyvek suit, shaking it out with a practiced *snap*. "But when it comes to working with cops, you and I always do well together. Better than most, in fact." His gaze quickly scanned the empty room as he tugged on the suit. "Although, I'm not used to you being on your own. After the cases you've run lately with Lowell and his team, it must feel odd working solo again."

Leigh gave him a crooked smile. She'd never admit it, but she was feeling the isolation of being without the team more strongly than she ever would have suspected. What started off as an unwilling alliance between herself and forensic anthropologist Dr. Matt Lowell had developed into a cohesive partnership. Add in Matt's three graduate students, and the team was complete. Compared to the mostly frosty relationships she had as the only woman in the Essex Detective Unit, working with her team felt like a homecoming. On a case like this, investigating solo, she missed not only the brainstorming and the way they played off each other to build the case, but also the

camaraderie and the drive of a shared goal. "Only specific victims require the forensic anthropology team. Luckily this one doesn't, because Matt's out of town at a symposium, and won't be back for three days. Besides, he wouldn't know what to do with this victim. Too much flesh."

Rowe gave a short bark of a laugh. "Don't know if I'd agree with that. As an ex-Marine medic, Lowell knows his way around a body."

Leigh dropped her head to hide the warmth brightening her cheeks. *He certainly knew his way around hers*.

Rowe's voice interrupted thoughts not suited to a crime scene, jerking her back to the here and now. "What do we have here?"

"Something I wasn't expecting to find, that's for sure."

Rowe flicked a quizzical glance in her direction as he started to pull out gloves and his instruments. "You're a murder cop. What were you expecting if not a body?"

"I was expecting a body, just not one this fresh." Before he could ask, she raised a hand. "Let me back up. At the unit, if we have time on our hands, we work open reports and cold case files. I had a report of some old guy in a nursing home who repeatedly told a story about a body hidden in this building. The family didn't pay much attention—apparently he's ninety-six and tends to tell some pretty tall tales on a regular basis—except he kept retelling this particular tale. So they reported it to the local police, who turned it over to us since it described a murder. I had some time on my hands today during shift, so I came out to look the place over."

Daylight flared briefly into the room as the missing tech banged through the door, bags piled on his shoulders like a pack mule.

Rowe waved him in before turning back to Leigh. "Can we go ahead and do photos? I saw the crime scene boys in their van outside."

"Yes. They've done their initial work, even did a fancy 3D laser mapping of the room. They did body shots, but I know you like to do your own in case anything changes between the scene and the morgue. They cleared out until after you're done to preserve the integrity of the scene. I stayed to maintain it."

Rowe motioned the tech to get started. The tech put down his bags, pulled out a camera, and immediately started photographing the body *in situ*.

Rowe stepped back to stay out of his way. Hands on his hips, he tipped his head back to consider the high ceiling above them. Plaster crumbled in chunks from overhead, but the remains of intricate crown molding still circled the top of the walls. "This is a great old building. Must be a hundred years old."

"More than that actually. I took the time to look up the building's history because I was trying to get a feel for exactly how long the supposed victim could have been here. It was built in eighteen-ninety." She scanned the interior of the room again, taking in the worn wood floor, aged walls, peeling paint, and the water stain running nearly floor-to-ceiling beside a single window so grimy that only watery light filtered through. "It's been at least a decade since this part of the building was occupied. I talked to the owner, who was extremely skeptical at the suggestion of a body. The upper three floors of the building are now low-income senior housing. He said that those floors were totally gutted and refurbished about twenty-five years ago and they certainly hadn't found a body then. A few storefronts are still occupied but several are empty just like this space."

"If they only renovated the upper three floors, that still gave you some leeway for a search," Rowe reasoned. "Especially if the upper floors were always residential. It's doubtful they'd be able to hide a body up there with no one noticing."

"That's exactly what I thought. The owner wasn't willing to

waste his time coming down here on a 'wild goose chase'—his words, not mine—but he gave me full consent and these"—keys jingled merrily where they hung suspended between her index finger and thumb—"and told me to help myself. I checked out the empty stores in front before coming back here. As soon as I got to the bottom of the stairs in the brick archway, I could see the door standing open. I called out my designation, but no one responded. I came in cautiously because I was expecting a homeless person squatting out of the cold nights. But instead I found him."

They both turned to look at the victim sprawled on the floor: male, probably in his mid to late forties. His clothes spoke of a lifetime of luxury and money—custom-made leather shoes, classic gold watch, and a perfectly tailored suit. He might have been asleep, if not for the dark blossom of blood over his heart and the waxy pallor of his skin.

Rowe stepped forward and leaned over for a better view. "That's no homeless person. He's wearing a Breitling watch that's worth more than many people in Essex County make in a year."

