

CHAPTER THREE

Albuquerque, 2002.

The people who worked the various enterprises located in the manufacturing section of Albuquerque's Negocio Commercial Park usually refrained from working nights or weekends. The general attitude was if you couldn't get it done during regular weekday business hours, it would simply have to wait until the following week.

If factory lights burned nights or weekends, they would draw eyebrows raised to points—indignant, suspicious points. But everyone around Negocio knew Frost Glove Company was not your typical factory; and neither Miss Kate Frost nor her father CJ fell under the category of normal, typical, or ordinary.

For one thing, the entire Negocio development was built around Frost Glove Company's original building, a historically preserved treasure. Then there was talk of CJ's father, and his hush-hush work for the government around about the time of World War II with the likes of Oppenheimer and Fermi. That was when CJ and his old uncle took over the business. Then, wouldn't you know, CJ, an aeronautical engineer by education, followed in his father's footsteps. Went down there to Alamogordo just like his old man, to work on some secret post war project. He left his father and the old uncle running the business in his absence. When first his father died, then the Uncle, CJ was forced to return to Albuquerque, and return he did, and brought with him a strange group to help him run the family business.

A lot of gossip followed his return. Maybe it was as simple as his eyes, how they seemed to reflect dirty ice, or his thin lips, how they looked for a way to disappear altogether. Then of course, there were the mysterious circumstances surrounding his wife Katherine's sudden death, leaving their little daughter motherless, well...

And talk about strange; Kate Frost had strangeness written all over her. Folks never could put their finger on it. She was just different. If ever she bothered to meet someone's gaze, they came away with the sensation those peculiar eyes of hers had looked right through them. A withdrawn workaholic with no noticeable social life, there was just something about that woman that

didn't seem natural.

Take this whole weekend, for instance. Frost Glove's factory lights burned straight through, ignoring the usual business tradition for this particular commercial park: it-can-wait-until-Monday.

Had anyone dared to peek inside they would have seen Kate Frost's usually immaculate office was a jumble of samples of fabric and leather, paper patterns, prototypes of gloves in various stages of design and completion. Reams of paper, piles of ledgers, folders, and computer printouts covered desks, counter tops, and cutting tables. The fax machine stood against one wall like a Las Vegas hooker, available around the clock. The copy machine's motor hummed its endless tune.

Mixed in with the unmistakable odor of yarn dyes and the distinctive smell of scraps of suede and leather was the added odor of food. Not a pleasant blending. A fresh nose could determine why the place reeked: the stale remains of a container of mushroom-spinach soup, the leftover skeleton of a fried catfish, a greasy plate from *quesadillas*, empty bottles of *cerveza*, the liquid essential to quench the chili pepper fire.

Never a gourmet, Kate turned ravenous whenever tension gripped her. Getting the reports ready for Monday's meeting with her former lover Geoffrey Kenilworth, who just happened to be the Senior Loan Officer of The Old Mercantile Bank was work, but that wasn't what made her devour tremendous quantities of food. Like some people find exercise their release, for Kate, work was therapeutic. No, the agitated nerves triggering her weekend binge were due to some internal sense of foreboding.

Certain she had ended things with Geoff as amicably as possible she knew it had hurt him. Still she refused to believe her tension had anything to do with him. True, CJ was failing, but that was not a new situation. Nor would it change dramatically anytime soon.

Usually stoic, this invasion of darkness forced forward a childhood memory. Kate's sixth grade class, studying the South and racial bigotry, was taken on a field trip to see the musical "Showboat." Men and women danced, everyone sang jolly songs, and one pretty girl fell in love with a handsome fellow. All of a sudden, young Kate realized the mood and music had changed. A group of blacks, or coloreds, as they were called in the show, sang a gloomy song, "Misery's Comin' Around," and they had been right.

Now older and wiser, her papers in order, all expenses and estimated income tallied, her plans for the future of Frost Glove Company efficiently outlined, Kate should have felt upbeat. Instead, she could not dispel the mood of that song.