

# MEMORY IN DEATH

TITLES BY J. D. ROBB

*Naked in Death*

*Glory in Death*

*Immortal in Death*

*Rapture in Death*

*Ceremony in Death*

*Vengeance in Death*

*Holiday in Death*

*Conspiracy in Death*

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*Witness in Death*

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*Key of Valor*

*Northern Lights*

*Blue Dahlia*

*Black Rose*

*Red Lily*

*Blue Smoke*

BY NORA ROBERTS AND

J. D. ROBB

*Remember When*





# MEMORY IN DEATH



J. D. ROBB

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There was an old woman who lived in a shoe,  
She had so many children she didn't know what to do;  
She gave them some broth without any bread;  
She whipped them all soundly and put them to bed.

—NURSERY RHYME

Memory, the warder of the brain.

—WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE



# MEMORY IN DEATH





DEATH WAS NOT TAKING A HOLIDAY. NEW YORK may have been decked out in its glitter and glamour, madly festooned in December of 2059, but Santa Claus was dead. And a couple of his elves weren't looking so good.

Lieutenant Eve Dallas stood on the sidewalk with the insanity of Times Square screaming around her and studied what was left of St. Nick. A couple of kids, still young enough to believe that a fat guy in a red suit would wiggle down the chimney to bring them presents instead of murdering them in their sleep, were shrieking at a decibel designed to puncture eardrums. She wondered why whoever was in charge of them didn't haul them away.

Not her job, she thought. Thank God. She preferred the bloody mess at her feet.

She looked up, way up. Dropped down from the thirty-sixth floor of the Broadway View Hotel. So the first officer on-scene had reported. Shouting, "Ho, ho, ho"—according to witnesses—until he'd gone *splat*, and had taken out some hapless son of a bitch who'd been strolling through the endless party.

The task of separating the two smashed bodies would be an unpleasant one, she imagined.

Two other victims had escaped with minor injuries—one had simply dropped like a tree and cracked her head on the sidewalk in shock when the nasty spatter of blood, gore, and brain matter had splashed all over her. Dallas would leave them to the medical techs for the moment, and get statements when, hopefully, they were more coherent.

She already knew what had happened here. She could see it in the glassy eyes of Santa's little helpers.

She started toward them in a boot-length black leather coat that swirled in the chilly air. Her hair was short and brown around a lean face. Her eyes were the color of good, aged whiskey and were long like the rest of her. And like the rest of her, they were all cop.

"Guy in the Santa gig's your buddy?"

"Oh, man. Tubbs. Oh, man."

One was black, one was white, but they were both faintly green at the moment. She couldn't much blame them. She gauged them as late twenties, and their upscale partywear indicated they were probably junior execs at the firm that had had its holiday bash rudely interrupted.

"I'm going to arrange to have you both escorted downtown where you'll give your statements. I'd like you to voluntarily agree to illegals testing. If you don't . . ." She waited a beat, smiled thinly. "We'll do it the hard way."

"Oh, man, oh, shit. Tubbs. He's dead. He's dead, right?"

"That's official," Eve said and turned to signal to her partner.

Detective Peabody, her dark hair currently worn in sporty waves, straightened from her crouch by the tangle of body parts. She was mildly green herself, Eve noted, but holding steady.

"Got ID on both victims," she announced. "Santa's Lawrence, Max, age twenty-eight, Midtown address. Guy who—ha-ha—broke his fall's Jacobs, Leo, age thirty-three. Queens."

"I'm going to arrange to have these two taken into holding, get a test

for illegals, get their statements when we finish here. I assume you want to go up, look at the scene, speak with the other witnesses.”

“I . . .”

“You’re primary on this one.”

“Right.” Peabody took a deep breath. “Did you talk to them at all?”

“Leaving that for you. You want to take a poke at them here?”

“Well . . .” Peabody searched Eve’s face, obviously looking for the right answer. Eve didn’t give it to her. “They’re pretty shaken up, and it’s chaos out here, but . . . We might get more out of them here and now, before they settle down and start thinking about how much trouble they might be in.”