"I noticed that when the crime scene techs got the extra lighting set up." She looked up at the single light socket that hung from a cord in the ceiling, the base of a shattered light-bulb still embedded in the fixture. "I'm thinking the owner's estimate of this place being empty for a decade was conservative."

Rowe circled the body, surveying it critically. "Gunshot wound is the only obvious cause of death at first glance." After staring at the floor for a moment, he grasped one of the tripod lights and swiveled it around to shine into the dark corners of the musty, dank room. His gaze skimmed over the illuminated walls and floor. "Hmmm . . ."

"I know," Leigh said. "There's no obvious spatter or any

other sign that he was killed here."

Rowe got the go-ahead from his tech and stepped up to the body. He crouched down and touched his fingers to the man's neck. "The body is well-cooled." He grasped one wrist and tried to lift it off the ground. The arm shifted by only millimeters. "Rigor is well-established. This man has been dead for hours."

"Was he killed here, or was he moved to this location?"

"I'll be able to give you my thoughts on that soon." He indicated the arms sprawled out to the side of the torso, the bent knee, and awkwardly twisted ankle. "If he was moved, it was before rigor set in. Let's get started. Ambient temp is 11.7°C." He pushed back the edge of the suit jacket and pulled the man's shirt from his waistband on the right side, raising it a few inches while being careful not to disturb the blood-soaked material. Leigh winced as he made a small, bloodless incision with a scalpel just below the bottom of the ribs before inserting the long metal probe of a digital thermometer deep into the body. "Liver temp at the start of the exam is 26.6°C." He pushed back his cuff to reveal a large luminous wristwatch. "Time-stamp it twelve-thirty-one." He glanced up at Leigh. "I'll do a second measurement before we pack him up to nail down the rate of cooling in this specific environment, but as a rough guess, considering the temp in the room, I'd say your vic has been dead for about twelve hours. Which is consistent with rigor."

Leigh pulled her notebook and pen out of her jacket pocket and jotted down the information.

"Wallet in the back pocket," Rowe commented. He deftly slid it out without rolling the body and flipped it open. "Driver's license lists him as Peter Holt, age forty-four." He rattled off a Boston address and then held the license photo next to the dead man's face. "That's definitely him. I'll get dentals to

confirm, but I think you have your victim, Abbott. The question is—if he wasn't killed here, where was he killed and why was he moved?"

"Both good questions. I want to check out this room a little more closely and make sure we didn't miss anything. I'd like to be able to corroborate your opinion of whether the body has been moved. Are you okay here if I grab one of the lights?"

"Just leave me that one"—Rowe pointed to a tripod—"and that. Those will be enough for me to do the exam, then we'll start processing for trace evidence before preparing the body for transport."

"I'll leave you to it. I'm going to finish checking this room out, then I need to see if there's anything to the old guy's story."

"You know where to find me." Rowe turned back to his victim, and he and the tech got to work.

Leigh stepped out of the circle of light. Giving her eyes a moment to adjust to the shadows, she studied the room. She considered the shape of the building—a shorter, squatter version of New York's Flatiron Building. Built on the sliver of land between Union Street and the MBTA railroad tracks, the back of the building faced the old Central Square train station. Red brick and Italianate in style, it was only four stories tall. Facing Union Street, the ground floor hosted a few thriving shops and a café, but hard times had left several other businesses locked and permanently shuttered.

Since the elderly man's story implied the death had occurred decades before, possibly more than fifty years ago, it seemed unlikely that recently closed businesses or occupied living spaces could hide a body all that time. The chance of there actually being a body was close to zero.

Frowning, she turned back to where Rowe and his tech bent over her newest case. Well, maybe not exactly zero.

If you were going to hide a body, and have it remain

undiscovered for decades, you'd have to put it somewhere so secret it wouldn't be found unless you knew exactly where to look. Leigh just wasn't seeing anything that set off warning bells.

She dragged the third tripod several feet away from the victim, turning it to direct the light beam at the back wall. Inching along the baseboard, she examined it closely, looking for any sign of blood spatter or bullet defect. The wall was discolored, making it hard to discern small spots, and several times Leigh leaned in with her forehead nearly scraping the plaster. Wrinkling her nose at the stale odor of neglect and hoping she wasn't inhaling some kind of toxic killer mold, she studied a splotch on the wall for a moment before deciding the dark stain wasn't something cast off by her victim.

She started to pull away when something further down the wall caught her eye. Stepping toward the center of the room made it disappear, so she leaned back in, staring along the length of the wall. The surface curved gently, but a small section bowed out from its surroundings a few feet away.

Going back to the tripod, she aimed the light more squarely at that area. Then she saw it: two barely discernible parallel lines, about three feet apart, running down the wall.

