**Windfall**

**Chapter One**

*Saturday, March 2*

*Minneapolis*

An hour had passed before she was able to flee the house. At least that’s how long it seemed; she actually wasn’t sure how much time had elapsed. In some ways it seemed like mere minutes; in other ways it seemed as though the terror had always been with her, that she’d had no life before it. That the man she fled from had long since left her house was utterly beside the point.

On the plus side, she hadn’t yet committed suicide. That seemed the man’s major concern; he had watched her for nearly an hour before leaving. The urge will subside, he’d said, even though that was hard to imagine now.

Subside, he’d added, but not disappear.

She’d avoided the mirror while hunting for her clothing, stopping to feel her hands, her face, her body. Yes, she was still here.

And it *had* really happened.

He’d talked a lot, probably just to fill the time. He’d told her his name, Terrence, which he said was his actual given name. He had been solicitous—apologetic even, assuring her that the ordeal was necessary and was not about her. He had said she’d be able to function again in a couple of days.

It had taken her forever to get dressed in the dim light; why hadn’t she turned the damn lights on? He had removed her clothing—for her comfort, he’d said. She finally located her clothes, and with a supreme effort of concentration, hindered by jerky, uncoordinated motions as well as the sheer terror, she managed to get them on.

He’d apparently been serious when he had warned her against fleeing. “You won’t be in much shape to drive,” he’d said. And then he’d added, in the most accurate statement he had made during their time together: “You won’t be able to run from this experience.”

But she also could not have stopped herself from running.

She staggered out the door to the garage, got into her vehicle, and after several tries was able to start the engine. She took deep breaths, forcing herself to concentrate as she backed the car down the driveway. Then she shifted to drive and moved forward. Abruptly, waves of terror returned, and she floored the accelerator. The car careened wildly down the street, striking at least two other vehicles. But she pressed on, despite having no destination.

She stopped the car at an intersection after a while—perhaps ten minutes. She sat for several more minutes, taking big, heaving breaths, managing to calm herself down. Then she fumbled in her purse, managing to extract her phone and punch in a speed dial number.

“Yes?”

“It’s me. I—I . . .”

“What’s wrong?”

“A man. He—oh, God.”

“What happened, for heaven’s sake?”

“I—I can’t . . .”

“Is he gone?”

“Yes.”

“Did you call the police?”

“No! I can’t!”

“I’ll be right over.”

“I’m not at home.” She looked up at the street signs and read off the names.

“Don’t move. I’ll be right there. We’ll get your car back home, and then you can tell me what happened, and we’ll get you to a hospital, or—”

“No! I need to hide.”

A pause. “Just hold on. I’ll be right there.”

She waited, looking out the car windows. The roads were nearly deserted, and she realized that it must be late—past midnight. She might live until help arrived, or even longer. But for her, it would always be the middle of the night.