“Which one do you want?”

“Um. I’ll take the black guy.”

Eve nodded, walked back. “You.” She pointed. “Name?”

“Steiner. Ron Steiner.”

“We’re going to take a little walk, Mr. Steiner.”

“I feel sick.”

“I bet.” She gestured for him to rise, took his arm, and walked a few paces away. “You and Tubbs worked together?”

“Yeah. Yeah. Tyro Communications. We—we hung out.”

“Big guy, huh?”

“Who, Tubbs? Yeah, yeah.” Steiner wiped sweat from his brow. “Came in about two-fifty, I guess. So we figured it’d be a gag to have him rent the Santa suit for the party.”

“What kind of toys and goodies did Tubbs have in his sack today, Ron?”

“Oh, man.” He covered his face with his hands. “Oh, Jesus.”

“We’re not on record yet, Ron. We will be, but right now just tell me what went down. Your friend’s dead, and so is some poor schmuck who was just walking on the sidewalk.”

He spoke through his hands. “Bosses set up this lunch buffet deal for the office party. Wouldn’t even spring for some brew, you know?” Ron

shivered twice, hard, then dropped his arms to his sides. “So a bunch of us got together, and we pooled to rent the suite for the whole day. After the brass left, we brought out the booze and the . . . the recreational chemicals. So to speak.”

“Such as?”

He swallowed, then finally met her eyes. “You know, a little Exotica, some Push and Jazz.”

“Zeus?”

“I don’t mess with that. I’ll take the test, you’ll see. All I did was a few tokes of Jazz.” When Eve said nothing, merely stared into his eyes, he welled up. “He never used heavy stuff. Not Tubbs, man, *I swear*. I’d’ve known. But I think he had some today, maybe laced some of the Push with it, or somebody did. Asshole,” he said as tears spilled down his cheeks. “He was juiced up, I can tell you that. But man, it was a *party*. We were just having fun. People were laughing and dancing. Then Tubbs, he opens the window.”

His hands were everywhere now. His face, his throat, his hair. “Oh, God, oh, God. I figured it was because it was getting smokey. Next thing you know, he’s climbing up, he’s got this big, stupid grin on his face. He shouts, ‘Merry Christmas to all, and to all a good night.’ Then he fucking dived out. Head first. Jesus Christ, he was just gone. Nobody even thought to grab for him. It happened so fast, so damn fast. People started screaming and running, and I ran to the window and looked.”

He mopped at his face with his hands, shuddered again. “And I yelled for somebody to call nine-one-one, and Ben and I ran down. I don’t know why. We were his friends, and we ran down.”

“Where’d he get the stuff, Ron?”

“Man, this is fucked up.” He looked away, over her head, out to the street. Fighting, Eve knew, the standard little war between ratting out and standing up.

“He must’ve gotten it from Zero. A bunch of us chipped in so we could get a party pack. Nothing heavy, I swear.”

“Where does Zero operate?”

“He runs a data club, Broadway and Twenty-ninth. Zero’s. Sells recreationals under the counter. Tubbs, man, he was harmless. He was just a big stupid guy.”

The big stupid guy and the poor schmuck he landed on were being scraped off the sidewalk when Eve walked into party central. It looked as she’d expected it would look: an unholy mess of abandoned clothes, spilled booze, dropped food. The window remained open, which was fortunate as the stench of smoke, puke, and sex still permeated.

Witnesses who hadn’t run like rabbits had given statements in adjoining rooms, then had been released.

“What’s your take?” Eve asked Peabody as she crossed the minefield of plates and glasses scattered on the carpet.

“Other than Tubbs won’t make it home for Christmas? Poor idiot got himself hyped, probably figured Rudolph was hovering outside with the rest of the reindeer and the sled. He jumped, in clear view of more than a dozen witnesses. Death by Extreme Stupidity.”

When Eve said nothing, only continued to look out the open window, Peabody stopped bagging pills she found on the floor. “You’ve got another take?”

