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*See below for a sneak peek from
our inspirational line, Love Inspired® Suspense*

*Enjoy this heart-stopping excerpt from
RUNNING BLIND*

*by top author Shirlee McCoy,
available November 2010!*

*The mission trip to Mexico was supposed to be an
adventure. But the thrill turns sour when Jenna Dougherty
and her roommate Magdalena are kidnapped.*

“It’s okay. I’m here to help.” The voice was as deep as the darkness, but Jenna Dougherty didn’t believe the lie. She could do nothing but lie still as hands slid down her arms, felt the rope around her wrists.

“I’m going to use a knife to cut you free, Jenna. Hold still.”

The cold blade of a knife pressed close to her head before her gag fell away.

“I—” she started, but her mouth was dry, and she could do nothing but suck in air.

“Shhh. Whatever needs to be said can be said when we’re out of here.” Nick spoke quietly, his hand gentle on her cheek. There and gone as he sliced through the ropes on her wrists and ankles.

He pulled her upright. “Come on. We may be on borrowed time.”

“I can’t leave my friend,” Jenna rasped out.

“There’s no one here. Just us.”

“She has to be here.” Jenna took a step away.

“There’s no one here. Let’s go before that changes.”

“It’s dark. Maybe if we find a light...”

“What did you say?”

“We need to turn on the light. I can’t leave until I know that—”

“What can you see, Jenna?”

“Nothing.”

“No shadows? No light?”

“No.”

“It’s broad daylight. There’s light spilling in from the window I climbed in through. You can’t see it?”

She went cold at his words.

“I can’t see anything.”

“You’ve got a nasty bruise on your forehead. Maybe that has something to do with it.” His fingers traced the tender flesh on her forehead.

“It doesn’t matter *how* it happened. I’m blind!”

Can Nick help Jenna find her friend or will chasing this trail have Jenna running blindly again into danger?

Find out in RUNNING BLIND, available in November 2010 only from Love Inspired Suspense.

FROM #1 NEW YORK TIMES
AND USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR
DEBBIE MACOMBER

Mrs. Miracle on 34th Street...

This Christmas, Emily Merkle (just call her Mrs. Miracle) is working in the toy department at Finley's, the last family-owned department store in Manhattan.

Her boss (who happens to be the owner's son) has placed an order for a large number of high-priced robots, which he hopes will give the business a much-needed boost. In fact, Jake Finley's counting on it.

Holly Larson is counting on that robot, too. She's been looking after her eight-year-old nephew, Gabe, ever since her widowed brother was deployed overseas. Holly plans to buy Gabe a robot—which she can't afford—because she's determined to make Christmas special.

But this Christmas will be different—thanks to Mrs. Miracle. Next to bringing children joy, her favorite activity is giving romance a nudge. Fortunately, Jake and Holly are receptive to her "hints." And thanks to Mrs. Miracle, Christmas takes on new meaning for Jake. For all of them!

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“Marcus,” she said, simply for lack of anything else. “Did you forget something?”

“Yes,” he said. The thickness in his voice sent a tremor rumbling through her, stirring a reaction she thought had died with his departure.

He stepped forward, filling the door frame until they were inches apart. The tremor gained intensity until it felt like a storm was building within her, churning in her belly. He reached down and hooked his forefinger under her chin, lifting her face to his.

She waited, breathless, to see what he would do. Behind him, the holiday lights on her neighbors' homes sparkled in the background like a million multicolored stars, giving the world—this moment—an unreal, almost magical feel. She knew it should be cold, felt the wind blowing past and around them, saw their breaths mixing and rising into the air. All she registered was heat, from that small spot where his finger met her chin, the only place where they were touching, from his eyes poring over her face and staring deep into her own.

Then, as though granting her something she'd been waiting an eternity for, he finally lowered his mouth to hers.

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CONNOR

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If you purchased this book without a cover you should be aware that this book is stolen property. It was reported as “unsold and destroyed” to the publisher, and neither the author nor the publisher has received any payment for this “stripped book.”

Many thanks to Allison Lyons
for her enthusiasm for this story.

With gratitude to all the Harlequin Intrigue authors
whose books made me dream of joining their ranks,
for showing me how it's done.

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SILENT NIGHT STAKEOUT

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

A lifelong mystery reader, Kerry Connor first discovered romantic suspense by reading Harlequin Intrigue books and is thrilled to be writing for the line. Kerry lives and writes in New York.

Books by Kerry Connor

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

Regina Garrett—A client's murder turns the defense attorney into a target herself.

Marcus Waters—The homicide detective has an instinctive dislike for defense attorneys, but isn't about to let that stop him from solving this case—and keeping Regina safe.

Jeremy Decker—He knew something someone would kill to keep quiet.

Lauren Decker—If Jeremy's sister knows what secrets her brother was keeping, she isn't telling.

Jeff Polinsky—Marcus's partner doesn't bother to hide his dislike of Regina.

Cole Madison—Is the wealthy man a simple crime victim, or something more?