Heart thumping faster with each step, Leigh crossed to the wall and ran her hand along one of the lines. It definitely jutted out from the plane of the wall. Bending, she set her fingertips on the crack and ran them upward from the floor. At about seven feet, the outcrop disappeared from beneath her touch. Her breath caught as excitement surged in her. She couldn't see it but she started to search for any kind of defect to the right of where she lost touch with the crack in the wall. Stretching up on tiptoe, she ran her fingers along the wall, peeling paint disintegrating under her touch.

Come on, I know you're here. Then her fingertips slid into the

subtle groove. *Got you!* She ran her fingers slowly along the crack until it veered downward. Dropping down to flat feet, she followed it down before stepping back.

It was a door, so perfectly inset into the wall and hidden by filth and peeling paint that you had to be nearly on top of it to see it. There were no hinges visible, so the door had to swing inward.

Bracing both hands just to the right of the offset crack, she gave it a hard push. The door shifted slightly. *Hinges on the right, door opens on the left.* 

Pulling back a few feet, Leigh threw her body against the door, hitting the wall right where her hands had been and taking the brunt of the blow with her shoulder. She gave a small groan at the impact, but elation filled her as the door shifted further. She fervently wished Matt was here—his bigger body and rower's physique would make short work of the closed door. She stepped back to take another run at it.

"Abbott, what are you doing?" It was Rowe's voice behind her.

She turned around, surprised to see Rowe standing just feet away. In her excitement at finding the door, she'd totally forgotten the investigation going on behind her. "There's a door hidden in the wall. See it?"

Rowe nodded and then quickly pulled off his gloves and jammed them into a pocket of his suit. He pushed her gently to the side. "I have about seventy-five pounds on you. Let me try."

Leigh tapped the wall. "Aim here. That seems to be the sweet spot."

Rowe stepped back, eyeing his target. He turned sideways, grasped his right forearm with his left hand to hold it steady, and took a run at the door. With a squeal of wood on wood, it moved inward by a full inch. "Almost."

One more hard push had the door swinging open with an

ominous creak to reveal a small landing with dust and debris lining the corners. A narrow wooden staircase to their left led down into the darkness below. The air was thick and stale after decades undisturbed.

Leigh reached into her pocket for the small flashlight she'd tucked there before entering the building. Flipping it on, she leaned into the gap, shining the light down the stairs. Rowe leaned in behind her.

Cobwebs filled every corner and at least one of the steps looked dangerously rotten. The walls were painted a dark red, faded now, but with a hint of their former flair. The beam of light fell on a wooden barrel in the corner at the bottom of the stairs. The wood was aged to a dull gray and the metal bands encircling it were rusted, iron oxides leaching onto the wooden staves like a bloody smear. Just barely discernible, in black print between the rusted hoops, was the brand "Bushmills Irish Whiskey."

Leigh nearly dropped the flashlight as her hand went clammy, and she had to clench the cylinder tighter before it slipped from her grasp and tumbled down the steps. She steadied the light and blinked a few times to make sure she wasn't imagining the scene.

It was still there.

She turned to gape at Rowe, who wore the same slack-jawed, wide-eyed expression she imagined was on her own face.

They'd just discovered an old speakeasy, lost to time since the days of Prohibition.

# CHAPTER Two: BLIND PIG

Blind Pig: an alternate name for a speakeasy. Possibly called a blind pig because the establishment turned a "blind eye" to Prohibition, or because consuming the often-contaminated illegal alcoholic beverages sold there sometimes caused blindness.

Friday, 12:46 p.m. The Adytum Building Lynn, Massachusetts

"Abbott, do you realize what this is?" Rowe's awed words echoed strangely down the empty staircase.

"I think so." Leigh stepped back into the main room. "And I think I can confirm it before even setting foot on that staircase."

She hurried across the room, automatically circling the sprawled body on the ground and the tech kneeling beside it without really seeing either. Grasping the outer door, Leigh pushed it fully open against the wall.

She'd seen the small inset door at eye level on her way in. Seen it, but not truly registered it. And certainly hadn't appreciated its meaning.

She swung the door partially closed so she could look behind it. A small hinged cutout of the same wood was flush mounted into the door. Both the tiny hinges and the small metal bar affixed beside the cutout to lock it in place were rusted solid.

She knew about the speakeasies of Chicago, Detroit, and

New York during the Prohibition years of the twenties and thirties. She knew local history and that Boston was a hotspot for rum-running during those years because of its ports and natural harbors. Her own great-grandfather had served the Boston Police Department as part of the elite Boston Liquor Squad, so she'd heard family stories about raids throughout Boston.

But she hadn't realized Lynn was a part of that history. Granted, given its proximity to Boston and the fact it was an oceanside town, it wasn't much of a stretch.

She tugged at the rusted knob on the metal bar. At first it didn't move, so she grasped it more tightly and pulled harder. There was an ear-piercing screech and then the bar slid back. Leigh pulled the cutout free of where it nested in the door, and looked out through the grille at blue sky and sunlit railway tracks beyond. She had a flash of a foggy night, a man with slicked-back hair wearing a dark suit standing on the doorstep, a stylish girl with bobbed locks and a fringed dress on his arm. A whispered password and the night was theirs.

