TWO FOR THE DOUGH

JANET EVANOVICH

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CHAPTER ONE

I knew Ranger was beside me because I could see his earring gleaming in the moonlight. Everything else about him—his T-shirt, his flack vest, his slicked-back hair, and 9-mm Glock—was as black as the night. Even his skin tone seemed to darken in shade. Ricardo Carlos Manoso, the Cuban-American chameleon.

I, on the other hand, was the blue-eyed, fair-skinned product of a Hungarian-Italian union and was not nearly so cleverly camouflaged for clandestine evening activities.

It was late October, and Trenton was enjoying the death throes of Indian summer. Ranger and I were squatting behind a hydrangea bush at the corner of Paterson and Wycliff, and we weren’t enjoying Indian summer, each other’s company, or much of anything else. We’d been squatting there for three hours, and squatting was taking its toll on our good humor.

We were watching the small clapboard Cape Cod at 5023 Paterson, following a tip that Kenny Mancuso was scheduled to visit his girlfriend, Julia Cenetta. Kenny Mancuso had recently been charged with shooting a gas
station attendant (who also happened to be his former best friend) in the knee.

Mancuso had posted a bail bond via the Vincent Plum Bonding Company, insuring his release from jail and returning him to the bosom of polite society. After his release he’d promptly disappeared and three days later failed to show face at a preliminary hearing. This did not make Vincent Plum happy.

Since Vincent Plum’s losses were my windfalls, I saw Mancuso’s disappearance from a more opportunistic perspective. Vincent Plum is my cousin and my employer. I work for Vinnie as a bounty hunter, dragging felons who are beyond the long arm of the law back into the system. Dragging Kenny back was going to net me ten percent of his $50,000 bond. A portion of that would go to Ranger for assisting with the takedown, and the rest would pay off my car loan.

Ranger and I had a sort of loose partnership. Ranger was a genuine, cool-ass, numero-uno bounty hunter. I asked him to help me because I was still learning the trade and needed all the help I could get. His participation was in the ballpark of a pity fuck.

“Don’t think this is gonna happen,” Ranger said.

I’d done the intel and was feeling defensive that maybe I’d had my chain yanked. “I spoke to Julia this morning. Explained to her that she could be considered an accessory.”

“And that made her decide to cooperate?”

“Not exactly. She decided to cooperate when I told her how before the shooting Kenny had been sometimes seeing Denise Barkolowski.”
Ranger was smiling in the dark. “You lie about Denise?”
“Yeah.”
“Proud of you, babe.”

I didn’t feel bad about the lie since Kenny was a scumbag felon, and Julia should be setting her sights higher anyway.

“Looks like maybe she thought twice about reaping the rewards of revenge and waved Kenny away. You find out where he’s living?”

“He’s moving around. Julia doesn’t have a phone number for him. She says he’s being careful.”

“He a first-time offender?”
“Yeah.”

“Probably nervous about checking into the big house. Heard all those stories about date rape.”

We turned silent as a pickup approached. It was a new Toyota 4×4 fresh off the showroom floor. Dark color. Temporary plates. Extra antennae for a car phone. The Toyota eased up at the Cape Cod and pulled into the driveway. The driver got out and walked to the front door. His back was to us and the lighting was poor.

“What do you think?” Ranger asked. “Is that Mancuso?”

I couldn’t tell from this distance. The man was the right height and weight. Mancuso was twenty-one years old, six feet tall, 175 pounds, dark brown hair. He’d been discharged from the army four months ago, and he was in good shape. I had several pictures that were obtained when the bond had been posted, but they didn’t do me any good from this angle.
“Could be him, but I can’t swear to it without seeing his face,” I said.

The front door of the house opened and the man disappeared inside. The door closed shut.

“We could go knock on the door nice and polite and ask if he’s the man,” Ranger said.

I nodded in agreement. “That might work.”

We stood and adjusted our gun belts.

I was dressed in dark jeans, long-sleeved black turtle-neck, navy Kevlar vest, and red Keds. I had my curly, shoulder-length brown hair tied in a ponytail, tucked under a navy ball cap. I wore my five-shot .38 Smith & Wesson Chief’s Special in a black nylon webbed hip holster with cuffs and a defense spray wedged into the back of the belt.