“Nobody pushed him, but he had help getting extremely stupid.” Absently, she rubbed her hip that still ached a bit now and then from a healing wound. “There’s going to be something in his tox screen other than happy pills or something to give him his three-hour woody.”

“Nothing in the statements to indicate that anyone had anything against the guy. He was just a schmoe. And he’s the one who brought the illegals in.”

“That’s right.”

“You want to go after the pusher?”

“Illegals killed him. The guy who sold them held the weapon.” She caught herself rubbing her hip, stopped, and turned around. “What did you get from the witnesses regarding this guy’s illegals habit?”

“He didn’t really have one. Just played around a little now and then at parties.” Peabody paused a moment. “And one of the ways pushers increase their business is to spice the deal here and there. Okay. I’ll see if Illegals has anything on this Zero, then we’ll go have a talk with him.”

She let Peabody run the show and spent her time getting the data on the next of kin. Tubbs had no spouse or cohab, but he had a mother in Brooklyn. Jacobs had a wife and a kid. As it was unlikely any investigation would be necessary into either victim’s life, she contacted a departmental grief counselor. Informing next of kin was always tough, but the holidays added layers.

Back on the sidewalk, she stood looking at the police barricades, the throngs behind them, the ugly smears left behind on the pavement. It had been stupid, and plain bad luck, and had too many elements of farce to be overlooked.

But two men who’d been alive that morning were now in bags on their way to the morgue.

“Hey, lady! Hey, lady! *Hey, lady!*”

On the third call, Eve glanced around and spotted the kid who’d scooted under the police line. He carried a battered suitcase nearly as big as he was.

“You talking to me? Do I *look* like a lady?”

“Got good stuff.” As she watched, more impressed than surprised, he flipped the latch on the case. A three-legged stand popped out of the bottom, and the case folded out and became a table loaded with mufflers and scarves. “Good stuff. Hundred percent cashmere.”

The kid had skin the color of good black coffee, and eyes of impossible green. There was an airboard hanging on a strap at his back, and the board was painted in hot reds, yellows, and oranges to simulate flames.

Even as he grinned at her, his nimble fingers were pulling up various scarves. “Nice color for you, lady.”

“Jesus, kid, I’m a cop.”

“Cops know good stuff.”

She waved off a uniform hot-footing it in their direction. “I’ve got a couple of dead guys to deal with here.”

“They gone now.”

“Did you see the leaper?”

“Nah.” He shook his head in obvious disgust. “Missed it, but I heard. Get a good crowd when somebody goes and jumps out the window, so I pulled up and came over. Doing good business. How ’bout this red one here. Look fine with that bad-ass coat.”

She had to appreciate his balls, but kept her face stern. “I wear a bad-ass coat because I am a bad-ass, and if these are cashmere, I’ll eat the whole trunk of them.”

“Label says cashmere; that’s what counts.” He smiled again, winningly. “You’d look fine in this red one. Make you a good deal.”

She shook her head, but there was a checked one, black and green, that caught her eye. She knew someone who’d wear it. Probably. “How much?” She picked up the checked scarf, found it softer than she’d have guessed.

“Seventy-five. Cheap as dirt.”

She dropped it again, and gave him a look he’d understand. “I’ve got plenty of dirt.”

“Sixty-five.”

“Fifty, flat.” She pulled out credits, made the exchange. “Now get behind the line before I run you in for being short.”

“Take the red one, too. Come on, lady. Half price. Good deal.”

“No. And if I find out you’ve got your fingers in any pockets, I’ll find you. Beat it.”

He only smiled again, flipped the latch, and folded up. “No sweat, no big. Merry Christmas and all that shit.”

“Back at you.” She turned, spotted Peabody heading her way, and with some haste stuffed the scarf in her pocket.

“You bought something. You shopped!”

“I didn’t shop. I purchased what is likely stolen merchandise, or gray-market goods. It’s potential evidence.”