Tracy Madison—A woman who is possessive toward what she considers hers.

Donald Gaines—A man with powerful connections and no qualms about using them.

Eric Howard—How much does Jeremy's childhood friend know?

Troy Lewis—Lauren's ex-boyfriend is nothing but trouble.

Adrian Moore—His responsibilities extend far beyond his job description.

Prologue

Jeremy Decker sat in the driver's seat of the parked car, hands clenched on the steering wheel, and tried to fight the fear gripping his body.

The feeling was nothing new. It seemed as if he'd spent the past year being afraid, ever since the night the police had arrested him. He still remembered the shock and terror of those moments when they'd slapped the cuffs on and dragged him away. The first days after the arrest had been nerve-racking because he hadn't known what would happen next. Then there'd been all the long months in jail when he'd been scared to sleep, scared to turn his back on anyone, scared that he'd never see the outside again.

But never in his life had he been as scared as he was right now.

Outside, the temperature was almost zero. A thick layer of snow was on the ground, the wind blowing gusts of it across the deserted street. He knew the cold had to be seeping into the vehicle more and more every moment he sat there. White puffs of air appeared in front of his face with every breath he took. He barely felt it, unable to feel anything but the fear holding him in place.

He didn't make a move to restart the engine and turn on the heat. It would only delay what he needed to do. He needed to push the door open. He needed to get out of the car and walk into the office building where his lawyer was waiting for him. He needed to get help.

He needed to tell.

Just the thought of it made him swallow hard, his lungs tightening painfully in his chest. The idea was terrifying, no matter how much he knew he had to do it. Ms. Garrett would know what to do. She'd fought hard for him, done everything she could for him, gotten him out of jail.

Now, though, he couldn't help but wish she hadn't fought so hard, had left him there, where it suddenly seemed so much safer.

Lost in his thoughts, he barely had time to react to the sound of the back door being wrenched open before someone slid into the seat behind him.

He jerked his head up to meet the intruder's eyes in the rearview mirror. He felt no surprise at what he saw. There was only the fear, rising another notch to outright horror.

"Does she know? Did you tell her?"

He somehow managed to make his throat move, to force out the sound. "No."

"But you were going to, weren't you?"

There was no point in lying. He was sure the answer was written all across his face. He couldn't keep it from his eyes as they stared back at those in the mirror.

Staring at those eyes, he never saw the knife. He only felt it, the pain sharp and swift and agonizing against his

neck. His mouth fell open in shock, in terror. He couldn't move, couldn't find the power to utter a single word.

He could only stare into those eyes as they stared back, grim and determined.

Before he realized it, he felt it, the cold, in a way he hadn't before. It poured into his body, insistent and unrelenting, filling him down to the bone. Until he could feel nothing else.

Cold. So cold.

And then he felt nothing at all.

Chapter One

“Tell me you’re not still at the office.”

Bracing the phone between her ear and shoulder, Regina Garrett smiled at the dismay in her friend’s voice.

“I answered the phone here, didn’t I?”

“You’re supposed to be on vacation!”

“And I will be, just as soon as I see one last client.”

A client who was already more than an hour late, she noted with another glance at the clock. Jeremy Decker had practically begged her to see him, so if anything, she would have expected him to be early. But an hour after their designated meeting time, he had yet to appear. She wasn’t sure whether to be concerned or annoyed, though annoyance was starting to win out.

“There’s always one more client with you,” Cheryl said. “That’s the reason you haven’t had a vacation in three years.”

Four, Regina thought, not about to correct Cheryl when she was already in mid-lecture. The last thing her friend needed was more reason to get riled up.

“Not this year. This really is the last client. My calendar is cleared for the next three weeks, my bags are packed and tomorrow morning I’ll be on a plane.”

“Uh-huh. I’ll believe it when I see it.”

“I booked the flight and the hotel long ago, and both are nonrefundable. I’m going.”

“I guess that’s something. You might be a workaholic, but I’ve never known you to throw away money like that.” Sounding slightly mollified, Cheryl sighed. “Christmas in the Caribbean. I really envy you.”

“You wouldn’t miss Christmas with your family for anything,” Regina pointed out.

“I know, but I wouldn’t mind exchanging all this snow and ice for a sunny beach. The tropics will sure be a big change from Chicago.”

“You’ve got that right. It’ll be nice to get some actual sun in December.” It would be even nicer to have the kind of Christmas Cheryl had in store for her, with her kids and husband and multitude of assorted relatives, all squeezed together in a house that wasn’t really made to accommodate so many people. But they would make do, and be happy, laughing and eating and loving, just enjoying being together.

Regina swallowed the pang of envy as she pictured it. Ever since her mother’s death, she’d been alone for the holidays. There was no other family left, and unlike Cheryl and pretty much every one of her friends, she was still single. Meeting the right man wasn’t easy in her line of work. As a criminal defense attorney with her own small practice, she worked long hours, and bad guys were more likely to cross her path than good ones. And given how she spent her days, it was even more important to her that any man she spend her nights with be a good one, someone real and honorable and true.