She turned back to Rowe, who still stood at the passageway. "It's a speakeasy, all right. This room must have been their cover. If the cops ever barged through this door, they were safe as long as they could get the hidden door closed. I bet they even kept boxes or some other camouflage nearby to push in front of it in case of emergency."

"You think your body is down there?"

"Ten minutes ago I was thinking I should put money down on there being no hidden body here. Now I think I might have lost spectacularly." She crossed the room and pulled out her flashlight again. "I'm going down."

"Shouldn't you call someone first? This is an amazing historical find."

"First and foremost, it's my crime scene. There's no way I'm having a bunch of academic geeks stomping through my crime

scene." At Rowe's raised eyebrow, she clarified. "Unless they're my academic geeks, who I've already trained in crime scene protocol. Damn, I wish Matt was here. He'd love this."

"Find him eighty-year-old skeletal remains and he'll be here to love it, let me assure you. You're sure you want to do this?"

Leigh flicked on the flashlight. "Positive."

"Then you're not going down on your own." Rowe moved to one of the bags, pawing through it quickly until he pulled out another flashlight. "Ted, keep pulling any trace you can find and then hold the body. We won't be long." He nodded at Leigh. "Let's go, I'm right behind you. And be careful on those stairs. Some of the steps look pretty iffy."

Leigh stepped onto the landing. She slipped behind the door and then peered around the front of it. "As I thought. The door is wood, but they plastered over the front and then painted it to look just like the walls of the room. Sneaky."

"Back then, not getting caught was a big deal. Jail sentence aside, getting caught meant a huge loss of revenue for the owners. And for the Mob."

Leigh touched a toe to the first tread, a deep-set, narrow board of aged wood. "Maybe it wasn't a Mob joint." She leaned a small amount of weight on the step, and then still more. The wood groaned in protest, but held. Grasping the thick banister mounted to the wall, she stepped off the landing onto the step, pausing until she was sure it would support her weight.

"Back then, they were all Mob jobs. 'Mad Johnny' Orestes ran the city. He had his finger in every pie and was most likely providing the booze for this establishment too."

Leigh froze with her foot an inch over the second step and turned to peer up at him. "You sound like you know a little bit about this."

"Are you kidding? I love local history. It's kind of a hobby. And in Boston and the surrounding area, local history goes a long way back. But the Prohibition years were particularly colorful."

Leigh chuckled and continued onto the next step. "Good to know we have a resident expert on the team. It might come in handy."

"Why do you think I'm here with you instead of bent over that body upstairs? This is a once in a lifetime opportunity. And Ted has everything well in hand; I've already done the tricky stuff."

They crept down the stairs carefully, skipping some steps completely, with Leigh testing the others individually before Rowe would trust his greater weight on them. As they descended, the air became cooler and staler. "I wonder if this place was ever raided," Leigh said.

"If it were, I might be able to track it down. But you should ask Lowell about some local historians at B.U. too."

"That's a good point. He might know—" The step suddenly gave way under her weight. With a small cry Leigh started to pitch forward. Only her tight hold on the banister and Rowe's quick hand grabbing her jacket kept her from pitching headfirst down the stairs. With a ragged breath, she settled on the next step, glaring at the broken tread behind her. "That was close. Thanks."

"You're welcome. Just one of the reasons I didn't want you coming down here on your own."

Rowe eased himself over the broken step, stretching out his long legs to the next tread down before proceeding. They continued to the bottom of the staircase without further incident. At the bottom, they paused to examine the barrel.

Rowe grabbed the lip and rocked it back and forth several times. "Empty."

"You didn't think it would be full, did you?"

"Not really. But do you know what a cask of eighty-year-old

Irish whiskey would be worth?" He grinned conspiratorially. "We could all comfortably retire."

"Tempting thought, some days."

"Amen to that . . . but not today." He stepped through the door at the bottom of the stairs, Leigh right behind him, both of them shining their flashlights into the open space.

Leigh gasped as Rowe went motionless beside her.

It was like stepping back in time.

Their lights slowly panned over the room, twin beams sliding over wood and glass.

Rowe whistled softly. "What are the chances there are working lights down here?"

"It's possible. The building is powered and the place must have had electricity. Unless mice have eaten through the wires, we might get lucky."

They turned their search toward finding a light switch. Leigh found several on the wall by the door—vintage paired buttons, inlaid with mother-of-pearl. She slowly depressed them one at a time. Two large ceiling-mounted lights with large round bulbs flickered on, tentatively at first, then stronger. One bulb in the fixture over the bar gave a sharp pop and winked out, but the one over the remains of the once polished dance floor stayed on. The next button push lit the scrolling Art Deco wall sconces mounted high on columns throughout the room.