We walked across the lawn and Ranger rapped on the front door to the house with a flashlight that was eighteen inches long and eight inches round at the reflector. It gave good light, and Ranger said it was excellent for making serious head dents. Fortunately, I’ve never had to witness any bludgeoning. I’d fainted flat out watching Reservoir Dogs and had no illusions about my blood-and-guts comfort level. If Ranger ever had to use the flashlight to crack skulls while I was around, I intended to close my eyes . . . and then maybe I’d take up another profession.

When no one answered I stepped to the side and unholstered my revolver. Standard procedure for the backup partner. In my case, it was more or less an empty gesture. I religiously went to the range to practice, but truth is I’m hopelessly unmechanical. I harbor an irrational fear of guns, and most of the time keep my
little S & W empty of bullets so I won’t accidentally blast the toes off my foot. On the one occasion I’d had to shoot somebody I’d been so flustered I’d forgotten to take my gun out of my pocketbook before pulling the trigger. I wasn’t eager to repeat the performance.

Ranger rapped again, with more force. “Fugitive apprehension agent,” he called out. “Open the door.”

This drew a response, and the door was opened, not by Julia Cenetta or Kenny Mancuso, but by Joe Morelli, a Trenton Police Department plainclothesman.

We all stood silent for a moment, everyone surprised to see everyone else.

“That your truck in the driveway?” Ranger finally asked Morelli.

“Yeah,” Morelli said. “Just got it.”

Ranger nodded. “Good-looking vehicle.”

Morelli and I were both from the Burg, a blue-collar chunk of Trenton where dysfunctional drunks were still called bums and only pansies went to Jiffy Lube for an oil change. Morelli had a long history of taking advantage of my naïveté. I’d recently had the opportunity to even the score, and now we were in a period of reevaluation, both of us jockeying around for position.

Julia peeked at us from behind Morelli.

“So what happened?” I said to Julia. “I thought Kenny was supposed to stop around tonight?”

“Yeah, right,” she said. “Like he ever does anything he says.”

“Did he call?”

“Nothing. No call. Nothing. He’s probably with Denise Barkolowski. Why don’t you go knock on her stupid door?”
Ranger stayed stoic, but I knew he was smiling inside. “I’m out of here,” he said. “Don’t like to get involved in these domestic unpleasantries.”

Morelli had been watching me. “What happened to your hair?” he asked.

“It’s under my hat.”

He had his hands shoved into his jeans pockets. “Very sexy.”

Morelli thought everything was sexy.

“It’s late,” Julia said. “I gotta go to work tomorrow.” I looked at my watch. It was ten-thirty. “You’ll let me know if you hear from Kenny?”

“Yeah, sure.”

Morelli followed me out. We walked to his truck and stared at it in silence for a while, thinking our own thoughts. His last car had been a Jeep Cherokee. It had been bombed and blown to smithereens. Fortunately for Morelli, he hadn’t been in the car at the time.

“What are you doing here?” I finally asked.

“Same as you. Looking for Kenny.”

“I didn’t think you were in the bond enforcement business.”

“Mancuso’s mother was a Morelli, and the family asked if I’d look for Kenny and talk to him before he got himself into any more trouble.”

“Jesus. Are you telling me you’re related to Kenny Mancuso?”

“I’m related to everyone.”

“You’re not related to me.”

“You have any leads besides Julia?”

“Nothing exciting.”
He gave that some thought. “We could work together on this.”

I raised an eyebrow. Last time I worked with Morelli I’d gotten shot in the ass. “What would you contribute to the cause?”

“Family.”

Kenny might be dumb enough to turn to family. “How do I know you won’t cut me out at the end?” As he was sometimes prone to do.

His face was all hard planes. The sort of face that started off handsome and gained character as it aged. A paper-thin scar sliced through his left eyebrow. Mute testimony to a life lived outside the normal range of caution. He was thirty-two. Two years older than me. He was single. And he was a good cop. The jury was still out on its assessment of him as a human being.

“Guess you’ll just have to trust me,” he said, grinning, rocking back on his heels.

“Oh boy.”

He opened the door to the Toyota and new-car aroma washed over us. He hitched himself up behind the wheel and cranked the engine over. “Don’t suppose Kenny will show up this late,” he said.

“Not likely. Julia lives with her mother. Her mother’s a nurse on the night shift at St. Francis. She’ll be home in half an hour, and I can’t picture Kenny waltzing in when Momma’s here.”

