

Kit Frazier

MORGUE FILE



Chapter One

“You found a head in a box?” I nearly dropped the desk phone. “You’re calling off the Team Six Search and Rescue practice because you found a head in a box?”

“Three heads, and I didn’t find them, they found me,” said Detective Jim Cantu.

I made a sound, half gasp, half squeak. Marlowe dashed out from under my desk, a snarl twisting his otherwise handsome husky-mutt face.

I reached down to stroke his ear, which calms him, and to be honest, calms me, too. My boss, Mike Tanner, poked his head out of his glass-enclosed office his nostrils flaring like he smelled a scoop. Based on past experience with boundaries and bosses, I chose not to stroke his ear. And he was right. He did smell a scoop. But it was *my* scoop, and I was determined to keep it that way.

I gave Tanner the okay sign, waving him away, knowing if he heard the details, he’d take Cantu’s heads-in-a-box story and assign it to Paul Shiner, News Boy in training. Obituary writers like me are supposed to write obituaries, not award-winning investigation pieces that’d give them a shot at the City Desk downtown, where reporters write real stories, have offices with walls and sleek, shiny new computers that don’t require a sledge hammer to reboot.

I turned my back toward Tanner, listening closely to Cantu. “I can’t really get into it, but a kid from Fed Ex called saying,” I heard paper rattling and I knew he was squinting his dark, handsome eyes at his notebook, trying not to use the reading glasses his wife

bought him last week. “He said he noticed a funk from one of the boxes and dug it out of a pile. It was leaking.”

“Did he open the box?”

“Yep. Hurlled all over his Wheelies.”

“That bad?” I said, a bizarre mix of horror and curiosity nudging me on.

“They were wrapped in Saran Wrap. They looked like regular people’s heads. Except, you know, where the bodies should be, it was bloody stumps.”

My stomach lurched. In my brief time writing obituaries for the *Austin Sentinel* satellite office and volunteering for Team Six Search and Rescue in lieu of a social life, I’ve seen a lot of trippy stuff—drugs smuggled through an exotic pet shop, federal snitches gunned down on the courthouse steps, but this was the first case of disembodied heads going postal.

“Anything I can do?” I said into the phone, trying to shake the visual of the heads in a box out of my frontal lobe.

“Yeah,” he said. “Call Olivia, get the word out that there’s a change of plans for Six this afternoon.”

“Yeah, sure.” I glanced over at Tanner, who was staring at me like he was trying to mentally bug the phone line. I lowered my voice. “This going to turn into a search and rescue thing?”

“Don’t know yet. I got the *from* and *to* addresses. I’m going to check ‘em out. You gonna help Olivia get the word out about the cancellation?” he said and I hesitated.

“As much as I can. I’ve got plans,” I said, twisting the phone cord. “Logan’s back.”

There was a long silence and I smiled.

Jim Cantu was a beat cop when my father was a detective. After Daddy died, Cantu took it upon himself to watch over me, Mama and my sister. He chaperoned my first date,

stood by me when I fell head over high heels for my lying, cheating ex-husband, Dr. Dick, and nearly choked the man to death when he broke my heart. I will always love him for that.

“I’ll call you in the morning,” I said.

“I’ll be in touch before that if Team Six has to hunt down the bodies that belong to these heads,” he said.

I grinned. “It won’t come to that.”

“Yeah,” he said. “Maybe. Have fun on your date.”