Stepping away from the wall, Leigh turned off her flashlight and slid it into her pocket as she simply tried to take it all in.

A dark wood bar stood at one end of the room, its long smooth surface dulled by dust and grime. A tall square bottle with a yellowed label lay on its side, cork removed and precious contents long since spilled. At the far end of the bar, a sepia poster reading "Alfred E. Smith for President—Honest. Able. Fearless" hung over an open brass case with several disintegrating cigarettes still tucked inside.

Plaster columns topped by decorative capitals studded the outer walls. Tables were tucked between the columns, and the chairs around them—some tipped over, several broken—told a tale of rough handling and a rapid exit. A lone shoe—black leather with what must have been a scandalously high heel for the time—lay under one of the chairs shoved against the wall.

A blackjack table stood against another wall, scattered playing cards spread over the crumbling green felt surface, and a stack of chips still in the slots. Behind the table, a mural depicting Roman ruins splashed across the wall: crumbling archways, weathered statuary, and toppled Tuscan columns, all painted in cascading shades of blue.

A single forlorn music stand stood on a small raised dais in the back corner, as if waiting for the band to return.

Leigh circled behind the bar. Underneath, dusty shot glasses were stacked in rows, and two beer kegs were tucked under the long stretch of the bar, brass taps tarnished with age. Leigh grasped one of the smooth wood handles and pulled, but not even a single drop leaked out. Large glass jugs littered the floor behind the bar, some tipped over carelessly on their sides. Several wooden crates labeled by out-of-state wineries were stacked haphazardly in the far corner.

Seeing a slip of paper under one of the kegs, she tried to catch it with her fingertips. It took several tries before she drew out a two-dollar bill. Pulling out her flashlight, Leigh aimed it at the bill to study the details. "Get a load of this."

She passed Rowe the bill over the bar. He aimed his own flashlight at it, examining it carefully. "Two-dollar bill, series nineteen-twenty-nine." He looked up at Leigh. "That was the first year those bills were printed at their current size. Before that, they were quite a bit bigger." He flipped the bill over. "Look at that. Monticello on the back, not the Declaration of Independence. Probably not worth much on the open market,

but worth an awful lot to a collector."

"Finders keepers as far as I'm concerned," she said, and then purposely turned her back on Rowe to examine a poster from the Salt Lake Brewing Company, extolling its Old German lager as "The American Beauty Beer" and promising a restful night's sleep, a stimulated appetite, and a "nourishing and strengthening tonic for mother and baby." That last left Leigh staring open-mouthed long enough that when she turned around, Rowe was standing alongside the blackjack table and the two-dollar bill was nowhere in sight.

Coming out from behind the bar, Leigh stood in the middle of the room. As she turned in a slow circle, she felt thrown back in time, a black and white movie playing in her mind as she scanned the room. A tall, broad man in a dark shirt with a white towel thrown over his shoulder stood behind the bar, backlit by rows of gleaming bottles of golden whiskey and ruby wine. Men in London drape suits holding lowball glasses sat at tables across from sparkling women sipping goblets of wine while brandishing long, slender cigarette holders. In the corner a four-piece brass band was blasting out the latest jazz tune. Women with short hair and shorter skirts crowded the dance floor, doing the Charleston and the Black Bottom. The smoky air was full of laughter and song.

"Abbott, I think you should see this."

Leigh shook her head and the music died away to a mere echo from the past. Her eyes focused once again on the dim, abandoned room. But there was no sign of Rowe and his voice was muffled, although she wasn't sure if it was from the music in her head or from his location. "Where are you?"

Rowe poked his head out from a swinging door behind the bar. "Over here. There's a storage room in the back."

She followed him into a flurry of tipped boxes and spilled bottles. She stopped in the doorway. "Wow. If we had questions before about whether this place was raided . . ."

"It was raided all right, no question. But I wanted to show you this." He pointed at the wall at the far end of the room.

Leigh picked her way through the crates to stand as close as possible. "What about it?"

"Did you notice that while the walls out there are plaster, the walls in here are just plain brick?"

"Sure. Why gussy up the storeroom when just plain brick will do?"

"Fair enough. But why is this wall different?"

Leigh stood back to look more closely at the room as a whole. The front and side walls of the room were composed of rough bricks in varying shades. But the back wall was uniform in color and texture, and the mortar was shades lighter in tone. "Good question." She ran her fingers over the bricks on a side wall and then over the back wall. "These bricks feel different. Smoother."

"I want to try something." Rowe slipped out of the room, returning moments later with a wooden baseball bat.

Leigh stared at him, dumbstruck. "Where on earth did that come from?"

"Behind the bar. I bet the barkeep kept it around just in case things got out of hand. In the rush to leave, it got left behind."