Morelli nodded agreement and drove off. When his taillights disappeared in the distance I walked to the far corner of the block where I’d parked my Jeep Wrangler. I’d gotten the Wrangler secondhand from Skoogie
Krienski. Skoogie had used it to deliver pizza from Pino’s Pizzeria, and when the car got warm it smelled like baking bread and marinara sauce. It was the Sahara model, painted camouflage beige. Very handy in case I wanted to join an army convoy.

Probably I was right about it being too late for Kenny to show, but I figured it wouldn’t hurt to hang out a little longer and make sure. I snapped the top on the Jeep so I wouldn’t be so visible, and slouched back to wait. It wasn’t nearly as good a vantage point as the hydrangea bush, but it was okay for my purposes. If Kenny appeared, I’d call Ranger on my cellular phone. I wasn’t anxious to do a single-handed capture of a guy going down for grievous wounding.

After ten minutes a small hatchback passed by the Cenetta house. I slunk down in my seat and the car continued on. A few minutes later, it reappeared. It stopped in front of the Cape Cod. The driver beeped the horn. Julia Cenetta ran out and jumped into the passenger seat.

I rolled my engine over when they were half a block away, but waited for them to turn the corner before I hit the lights. We were on the edge of the Burg, in a residential pocket of moderately priced single-family houses. There was no traffic, making it easier to spot a tail, so I stayed far behind. The hatchback connected with Hamilton and headed east. I hung tight, closing the gap now that the road was more traveled. I held this position until Julia and friend pulled into a mall lot and parked on the dark fringe.

The lot was empty at this time of night. No place for a nosy bounty hunter to hide. I cut my lights and eased
into a parking place at the opposite end. I retrieved binoculars from the backseat and trained them on the car.

I almost jumped out of my shoes when someone rapped on my driver-side door.

It was Joe Morelli, enjoying the fact that he’d been able to catch me by surprise and scare the heck out of me.

“You need a night scope,” he said affably. “You’re not going to see anything at this distance in the dark.”

“I haven’t got a night scope, and what are you doing here anyway?”

“I followed you. Figured you’d watch for Kenny a while longer. You’re not very good at this law enforcement stuff, but you’re freaking lucky, and you’ve got the temperament of a pit bull with a soup bone when you’re on a case.”

Not a flattering assessment, but dead accurate. “You on good terms with Kenny?”

Morelli shrugged. “Don’t know him all that well.”

“So you wouldn’t want to drive over there and say hello.”

“Hate to ruin Julia’s good time if it isn’t Kenny.”

We were both staring at the truck, and even without a night scope we could see it had begun to rock. Rhythmic grunting sounds and whimpers carried across the empty lot.

I resisted the urge to squirm in my seat.

“Damn,” Morelli said. “If they don’t pace themselves they’re going to kill the shocks on that little car.”

The car stopped rocking, the motor caught, and the lights flashed on.
“Jeez,” I said. “That didn’t take long.”
Morelli hustled around to the passenger seat. “Must have gotten a head start on the way over. Wait until he hits the road before you use your lights.”
“That’s a great idea, but I can’t see without my lights.”
“You’re in a parking lot. What’s to see besides three acres of unobstructed macadam?”
I crept forward a little.
“You’re losing him,” Morelli said. “Step on it.”
I pushed it up to 20, squinting into the darkness, swearing at Morelli that I couldn’t see jackshit.
He made chicken sounds, and I mashed the gas pedal to the floor.
There was a loud wump, and the Wrangler bucked out of control. I slammed my foot to the brake and the car came to a sudden stop with the left side tilted at a 30-degree angle.
Morelli got out to take a look. “You’re hung up on a safety island,” he said. “Back up, and you should be okay.”
I eased off the island and rolled several feet. The car pulled hard to the left. Morelli did the take-a-look thing again while I thrashed around in the driver’s seat, sputtering and fuming and berating myself for listening to Morelli.
“Tough break,” Morelli said, leaning into the open window. “You bent your rim when you hit the curb. You got road service?”
“You did this on purpose. You didn’t want me to catch your rotten cousin.”
“Hey, cupcake, don’t blame me just because you made some bad driving decisions.”

“You’re scum, Morelli. Scum.”

He grinned. “Better be nice. I could give you a ticket for reckless driving.”

