

| CHAPTER 45

Photographs were scattered all over the bed, along with old birthday cards and some dried rose petals. Candles illuminated the room, and the flames seemed to dance to the beat as Sade sang about a lost love. Leslie poured another glass of Scotch as she sat on the edge of the bed, wearing her old wedding gown, staring at the pieces of her broken heart. She was holding a set of keys that she had taken from Victor's house. She thought it was funny how some people were such creatures of habit, Victor being one of them; and no matter how much time passed, old habits never die. Victor always kept an extra set of keys for every lock on one key ring. He hid the keys in an old sweat sock in his sock drawer. The car, house, New York apartment, and safe deposit box keys were all on one ring and in her hand. Leslie decided that being an ex had advantages that the soon-to-be probably wasn't privy to yet. She even found the paperwork for the alarm system and hoped the password was still the same, just in case she needed to get into the house again. She had all the codes to contact them and have it reset, if necessary. She could not believe how easy he was making this for her; it almost took the fun out of it.

She got up from the bed and walked over to the dresser. More pictures of the two of them were taped to the mirror—some were from their wedding, others from a vacation in the islands. Leslie took a long drag from the cigarette and opened the top drawer. The .38 caliber gun was sitting on top of a pair of red satin panties. She held it with both hands and pointed it at her image in the mirror.

"Bang, bang," she said, taking a sip of her drink. "Too hot in August, huh? Well, I've got some heat for your ass, Mr. Baxter."

The telephone rang, and she wasn't going to answer it but changed her mind because it could be important.

"Hey, baby, I'm just looking at some old pictures." Pause. "We've been over this three

times already! It's going to work, trust me. The password should be VBESQ. If that doesn't work, try ATTYVB." Pause. "Just make it sound realistic, but don't go overboard." Pause. "Okay, I'll see you tomorrow," she said and then hung up the phone.

Ironically, "Bullet Proof Soul" was playing as she returned the gun to the drawer. She sang along with Sade, lying down in the center of the bed, wanting to drown in her memories.

"I came in like a lamb, but I intend to leave like a lion," she sang softly as the tears rolled down her face.