"Or after everyone was taken out," Leigh said. "What exactly did you have in mind?"

"I want to test that wall." Rowe put the bat down, tip to the floor, and casually leaned on the flat end of the grip. "Why would that wall be different?"

"It wouldn't be if it went up at the same time."

"Exactly my point." He picked up the bat, cradling it in both hands and frowned. "An antique Louisville Slugger. Now this is a crying shame." He tossed the bat in the air, deftly catching it in both hands, choked up, and swung it at the side wall. The bat hit with a loud *clunk* and a few flakes of brick fell from the

surface to tumble out of sight behind a crate.

He moved to the back wall, tightened his grip, and swung again. The bat connected with the brick with a decidedly higher pitch. Rowe's raised eyebrows gave Leigh an *I told you so* look and moved on to the third wall, then the fourth.

They had their answer.

"Only the back wall sounds different," Leigh said. "Do you think it's because of the type of brick?"

"Possibly, but my money is on there being a space behind that wall. You want to find your hidden body? Try behind there."

"Your mind works in interesting ways, Rowe. Do you always see death everywhere you look?"

"Death is my thing. It's hard *not* to see it everywhere I go. But you came searching for it specifically this time, so I was watching for it. The difference in the bricks is pretty minor but nothing else seems out of place in here. Keep in mind I might be wrong and you might be trying to bring down a wall for nothing, in which case you'll piss off the historians in a big way. But can you afford to take that chance after coming this far?"

"You know I can't." Leigh pulled her cell phone from her pocket. "No signal down here. I'm going to head up. If Riley's at the unit, I'm going to have him pick up some tools and bring them here."

"Meanwhile I'll finish off with the body. Enough time has now passed to get my second liver temp. Then we'll package him up and send him on his way to the morgue."

Leigh led the way through the speakeasy and back toward the stairs. "Are you going to stay or are you heading back with the body?"

"I'm not missing this for the world. Ted can make the transfer and put the body in the fridge. You're stuck with me."

#### Jen J. Danna

"Happily." She took a cautious step back onto the stairs. "Let's do this."

Friday, 2:20 p.m.

The Adytum Building

Lynn, Massachusetts

"Whoa!" Brad Riley's eyes nearly bugged out of his head as he stepped into the dimly lit bar. "This is amazing!" Riley was the squad rookie, and the one trooper in the unit Leigh was on truly good terms with. He'd heard the stories about Leigh from the other guys, but had decided on his own that she wasn't a bad cop. He'd even volunteered to help with her casework in the past. He was young and green, but they'd all been that at some point, and Leigh genuinely liked him.

Leigh grinned at his enthusiasm. "Yeah, it's pretty cool."

"The body is down here?" Riley swung the sledgehammer off his shoulder, carefully lowering it to the ground.

"Maybe. We're about to find out for sure. Through here." She led the way into the back, waiting patiently as Riley dragged his heels a bit, looking at everything as he came through.

"Do you want to do the honors?" she asked Rowe.

He stepped back, one hand raised, the other still weighed down with the crowbar he carried. "No, ma'am. This is the most fun I've had on a case in years, but this is your show. You do the honors."

Leigh accepted the sledgehammer from Riley, swinging it up to rest on her shoulder. "I'm thinking dead center to have the least amount of support from the surrounding structure. Agreed?"

"Yes. Not that you'll have much luck aiming with that, but try for the mortar joins. The mortar will give way before the brick."

Leigh got a good grip on the sledgehammer and then swung

it with all her strength at the wall. It hit with a resounding *crash*, the reverberations shooting up both arms and straight into her shoulders. She let the sledgehammer fall heavily to the floor, narrowly missing her toes, before examining the wall. The bricks were all still in place, but mortar crumbled to the floor. Heaving the sledgehammer up to her shoulder again, she prepared for the second strike.

It took three blows to knock the first brick free and two more to make a hole big enough to see through. Leigh set the sledgehammer down against the wall, panting. "That . . . should do it." Stepping up to the shoulder-height hole, she pulled a loose brick free and tossed it onto the plank floor at her feet. She angled the light into the hole, crouched down to peer in, and froze.

The hidden space was approximately two feet deep and ran the length of the eight foot wall. She had to crane her neck to follow the narrow beam of light down to the floor. But after all the time spent with Matt and his students, there was no mistaking the pale flash of bones lying inside.

A tomb was hidden on the other side of this wall. But had the victim been alive or dead when he was bricked in so long ago?

Wordlessly, she stepped back and handed the flashlight to Rowe. He gave her a quick, searching glance, but then moved in to see for himself. He peered through the gap, squinting in the dim light and then spending a long moment taking in the remains. Finally, he pulled back and handed the flashlight to Riley before stepping out of the way.

Leigh met his solemn gaze. "Better call Lowell back ASAP," he said. "Looks like we're going to need him again."