I yanked the phone out of my pocketbook and called Al’s Auto Body. Al and Ranger were good friends. During the day Al ran a legitimate business. I suspected that at night he ran a chop shop, hacking up stolen cars. It didn’t matter to me. I just wanted to get my tire fixed.

An hour later I was on my way. No sense trying to track down Kenny Mancuso. He’d be long gone. I stopped at a convenience store, bought a pint of artery-clogging coffee ice cream, and headed for home.

I live in a blocky three-story brick apartment building located a couple miles from my parents’ house. The front door to the building opens to a busy street filled with little businesses, and a tidy neighborhood of single-family bungalows sprawls to the rear.

My apartment is in the back of the building, on the second floor, overlooking the parking lot. I have one bedroom, one bath, a small kitchen, and a living room that combines with the dining area. My bathroom looks like it came off the set from *The Partridge Family*, and due to temporarily strained finances my furniture could be described as eclectic—which is a snooty way of saying nothing matches.

Mrs. Bestler from the third floor was in my hall when I got off the elevator. Mrs. Bestler was eighty-three and didn’t sleep well at night, so she walked the halls to get exercise.
“Hey, Mrs. Bestler,” I said. “How’s it going?”
“Don’t do no good to complain. Looks like you’ve been out working tonight. You catch any criminals?”
“Nope. Not tonight.”
“That’s a pity.”
“There’s always tomorrow,” I said, unlocking my door, slipping inside.

My hamster, Rex, was running on his wheel, his feet a blur of pink. I tapped on the glass cage by way of greeting, causing him to momentarily pause, his whiskers twitching, his shiny black eyes large and alert.
“Howdy, Rex,” I said.
Rex didn’t say anything. He’s the small, silent type.
I dumped my black shoulder bag on the kitchen counter and got a spoon from the cutlery drawer. I popped the top on the ice cream container and listened to my phone messages while I ate.

All of the messages were from my mother. She was making a nice roast chicken tomorrow, and I should come for dinner. I should be sure not to be late because Betty Szajack’s brother-in-law died and Grandma Mazur wanted to make the seven o’clock viewing.

Grandma Mazur reads the obituary columns like they’re part of the paper’s entertainment section. Other communities have country clubs and fraternal orders. The Burg has funeral parlors. If people stopped dying, the social life of the Burg would come to a grinding halt.

I finished off the ice cream and put the spoon in the dishwasher. I gave Rex a few hamster nuggets and a grape and went to bed.
I woke up to rain slapping against my bedroom window, drumming on the old-fashioned black wrought-iron fire escape that serves as my balcony. I liked the way rain sounded at night when I was snug in bed. I couldn’t get excited about rain in the morning.

I needed to harass Julia Cenetta some more. And I needed to run a check on the car that had picked her up. The phone rang, and I automatically reached for the portable at bedside, thinking it was early to be getting a phone call. The digital readout on my clock said 7:15.

It was my cop friend, Eddie Gazarra.
“Morning,” he said. “Time to go to work.”
“Is this a social call?” Gazarra and I had grown up together, and now he’s married to my cousin Shirley.
“This is an information call, and I didn’t make it. Are you still looking for Kenny Mancuso?”
“Yes.”
“The gas station attendant he nailed in the knee got dead this morning.”
This put me on my feet. “What happened?”
“A second shooting. I heard from Schmidty. He was working the desk when the call came in. A customer found the attendant, Moogey Bues, in the gas station office with a big hole in his head.”
“Jesus.”
“I thought you might be interested. Maybe there’s a tie-in, maybe not. Could be Mancuso decided shooting his pal in the knee wasn’t enough, and he came back to blow the guy’s brains out.”
“I owe you.”
“We could use a baby-sitter next Friday.”
“I don’t owe you that much.”
Eddie grunted and disconnected.
I took a fast shower, blasted my hair with the hair dryer, and squashed it under a New York Rangers hat, turning the brim to the back. I was wearing button-fly Levi’s, a red plaid flannel shirt over a black T-shirt, and Doc Martens in honor of the rain.
Rex was asleep in his soup can after a hard night on the wheel, so I tiptoed past him. I switched the answering machine on, grabbed my pocketbook and my black-and-purple Gore-Tex jacket, and locked up behind myself.
The gas station, Delio’s Exxon, was on Hamilton, not far from my apartment. I stopped at a convenience store on the way and got a large coffee to go and a box of chocolate-covered doughnuts. I figured if you had to breathe New Jersey air there wasn’t much point in getting carried away with always eating healthy food.
There were a lot of cops and cop cars at the gas station, and an emergency rescue truck had backed itself up close to the office door. The rain had tapered off to a fine drizzle. I parked half a block away and made my way through the crowd, taking my coffee and doughnuts with me, looking to spot a familiar face.
The only familiar face I saw belonged to Joe Morelli.
I sidled up to him and opened the doughnut box.
Morelli took a doughnut and shoved half in his mouth.
“No breakfast?” I asked.
“Got yanked out of bed for this.”
“I thought you were working vice.”
“I am. Walt Becker is the primary here. He knew I was looking for Kenny, and thought I’d want to be included.”