“My ass.” Peabody got her fingers on the tip of the scarf, rubbed. “It’s nice. How much? Maybe I wanted one. I haven’t finished Christmas shopping yet. Where’d he go?”

“Peabody.”

“Damn it. Okay, okay. Illegals has a sheet on Gant, Martin, aka Zero. I wrangled around with a Detective Piers, but our two dead guys outweigh his ongoing investigation. We’ll go bring him in for Interview.”

As they started toward their vehicle, Peabody looked over her shoulder. “Did he have any red ones?”

The club was open for business, as clubs in this sector tended to be, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Zero’s was a slick step up from a joint, with a circular revolving bar, privacy cubes, a lot of silver and black that would appeal to the young professional crowd. At the moment the music was tame and recorded, with wall screens filled with a homely male face, fortunately half-hidden by a lot of lank purple hair. He sang morosely of the futility of life.

Eve could have told him that for Tubbs Lawrence and Leo Jacobs the alternative probably seemed a lot more futile.

The bouncer was big as a maxibus, and his tunic jacket proved that black wasn’t necessarily slimming. He made them as cops the minute they stepped in. Eve saw the flicker in his eyes, the important rolling back of his shoulders.

The floor didn’t actually vibrate when he crossed the room, but she wouldn’t have called him light on his feet.

He gave them both a hard look out of nut-brown eyes, and showed his teeth.

“You got a problem?”

Peabody was a little late with the answer, habitually waiting for Eve to take the lead. “Depends. We’d like to talk to your boss.”

“Zero’s busy.”

“Gosh, then I guess we’ll have to wait.” Peabody took a long look around. “While we’re waiting we might as well take a look at your licenses.” Now she showed her teeth as well. “I like busywork. Maybe we’ll chat up some of your clientele. Community relations, and all that.”

As she spoke, she pulled out her badge. “Meanwhile you can tell him Detective Peabody, and my partner, Lieutenant Dallas, are waiting.”

Peabody strolled over to a table where a man in a business suit and a woman—who looked unlikely to be his wife due to the amount of breast spilling out of her pink spangled top—were huddled. “Good afternoon, sir!” She greeted him with an enthusiastic smile, and all the blood drained out of his face. “And what brings you into this fine establishment this afternoon?”

He got quickly to his feet, mumbled about having an appointment. As he rabbited, the woman rose. As she was about six inches taller than Peabody, she pushed those impressive breasts in Peabody’s face. “I’m doing business here! I’m doing business here!”

Still smiling, Peabody took out a memo book. “Name, please?”

“What the fuck!”

“Ms. What-the-Fuck, I’d like to see your license.”

“Bull!”

“No, really. Just a spotcheck.”

“Bull.” She spun herself and those breasts toward the bouncer. “This cop ran off my john.”

“I’m sorry, I’d like to see your companion license. If everything’s in order, I’ll let you get back to work.”

Bull—and it seemed the day for people to have names appropriate to their bodies—flanked Peabody, who now looked, Eve thought, like a slight yet sturdy filling between two bulky pieces of bread.

Eve rolled to her toes, just in case.

“You got no right coming in here rousting customers.”

“I’m just using my time wisely while we wait to speak with Mr. Gant. Lieutenant, I don’t believe Mr. Bull appreciates police officers.”

“I got better use for women.”

Eve rolled onto her toes again, and her tone was cool as the December breeze. “Want to try to use me? Bull.”

She saw the movement out of the corner of her eye, the flash of color on the narrow, spiral stairs that led to the second level. “Looks like your boss has time after all.”

Another appearance-appropriate name, she decided. The man was barely five feet in height and couldn’t have weighed a hundred pounds. He used the short guy’s compensation swagger and wore a bright blue suit with a florid pink shirt. His hair was short, straight, reminding her of pictures of Julius Caesar.

It was ink black, like his eyes.

A silver eyetooth winked as he offered a smile.

“Something I can do for you, Officers?”

“Mr. Gant?”

He spread his hands, nodded at Peabody. “Just call me Zero.”