## CHAPTER THREE: BATHTUR GIN

Bathtub Gin: a mix of alcohol, glycerin, and juniper juice contained in bottles or jugs, usually filled in a bathtub because they were too tall to be topped off in a sink.

Friday, 8:05 p.m. Abbott Residence Salem, Massachusetts

Leigh rolled her shoulders as she trudged up her front path, feeling a slight twinge as her muscles protested. The sledgehammer hadn't felt heavy at the time, but there was stiffness in her shoulders now that wasn't there when she'd started the drive home. Maybe she'd go loosen up in the whirlpool tub with her favorite juniper bath salts . . . after she called Matt.

She glanced at her watch. It was just after five o'clock in San Francisco, so she might catch him between the afternoon sessions and dinner if she called now. Her step lightened in anticipation of his reaction to her news. No burned flesh, no mutilation. Just nice clean bones and a historical mystery. He was going to love this case. She was going to love working with him and the team again.

He'd been busy for the last few days, and she looked forward to catching up. She could picture him at the conference: a tall, muscular ex-Marine in a room of pale, skinny scientists. She chuckled to herself at her own use of the stereotype, but in her experience, most scientists weren't athletes. Matt hadn't been

either when she'd first sat in one of his classes three years earlier. But that was before he and his father took up rowing. Now, their hard work showed clearly on both of them.

Leigh let herself in, automatically stepping over the mail strewn around the inside hallway from her mail slot. Bending, she started to collect the envelopes. *Bill. Bill. Junk mail. Real estate flyer.* 

She flipped over the large white envelope lying facedown on the floor and froze as her blood went cold, bills and junk mail tumbling from suddenly nerveless fingers.

Not again.

This envelope was larger than those that had arrived previously. Like past packages, her name was neatly printed on the face in black marker with the same Boston postmark and no return address. But unlike past deliveries, this one had come to her house instead of her desk at the Essex Detective Unit.

As a police officer, Leigh kept her home address unlisted. But there were those with the computer skills or inside connections to find her anyway.

Clearly, whoever was sending the disturbing packages knew where she lived.

She carried the envelope into the living room, being careful not to shift her grip from its original hold in case there might be fingerprints to recover. She set it down carefully on the table and stepped back, as if staring at a coiled rattlesnake preparing to strike rather than mere paper and ink. Sometimes words and images could injure more deeply than fangs and venom.

The deliveries had started about a month earlier. The first had sent her reeling—a crime scene photo of her father, killed while on the job, his broken body lying in the snow, surrounded by blood and brain tissue. The warning written on the back: Your father wasn't the hero you think he was. He was a dirty cop.

Soon the world will know it. And you'll be the one to pay for his crimes.

The second envelope arrived a week later. It contained a grainy photo of her father and a man she couldn't identify meeting in the shadows near a seedy North Salem bar. A log of her father's cell phone was also included, highlighting several calls made to the same number. Since then, she'd determined the phone log was fake, but the highlighted number was real, assigned at the time to a burner phone, long since discarded. Another dead end.

The first time Leigh had opened an envelope, she was alone, with no one to help her bear the brunt of the brutal blow. But later that evening, she had found herself at Matt's front door. Only then, as he'd eased some of the weight from her shoulders, was she able to break free of her cocoon of shock and pain to start thinking like the investigator she was. When the second package arrived, they'd opened it together, his large body beside her, cementing her own strength and determination.

Now she was on her own again, and she wasn't sure she had the strength to face this new nightmare alone.

It had been weeks since the last delivery, and in some small part of her mind, she'd closed off the worry and the pain of her father's loss. But that door was wide open now, the pain rising to engulf her once again.

Struggling for calm, she picked up the framed photograph on the end table. It was her academy graduation photo, and she and her father were both in their Massachusetts State Police dress uniforms. Memories of that day flooded back in a rush—entering the auditorium behind the pipes and drums, being inspected and then addressed by the governor of Massachusetts, followed by swearing faith and allegiance to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, and the thrill of her badge being pinned on for the very first time. Layered over it all was her father's pride

that his only child was following in his footsteps. The Abbotts had been cops for nearly one hundred years, and the tradition continued with Leigh.

Everything was so shiny and new back then. Before mistakes were made. Before lives were lost and reputations were soiled forever.

The fingers of her right hand slipped inside the neckline of her shirt, unerringly finding the small circle of hardened scar tissue above her left breast. Her head bent low as heat and shame seeped through her, stopping her breath and making her heart skip unevenly. Trooper Len Morrison's words echoed hollowly in her head: I don't know how you live with yourself. You killed a cop, a fellow officer. You might as well have pulled the trigger yourself.

Her stomach clenched and her palms went clammy, but she dug deep, pushing away the guilt and the sorrow. You did nothing wrong. The people that count know it and that's all that matters.