We both chewed some doughnut.

“So what happened?” I asked.

There was a crime photographer working in the office. Two paramedics stood by, waiting to zip the body into a bag and take off.

Morelli watched the action through the plate-glass window. “The M.E. estimates time of death at six-thirty. That’s right about when the victim would have been opening up. Apparently someone just walked in and blew him away. Three shots to the face, close range. No indication of theft. The cash drawer was intact. No witnesses so far.”

“A hit?”

“Looks like it.”

“This garage selling numbers? Dealing dope?”

“Nothing I know about.”

“Maybe it’s personal. Maybe he was screwing someone’s wife. Maybe he owed money.”

“Maybe.”

“Maybe Kenny came back to shut him up.”

Morelli didn’t move a muscle. “Maybe.”

“You think Kenny’d do that?”

He shrugged. “Hard to say what Kenny’d do.”

“You run the plate on that car last night?”

“Yeah. It belongs to my cousin Leo.”

I raised an eyebrow.

“It’s a big family,” he said. “I’m not that close anymore.”

“You going to talk to Leo?”
“Soon as I’m out of here.”
I sipped some of the steaming coffee and watched his eyes lock onto the Styrofoam cup. “Bet you’d like to have some nice hot coffee,” I said.
“I’d kill for coffee.”
“I’ll let you have some if you’ll let me tag along when you talk to Leo.”
“Deal.”
I took one last sip and passed him the cup. “You check on Julia?”
“Did a drive-by. The lights were out. Didn’t see the car. We can talk to her after we talk to Leo.”
The photographer was finished and the paramedics went to work, trundling the body into a bag, hefting it onto a stretcher. The stretcher clattered as it rolled over the doorstep, the bag jiggling with its dead weight.
The doughnut sat heavy in my stomach. I didn’t know the victim, but I felt his loss all the same. Vicarious grief.
There were two homicide detectives on the scene, looking professional in trench coats. Under the trench coats they wore suits and ties. Morelli was wearing a navy T-shirt, Levi’s, a tweed sport coat, and running shoes. A fine mist had settled on his hair.
“You don’t look like the other guys,” I said. “Where’s your suit?”
“You ever see me in a suit? I look like a casino pit boss. I have special dispensation never to wear a suit.” He took his keys from his pocket and gestured to one of the detectives that he was leaving. The detective nodded acknowledgment.
Morelli was driving a city car. It was an old tan Fairlane sedan with an antenna wired from the trunk and a
hula doll stuck in the back window. It looked like it couldn’t do 30 going uphill. It was dented and rusted and grime-coated.

“You ever wash this thing?” I asked.

“Never. I’m afraid to see what’s under the dirt.”

“Trenton likes to make law enforcement a challenge.”

“Yeah,” he said. “Wouldn’t want it to be too easy. Take all the fun out of it.”

Leo Morelli lived with his parents in the Burg. He was the same age as Kenny, and he worked for the Turnpike Authority, like his father.

A blue-and-white was parked in their driveway, and the whole family was outside talking to a uniform when we pulled up.

“Someone stole Leo’s car,” Mrs. Morelli said. “Can you imagine? What’s this world coming to? These things never used to happen in the Burg. Now look.”

These things never happened in the Burg because it was like a retirement village for the mob. Years ago when Trenton rioted no one even considered sending a squad car in to protect the Burg. Every old soldier and capo was up in his attic getting out his tommy gun.

“When did you notice it gone?” Morelli asked.

“This morning,” Leo said. “When I came out to go to work. It wasn’t here.”

“When did you see it last?”

“Last night. When I came home from work at six o’clock.”

“When was the last time you saw Kenny?”