“I’m afraid we’ve had a complaint. We’re going to need you to come downtown and answer some questions.”

“What sort of complaint?”

“It involves the sale of illegal substances.” Peabody glanced to one of the privacy cubes. “Such as the ones currently being ingested by some of your clientele.”

“Privacy booths.” This time he raised his spread hands in a shrug. “Hard to keep your eye on everyone. But I’ll certainly have those people removed. I run a class establishment.”

“We’ll talk about that downtown.”

“Am I under arrest?”

Peabody lifted her eyebrows. “Do you want to be?”

The good humor in Zero’s eyes hardened into something much less pleasant. “Bull, contact Fienes, have him meet me . . .”

“Cop Central,” Peabody supplied. “With Detective Peabody.”

Zero got his coat, a long white number that probably was one hundred percent cashmere. As they stepped outside, Eve looked down at him.

“You got an idiot on your door, Zero.”

Zero lifted his shoulders. “He has his uses.”

Eve took a winding route through Central, giving Zero a bored glance. “Holidays,” she said vaguely as they mobbed onto another people glide. “Everybody’s scrambling to clear their desks so they can sit around and do nothing. Lucky to book an interview room for an hour the way things are.”

“Waste of time.”

“Come on, Zero, you know how it goes. You get a complaint, you do the dance.”

“I know most of the Illegals cops.” He narrowed his eyes at her. “I don’t know you, but there’s something . . .”

“People get transferred, don’t they?”

Off the glide, she led the way to one of the smaller interview rooms. “Have a seat,” she invited, gesturing to one of the two chairs at a little table. “You want something? Coffee, whatever?”

“Just my lawyer.”

“I’ll go check on that. Detective? Can I have a minute?”

She stepped out, closed the door behind Peabody. “I was about to check my pockets for bread crumbs,” Peabody commented. “Why did we circle around?”

“No point letting him know we’re Homicide unless he asks. Far as he knows, this is a straight Illegals inquiry. He knows the ropes, knows how to grease them. He’s not worried about us taking a little poke there. Figures if we’ve got a solid complaint, he’ll fob it off, pay a fine, go back to business as usual.”

“Cocky little son of a bitch,” Peabody muttered.

“Yeah, so use it. Fumble around some. We’re not going to get him on murder. But we establish his connection to Tubbs, let him think one of his customers is trying to screw with him. Work him so we’re just trying to put this into the file. Tubbs hurt somebody, and now he’s trying to foist it off on Zero. Trying to make a deal so he gets off on the possession.”

“I got it, piss him off. We don’t give a damn either way.” Peabody rubbed her palms on her thighs. “I’ll go Miranda him, see if I can establish a rapport.”

“I’ll see about his lawyer. You know, I bet he goes to Illegals instead of Homicide.” Eve smiled, strolled off.

Outside the interview room, Peabody steadied herself, then inspired, slapped and pinched her cheeks pink. When she walked in, her eyes were down and her color was up.

“I . . . I’m going to turn on the record, Mr. Gant, and read you your rights. My . . . The lieutenant is going to check to see if your attorney’s arrived.”

His smile was smug as she cleared her throat, engaged the record, and recited the Revised Miranda. “Um, do you understand your rights and obligations, Mr. Gant?”

“Sure. She give you some grief?”

“Not my fault she wants to go home early today, and this got dumped on us. Anyway, we have information that indicates illegal substances have been bought and sold on the premises owned by . . . Shoot, I’m supposed to wait for the lawyer. Sorry.”

“No sweat.” He tipped back now, obviously a man in charge, and gave her a go-ahead wave. “Why don’t you just run it through for me, save us all time.”

“Well, okay. An individual has filed a complaint, stating that illegals were purchased from you, by him.”

“What? He complain I overcharge? If I did sell illegals, which I don’t, why does he go to the cops? Better Business Bureau, maybe.”

Peabody returned his grin, though she made hers a little forced.

“The situation is, this individual injured another individual while under the influence of the illegals allegedly purchased through you.”

