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INTRIGUE

DEBRA
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“They’re getting nervous and that makes you a target.”

“Makes us both targets,” she amended.

He nodded. “They don’t like that we’re getting so close.”

Close. Yes. Too close. This close she could see the tiny gray specks that gave his deep blue eyes such depth and vividness. She liked his lips... the cut of his jaw and the impact of his high cheekbones. The blue eyes appeared even more profound framed by that coal-black hair.

“You keep looking at me that way and we’re going to have a problem.”

“What kind of problem?” she prompted. Did she have to spell it out?

“The kind where I end that long dry spell of no kisses.”

She moistened her lips. “I wouldn’t categorize that as a problem.”

He leaned closer. “In that case—” he brushed his lips against hers “—let’s bring on the rain.”

**DEBRA
WEBB**

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This book is dedicated to my two dearest friends,
Vicki Hinze and Peggy Webb.

Two of the most amazing ladies

I have ever had the privilege
to know and love!



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COLBY VELOCITY

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Debra Webb wrote her first story at age nine and her first romance at thirteen. It wasn't until she spent three years working for the military behind the Iron Curtain and within the confining political walls of Berlin, Germany, that she realized her true calling. A five-year stint with NASA on the Space Shuttle Program reinforced her love of the endless possibilities within her grasp as a storyteller. A collision course between suspense and romance was set. Debra has been writing romantic suspense and action-packed romantic thrillers since. Visit her at www.DebraWebb.com or write to her at P.O. Box 4889, Huntsville, AL 35815.

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

Leland "Rocky" Rockford—A former Equalizer, Rocky has an aversion to suits. But if you're going through a door to face the unknown, he's the man you want at your side.

Kendra Todd—Kendra is conservative and sophisticated. She loves her work at the Colby Agency. Returning to her old life wasn't on her agenda until an old friend calls.

Yoni Sayer—A rising star in D.C.'s political world...he is desperate for Kendra's help.

Judd Castille—He's a U.S. senator whose power may or may not have turned him to the dark side.

Wayne Burton—Homicide detective Burton seems to want to help Kendra...she once shared his bed, after all.

Aleesha Ferguson—Just another dead prostitute...or is she more?

Sharon Castille—The senator's wife. What is she running from?

Grant Roper—Senator Castille's new personal aide. How far is he willing to go to move up the ranks?

Patsy Talley and Levi Stark—Members of the Colby Agency research staff.

Victoria Colby-Camp—As the head of the Colby Agency Victoria is committed to making the merger between her agency and the Equalizers work.

Jim Colby—Jim wants his mother to be happy, no matter what it takes. He now helps her run the Colby Agency.

Ian Michaels—As Victoria's second-in-command, Ian is a stabilizing force as the Colby Agency staff and the former Equalizers merge.

Chapter One

Chicago, Tuesday, July 4, 9:00 p.m.

Kendra Todd surveyed the deserted street. The last of the lingering Fourth of July revelers were only a few blocks over. The fireworks at the Pier crackled in the air, sending sprays of light over the city.

She had attended the agency cookout at Jim Colby's home. Afterward she'd anticipated a quiet evening at her apartment...but that hadn't happened.

Talk about ghosts from the past.... The frantic call she'd received had taken her back several years. Three, to be exact.

To a place she'd just as soon not revisited.

9:04 p.m. He was late.

Kendra tucked her cell phone back into the holster on her belt and surveyed the street once more.

Ten minutes more of hanging around this street corner alone and she was out of here. Whatever her old friend's latest drama...it wasn't hers. Kendra

Todd was no longer a part of the D.C. world of ruthless ambition and colliding egos. In three years she hadn't looked back once.

The move to Chicago was the smartest choice she'd made in a very long time. Working with Chicago PD's community affairs division the first two years of her new Windy City life had been very useful in acquainting herself with this new environment. Last year's offer to join the staff of the Colby Agency had come after working closely with Ian Michaels during the abduction attempt of Victoria Colby-Camp's granddaughter. The opportunity had proven the perfect prompt for Kendra to make a major move toward personally recognizing and professionally achieving a true career goal.