Leigh wondered if she told herself that enough times, she might someday believe it.

Her gaze flicked back to the envelope, anger rising like a hot tide, swamping shame and giving her a rope to clutch before she slipped any further into the pit. Goddamn whoever was sending these packages. And goddamn her own weakness that allowed him to have this kind of power over her. The only way to fight that weakness was to meet it head-on.

Someone was trying to sully her father's good name. She didn't know why, but really, the "why" didn't matter. What mattered was that she couldn't allow it. Wouldn't allow it. Sergeant Nathaniel Abbott was an honored member of the force, a man who had died in the line of duty, a man who was still talked about with reverence and respect to this day.

She'd do whatever it took it keep it that way.

Leigh sat down on the couch and pulled off her messenger

bag. Digging inside, she drew out a pair of latex gloves and pulled them on before reaching for the newest envelope. She ripped open the end and tipped the contents out onto the coffee table. There were three file folders, each crammed with paper and encircled with an elastic band. Her clenched stomach relaxed a fraction. Nothing directly related to her father . . . yet.

She picked up the first file, sliding off the elastic band and flipping it open. Inside was a Salem Police Department case file of a drug bust in Salem four years ago. She recognized the area in North Salem, knew it was a high-crime neighborhood brimming with low-income tenements and high unemployment. The file outlined the case against Doug Palmer, arrested on charges of possessing both heroin and cocaine with the intent to distribute. But unlike the files crossing her desk every day, this file was sanitized—witness evidence was included, but names and identifying information, like addresses and phone numbers, were blacked out. Leigh flipped through the rest of the file: case photos, lab and fingerprint reports, court documents. It was all there, but the only relevant names in the file were the officers involved and the perp.

Leigh moved on to the second file. It chronicled another drug bust, this time of a pair of students from Salem State University for possession and distribution of marijuana. Again, the file was complete, but sanitized, and nothing stood out.

She picked up the thickest of the three files. This file had combined documentation from both the Salem P.D.'s Criminal Investigation Division and the Essex Detective Unit.

It was a case gone wrong in every way possible. Not only drugs, but also illegal firearms. Attempting to escape, the perps had opened fire on the Salem P.D. In the end, one suspect was injured and another lay dead. Tragically, so was an eight-year-old boy in the adjoining apartment from a bullet that pierced the paper-thin wall and lodged in the back of his head while he

sat eating dinner. Surprise shivered through Leigh as she recognized a name. Both deaths were investigated by Trooper First Class Robert Mercer of the Essex Detective Unit.

Robert Mercer?

Trooper Mercer was another of the fallen. He'd died years ago during a high-speed chase, losing control of his patrol car on black ice and dying instantly when his car hit a bridge abutment, leaving behind a wife and four children.

It had been the death of Trooper Mercer that opened up a position in the unit. An opening she'd applied for and won.

This was the first connection to the Essex Detective Unit. She'd suspected all along that someone inside her own department might have something to do with these deliveries, but so far lacked proof of any kind. But now when proof finally surfaced, it was through a connection to a dead officer? That didn't make sense.

She thought of the file locked in her desk drawer at work. She'd just recently picked up the closed case file for the criminal investigation that led to her father's death. She'd been busy lately, but knew that her reticence to rehash her father's death, to relive it over again in minute detail, was the real reason she'd not pursued this investigation. Clearly, it was time to remedy that. She packed up the files and jammed them back in the envelope. As of now, she was back on the case.

Reflexively, she reached into her pocket. She just wanted to hear the sound of Matt's voice, for his warm tone and calm logic to steady her. Her fingers brushed the smooth surface of her cell phone before she froze.

You can't call him. Not about this. Not now.

Her shoulders slumped and she sagged back against the couch. Matt gave his time freely whenever she needed him, always without question or complaint. Now, when he was finally dedicating an uninterrupted weekend to his own career, how

could she call him? It was bad enough they had a case; if she told him about this latest delivery, there was no way she could keep him from coming home on the first available flight. He was an invaluable partner in their cases, but first and foremost he was a scientist with his own research. And this weekend, he was off the clock with respect to criminal investigations. For this weekend, she had to give him that time. And to do that, she would have to keep him in the dark about this particular issue.

She looked at the clock. Eight-thirty. Maybe having that nice long soak right now was exactly what the doctor ordered. It would not only wash off the dust of decades peppered with mortar grit, but would take long enough that by the time she called Matt, he'd be at dinner and she could just leave him a message. By the time he got back to his room, it would be far too late for him to come home. And if she left a message, she could be brief and he wouldn't hear the stress in her voice.

She shifted uneasily on the couch, trying not to think about how angry he'd be when she finally came clean the next time they saw each other. But she pushed the thought away. She would give him the pleasure of a new case he'd love, and not ruin the rest of his weekend with her personal angst.

It was for his own good.