Everybody blinked.

“Kenny?” Leo’s mother said. “What’s Kenny got to do with this?”
Morelli was back on his heels with his hands in his pockets. “Maybe Kenny needed a car.”
No one said anything.
Morelli repeated it. “So, when was the last time anybody talked to Kenny?”
“Christ,” Leo’s father said to Leo. “Tell me you didn’t let that asshole idiot have your car.”
“He promised me he’d bring it right back,” Leo said. “How was I to know?”
“Shit for brains,” Leo’s father said. “That’s what you got... shit for brains.”
We explained to Leo how he’d been aiding and abetting a felon, and how a judge might look askance at such an activity. And then we explained how if he ever saw or heard from Kenny again he should right away rat on him to his cousin Joe or Joe’s good friend Stephanie Plum.
“Do you think he’ll call us if he hears from Kenny?” I asked when we were alone in the car.
Morelli stopped for a light. “No. I think Leo will beat the crap out of Kenny with a tire iron.”
“It’s the Morelli way.”
“Something like that.”
“A man thing.”
“Yeah. A man thing.”
“How about after he beats the crap out of him? Do you think he’ll call us then?”
Morelli shook his head. “You don’t know much, do you?”
“I know a lot.”
This brought a smile to Morelli’s lips.
“Now what?” I asked.
“Julia Cenetta.”

Julia Cenetta worked in the bookstore at Trenton State College. We checked her house first. When no one answered we headed off for the college. Traffic was steady, with everyone around us rigidly obeying the speed limit. Nothing like an unmarked cop car to slow things down to a crawl.

Morelli entered through the main gate and looped around toward the single-level brick-and-cement bookstore complex. We passed by a duck pond and a few trees and expanses of lawn that hadn’t yet succumbed to winter blight. The rain had picked up again and was coming down with the boring relentlessness of an all-day soaker. Students walked head down, with the hoods pulled up on raincoats and sweatshirts.

Morelli took a look at the bookstore lot, filled to capacity with the exception of a few slots on the outermost rim, and without hesitation parked in a no-parking zone at the curb.

“Police emergency?” I asked.
“You bet your sweet ass,” Morelli said.

Julia was working the register, but no one was buying, so she was standing hip against the cash drawer, picking at her fingernail polish. Little frown lines appeared between her eyebrows when she saw us.

“Looks like a slow day,” Morelli said to her.
Julia nodded. “It’s the rain.”

“Hear anything from Kenny?”
Color crept into Julia’s cheeks. “Actually, I sort of saw him last night. He called right after you left, and
then he came over. I told him you wanted to talk to him. I told him he should call you. I gave him your card with your beeper numbers and everything.”

“Do you think he’ll come back tonight?”

“No.” She shook her head for emphasis. “He said he wasn’t coming back. He said he had to keep a real low profile because there were people after him.”

“The police?”

“I think he meant someone else, but I don’t know who.”

Morelli gave her another card with instructions to call him anytime, day or night, if she heard from Kenny.

She looked noncommittal, and I didn’t think we should count on much help from Julia.

We went back out into the rain and hustled to the car. Aside from Morelli, the only piece of cop equipment in the Fairlane was a recycled two-way radio. It was tuned to the police tactical channel and the dispatcher relayed calls between bursts of static. I had a similar radio in my Jeep, and I was struggling to learn the police codes. Like all other cops I knew, Morelli listened unconsciously, miraculously processing the garbled information.

He turned out of the campus, and I asked the inevitable question. “Now what?”

“You’re the one with the instincts. You tell me.”

“My instincts aren’t doing a lot for me this morning.”

“Okay, then let’s run down what we have. What do we know about Kenny?”

After last night we knew he was a premature ejaculator, but that probably wasn’t what Morelli wanted to
hear. “Local boy, high school graduate, enlisted in the army, got out four months ago. Still unemployed, but obviously not hurting for money. For unknown reasons he decided to shoot his friend Moogey Bues in the knee. He got caught in the process by an off-duty cop. He had no priors and was released on bond. He violated his bond contract and stole a car.”

“Wrong. He borrowed a car. He just hasn’t gotten around to returning it yet.”

“You think that’s significant?”

Morelli stopped for a light. “Maybe something happened to change his plans.”

“Like acing ol’ Moogey.”

“Julia said Kenny was afraid someone was after him.”

“Leo’s father?”