Reaching out to those in need and using the interactive skills she'd honed so well to solve a case satisfied her in a way nothing else about her professional history had. The camaraderie at the Colby Agency surprised her still. For someone who had no family left and who'd walked away from her lifelong friends three years ago, the atmosphere at the agency was spot on. She not only liked her job as an investigator, she also liked being part of something real.

Real life. Real people.

To say this jolt from the past was unwelcome would be a vast understatement. Not that she hadn't

kept in touch with a few of her former associates. Christmas cards and the occasional birthday card were exchanged. At first she'd even exchanged e-mails with her former boyfriend, but that had fizzled out after only a few months. But this—tonight—was far from a mere unexpected call from an old colleague.

This was trouble in big, bold letters.

Headlights flashed, drawing her attention to the west end of the block. A dark nondescript sedan had made the turn at the intersection and now rolled slowly in her direction.

She maintained her position against the wall of the closed boutique and watched as the sedan pulled up to the curb directly behind her smaller, two-door sports car. The snazzy red car was her one visible capitulation to vanity. And maybe to independence from all the *red* tape and chaos of so-called organized government.

The driver's door opened and she held her breath. As soon as the head and torso rose from behind the wheel of the car she squinted to identify the driver. The street lamp's glow spread across the hood of the sedan but fell short of providing sufficient illumination beyond the windshield. But she would know that tall, slim frame anywhere...even in the dark.

Yoni Sayar straightened his suit jacket and shoved the car door closed.

Kendra couldn't deny some sense of sentimentality at seeing him. Three years was a long time and they had been good friends.

"Kendra." He smiled as he strode toward her.

"It's good to see you," she confessed before accepting his quick, firm embrace.

Tall, thin and dark, Yoni was a natural born American but his parents were Israeli immigrants. Both had worked hard to ensure he received the best education possible and were extraordinarily proud of his accomplishments. A master's degree in global communications was complemented by his ability to speak a number of languages with incredible ease and fluency. He'd turned down numerous lucrative corporate offers to pursue his goal of making a difference in the merciless world of politics. A lobbyist who supported the rights of main street Americans over those of corporate America.

Yoni was one of the good guys. He'd worked hard to earn the respect of the most powerful senators and congressional members, including Senator Judd Castille, Kendra's former boss.

After a thorough scrutiny of her face, he said, "You look very happy." He nodded his approval. "Happy and stress-free."

A moment's hesitation passed before she admitted, "I'm very happy." Old habits died hard. Even with a good friend like Yoni, the political arena had

made her wary of the slightest personal confession. "The Colby Agency is great. It's the best move I could have made."

He surveyed the deserted street. "I'm very pleased to hear this." His tone gave away his distraction more so than his not so discreet surveillance of their surroundings.

"Would you like to have coffee while we talk?" He'd insisted on meeting someplace where they wouldn't be seen. Another learned trait of the political life. Still, surely he didn't expect to talk right here on the street, deserted or not. He'd come all this way, the least she could do was buy him a cup of coffee.

He shook his head. "I can't risk being seen."

With you. That he didn't verbalize that part disturbed her on some level. She and Senator Castille had parted on less than favorable terms. That was no secret. The rumors that had at first buzzed in the media were quickly squashed by Castille's people. It was completely understandable that Yoni would not want to be spied collaborating with the enemy.

Even three years later she remained the enemy.

"All right." She gestured to her car. "Why don't we sit in my car?"

He glanced nervously at the vehicle parked in front of his rental. "Well...we can do that."

That his uneasiness continued to mount triggered the first, distant alarm. Kendra led the way, hitting the remote and unlocking the doors as they reached the vehicle. She settled behind the steering wheel and waited until he'd slid into the passenger seat next to her before locking the doors once more.

"You bought a new car." He looked around the interior, surprise in his expression. "It's very nice." He managed a lackluster smile. "It suits you."

"It was time." The interior lights dimmed automatically, leaving them in darkness.

It was his turn to speak. This was his rendezvous after all. Yet the silence dragged on several seconds adding to Kendra's uneasiness. "Why don't you start at the beginning?" No point beating around the bush. He'd asked for this meeting, had taken a flight, rented a car and met her in an out-of-the-way location. A scene right out of an espionage movie.

Yoni released a big breath. "You know how Castille is. If he smells trouble..."

