

Chapter Two

Chicago, 2010, Twenty Years Later

Thursday Evening

Ben Bradshaw stooped down next to a headstone. He held a piece of wax paper over the stone and rubbed it with a soft object. The image of the gravestone appeared on the paper, capturing the bumps, crevices, patterns, and features of the letters and character of the stone.

Ben wanted to do a good job on this one. It would make a great addition to his ‘Famous Chicago People’ collection. The letters appeared on his side of the paper as he rubbed, ‘OSCAR F. MAYER.’

Just as Ben finished up with the dates, a security guard came up behind him. “What’re you doing?”

Ben turned around. “Nothing, just taking, like, you know, a picture of this.”

“That don’t look like no camera. You’re defacing private property.”

The guard took out his radio and called, “Yeah, I got that wacko here.”

Ben gathered up his stuff quickly and sprinted toward the cemetery gates.

“Hey, you, get back here.” He shouted into the radio, “He’s getting away.”

Ben slipped and plowed headfirst into a headstone. Oscar Mayer fell to the ground. Ben looked back and saw the guard stumble, fall, get up, and limp toward him. Ben panicked. His feet couldn’t quite grip the slick grass, and his documents were all over the wet lawn. The guard was fifty yards away, but still coming, talking into the radio.

Ben gathered up Oscar Mayer with his left hand and clutched the top of the headstone for support. He fell again, face down in the mud, protecting Oscar from the force of the fall. He looked behind him. Wait. The guard seemed confused as he surveyed the cemetery, peering around bushes, looking for Ben. Ben could see the guard, but it seemed that the guard lost track

of Ben. Ben held his breath and crouched low against the headstone. He maneuvered his body to allow the many statues and monuments to block him from the guard's view.

The guard turned in another direction. Ben angled his body again so that the guard couldn't see him, but that was only a temporary solution. He had to get to the gates, and fast.

Ben checked that Oscar Mayer was safely tucked under his left arm. He was careful to avoid exposing himself to the enemy guard. He clenched his bag with his left fingers, because he'd need his right hand free to pull himself up. His plan was to wait for the guard to look away, then grab the headstone he was using for cover and run to the gates. It was a good plan. The guard wandered to the left, but continuously searched for signs of the criminal Ben. Another guard came out of the building a hundred yards away. Ben had to go.

Ben gripped the top of the headstone for support with his right hand, ready to pull himself up for the sprint. He had Oscar Mayer cradled under his left arm and his bag in his left hand.

Ben angled his head toward the headstone for one last look, to make sure his right hand had a good grip, good enough to pull himself up and launch him toward the gates, but not firm enough that his skin and blood would end up on that headstone from some stupid piece of sharp, jutting rock at the top, just waiting to slice his finger open if he grabbed it the wrong way. He also needed to figure out how to get around the headstone, which interfered with his path to the gates.

Ben sneaked his right hand up and rubbed the top of the stone from his position on the ground. All right, no sharp edges. He got a good grip, but he thought he heard the guards coming closer and lay still. Ben couldn't tell where the guards were anymore because his face was flat on the ground.

Ben peeked around and behind the headstone to lay out his path to the gate. It was now or never. He'd have to run like a rabbit to get out of Rosehill Cemetery.

Then it happened.

The headstone that protected him bore the initials, 'MC' on the bottom left.

Miller's Chapel crashed into Ben's brain like a tornado in the night. His mind didn't even have to search for the image. The initials were just there, staring at him again, now, twenty years later, exactly the same, those same initials in the same place, same size, 'MC,' and the memory, still clear after all these years, of the grave of the girl who died at Miller's Chapel thirty years ago.

Ben sank down. "Oh, my God, oh, my God." The name on the headstone was Antisha Dunne, 1985-2009. Ben stared at the name, a girl's name, and then at the initials, but the security guards saw him this time. Ben got up and sprinted, dodging headstones.

He craned his neck backward to see if the guards were coming toward him, but not looking where he was going, and concentrating on protecting his prize, he tripped over a three-inch-high plastic fence and slammed into the arm of a statue. Ben held his shoulder as he bolted through the gates and into the street.