“You’re not taking this seriously,” Morelli said.

“I’m taking it very seriously. I’m just not coming up with much, and I don’t notice you sharing a lot of your thoughts with me. For instance, who do you think is after Kenny?”

“When Kenny and Moogey were questioned about the shooting they both said it was over a personal issue and wouldn’t discuss it. Maybe they had some bad business going on.”

“And?”

“And that’s it. That’s what I think.”

I stared at him for a moment, trying to decide if he was holding out on me. Probably he was, but there was no way to tell for sure. “Okay,” I finally said on a sigh, “I have a list of Kenny’s friends. I’m going to run through it.”
“Where’d you get this list?”
“Privileged information.”
Morelli looked pained. “You broke into his apartment and stole his little black book.”
“I didn’t steal it. I copied it.”
“I don’t want to hear any of this.” He glanced down at my pocketbook. “You’re not carrying concealed, are you?”
“Who, me?”
“Shit,” Morelli said. “I must be crazy to team up with you.”
“It was your idea!”
“Want me to help with the list?”
“No.” I figured that might be like giving a lottery ticket to your neighbor and having him win the jackpot on it.

Morelli parked behind my Jeep. “There’s something I need to tell you before you leave.”
“Yes?”
“I hate those shoes you’re wearing.”
“Anything else?”
“I’m sorry about your tire last night.”
Yeah, right.

By five o’clock I was cold and wet, but had gotten through the list. I’d done a combination of phone calls and face-to-faces, and had netted very little. Most of the people were from the Burg and had known Kenny all of his life. No one admitted to having contact with him after his arrest, and I had no reason to suspect they were lying. No one knew of any business deals or personal problems between Kenny and Moogey. Several
people testified to Kenny’s volatile personality and wheeler-dealer mentality. These comments were interesting, but too general to be really helpful. A few conversations had long, pregnant pauses that made me uncomfortable, wondering what was left unsaid.

As my last effort of the day I’d decided to check Kenny’s apartment again. The super had let me in two days before when he’d been temporarily confused as to my law enforcement affiliation. I’d surreptitiously lifted a spare key while admiring the kitchen, and now I could tippy-toe around whenever I wanted. The legality of this was a tad gray, but it would only be bothersome if I got caught.

Kenny lived just off Route 1 in a large apartment complex named Oak Hill. Since there were no hills or oaks in sight I can only guess they were leveled to make way for the three-story brick bunkers advertised as affordable luxury housing.

I parked in one of the slots and squinted through the dark and the rain to the lighted front entrance. I waited a moment while a couple sprinted from their car and hurried into the building. I transferred Kenny’s keys and my defense spray from my big black leather purse to my jacket pocket, pulled my jacket hood over my damp hair, and lurched out of the Jeep. The temperature had dropped during the course of the day, and the chill seeped through my wet jeans. So much for Indian summer.

I walked through the lobby with my head down and hood still up and had the good fortune to get an empty elevator. I rode to the third floor and hurried down the corridor to 302. I listened at the door for a moment, and
heard nothing. I knocked. I knocked again. No answer. I inserted the key and with hammering heart quickly stepped inside, immediately flicking the lights on. The apartment appeared to be empty. I went room to room in a cursory search and decided Kenny hadn’t returned since my last visit. I checked his answering machine. No messages.

Once again, I listened at the door. All was silent on the other side. I turned the lights out, took a deep breath, and propelled myself out into the hall, gasping with relief that the whole thing was over and I hadn’t been seen.

When I got back to the lobby I went straight to the mailboxes and checked Kenny’s. It was crammed full of stuff. Stuff that might help me find Kenny. Unfortunately, tampering with the mail is a federal offense. Stealing mail is an especially big no-no. It would be wrong, I told myself. Mail is sacred. Yes, but wait a minute. I had a key! Didn’t that give me some rights? Again, this was a gray issue since I’d sort of stolen the key. I put my nose to the grate and looked inside. A phone bill. This might give me clues. My fingers itched with the need to get at the phone bill. I was dizzy with temptation. Temporary insanity, I thought. I was in the grip of temporary insanity. All right!

I took a deep breath, rammed the key into the tiny keyhole, opened the mailbox, and shoveled the mail into my big black bag. I clicked the little mailbox door closed and left in a sweat, trying to get to the safety of my car before sanity returned and my defense was screwed.