Trouble. There it was. She'd known it was coming. "I thought you and Castille were still tight." The truth was, when Castille had targeted her, Yoni hadn't gone out of his way to back her up. She'd understood at the time, still did actually. Once Castille had decided she was out, no one or nothing was going to change his mind. Yoni sticking his neck out

and damaging his own position with the arrogant senator wouldn't have helped Kendra.

Political life was ruthless.

A frown furrowed across her brow as all those frustrating memories tumbled into vivid recollection. How the heck had she allowed herself to be dragged back into this vicious cycle?

"What sort of trouble?" And what did it have to do with her? Kendra tamped down the frustration. She reminded herself that she'd heard something in his voice that concerned her when he'd called. She couldn't just ignore him if he really needed help.

"I'm certain you've heard about the Transparency Bill."

She'd heard. Anyone who read the newspaper or watched the news likely knew of it. The bill was a very progressive action that had raised lots of eyebrows, particularly on Capitol Hill. Ultimately if the bill was passed, the way lobbyists and special interests groups worked would be forever changed. For the better. Though those lobbyists and special interest groups didn't see it that way.

"Castille supports it," she acknowledged. That she knew based on the headlines. "He's taken a lot of heat from the groups he once allowed to bolster his nest egg." Oh, yes. Castille was one rich old man. He'd reveled in the fringe benefits of those who lobbied for his support. Now that he was nearing

retirement he'd opted to man-up and do what no other senator before him had had the courage to do. Limit the behind-the-scenes influence and reach of all those very groups who fueled the power.

"He has persuaded a number to follow suit," Yoni mentioned, not that it was necessary. Kendra knew very well how much influence Castille wielded.

She turned to her old friend, searched his face. Her eyes had grown accustomed to the low light. "I can see where you might not be a supporter of the proposed legislation."

He shook his head. "I helped design the bill."

"Are you serious?" It was difficult to imagine Yoni, a lobbyist, proposing anything that would limit his ability to do his job. Though his efforts were always forthright and just, there were necessary strategies that those outside the political playing field might not fully understand if those efforts were exposed. Serving the greater good came with a cost—usually associated with providing benefits for certain private groups. It was simply the way the world worked.

Yoni dropped his head back against the seat and released a weary breath. "The whole process has gotten out of control. Someone has to draw a line somewhere. I admire Castille for having the courage to do so."

No question about the need for stronger

boundaries. She'd thought as much three years ago. That was just one of the subjects about which she and Castille had butted heads.

"I can see where that move would make you more than a few enemies." Was that why he'd come to her? Didn't make a whole lot of sense considering she was many degrees removed, but he hadn't actually given her any real specifics yet.

"Frustration, anger, resentment—all those things I anticipated," he explained, "but not the hideous threat of blackmail."

"Blackmail?" Her confusion cleared. "Someone is attempting to blackmail you?"

He nodded. "I have until ten Friday morning to ensure the senator ushers through a couple of amendment attachments or, according to the note I received, I'll face the consequences."

Tension tightened her muscles. "Do you have the note with you?"

He reached inside his summer-weight jacket and pulled out an envelope.

Kendra tapped a button to illuminate a console light. She accepted the envelope and inspected the exterior. His name was carefully printed on the front and nothing more. "Where was it delivered?"

"To my office. It was pushed beneath the door before we opened. I found it this morning."

Which meant anyone could have delivered it.

Yoni's office was in downtown D.C. on a public block with little or no security measures. She opened the envelope and withdrew the single page typed note.

You know what you need to do. Friday, 10:00 a.m. is the deadline. Meet the demand or face the consequences.

"Have you been to the police?" The answer would be no, otherwise they wouldn't be sitting here going through the cloak-and-dagger motions.

"I can't go to the police."

"Why not?" That made no sense. "This threat could be more than an opportunistic scare tactic. You need to take it seriously." He'd been in this business long enough to know this already. Power and money were strong motivators; some would do anything to get their hands on one or both.

"There's another note."

That he didn't make eye contact was more telling than he realized. She'd understood there surely was one or more other notes since this one did not state the precise demands or consequences. "Did you bring that note, as well?" Was he really going to make her ask for every iota of information?

He retrieved another plain white envelope from his interior jacket pocket and handed it to her. When her fingers tightened on the envelope, he hesitated before letting go. "I don't want this ugliness to color