Zero rolled his eyes to the ceiling, a gesture of impatient disgust. “So he gets himself juiced, then he wants to push the fact he was an asshole onto the guy who sold him the juice. What a world.”

“That’s nutshelling it, I guess.”

“Not saying I had any juice to sell, but a guy can’t go whining about the vendor, get me?”

“Mr. Lawrence claims—”

“How’m I supposed to know some guy named Lawrence? You know how many people I see every day?”

“Well, they call him Tubbs, but—”

“Tubbs? *Tubbs* went narc on me? That fat son of a bitch?”

**E**ve wound her way back, figuring she’d confused things enough that the lawyer would be hunting for them for a good twenty minutes. Rather than go into Interview, she slipped into Observation. The first thing she heard was Zero’s curse as he came halfway out of his chair.

It made her smile.

Peabody looked both alarmed and embarrassed, Eve noted. Good touch—the right touch.

“Please, Mr. Gant—”

“I want to talk to that bastard. I want him to look me in the face.”

“We really can’t arrange that right now. But—”

“That tub of shit in trouble?”

“Well, you could say that. Yes, you could say . . . um.”

“Good. And you can tell him for me, he’d better not come back to my place.” Zero stabbed a finger on her, setting his trio of rings glittering angrily. “I don’t want to see him or those asshole suits he runs with in my place again. He’ll get another kick for buying and possession, right?”

“Actually, he didn’t have any illegals on his person at the time of the incident. We’re doing a tox screen, so we can get him for use.”

“He tries to fuck with me, I’ll fuck with him.” Secure in his world, Zero sat back, folded his arms. “Say I happened to pass some juice—personal use, not for resale. We’re talking the usual fine, community service.”

“That’s the norm, yes, sir.”

“Why don’t you bring Piers in here. I’ve worked with Piers before.”

“Oh, I think Detective Piers is off duty.”

“You bring him in on this. He’ll take care of the details.”

“Absolutely.”

“Dumbass comes into my place. He *solicits* illegals from me. Fat slob’s always nickel-and-diming me, you get it? Mostly Push—and not worth my time. But I’m going to do him a favor since he and his buddies are regulars. Just a favor for a customer. He wants a party pack, so I go out of my way to do him this favor—at cost! No profit. That keeps the fine down,” he reminded her.

“Yes, sir.”

“Even gave him a separate stash, customized just for him.”

“Customized?”

“Holiday gift. Didn’t charge him for it. No exchange of funds. I ought to be able to sue him. I ought to be able to sue that rat bastard for my time and emotional distress. I’m going to ask my lawyer about that.”

“You can ask your lawyer, Mr. Gant, but it’s going to be tough to sue Mr. Lawrence, seeing as he’s dead.”

“What do you mean, dead?”

“Apparently the customized juice didn’t agree with him.” The harried and uncertain Peabody was gone, and in her place was a stone-cold cop. “He’s dead, and he took an innocent bystander with him.”

“What the hell is this?”

“This is me—oh, and I’m Homicide, by the way, not Illegals—arresting you. Martin Gant, you’re under arrest for the murder of Max Lawrence and Leo Jacobs. For trafficking in illegal substances, for owning and operating an entertainment venue that distributes illegal substances.”

She turned as Eve opened the door. “All done here?” Eve said brightly. “I have these two nice officers ready to escort our guest down to booking. Oh, your lawyer appears to be wandering around the facility. We’ll make sure he finds you.”

“I’ll have your badges.”

Eve took one of his arms, and Peabody the other, as they hauled him to his feet. “Not in this lifetime,” Eve said, and passed him to the uniforms, watched him walk out the door. “Nice job, Detective.”

“I think I got lucky. Really lucky. And I think he’s greasing palms in Illegals.”

“Yeah, going to have to have a chat with Piers. Let’s go write it up.”

“He won’t go down for murder. You said.”

“No.” As they walked, Eve shook her head. “Maybe Man Two. Maybe. But he’ll do time. He’ll do some time, and they’ll pull his operating license. Fines and legal fees will cost him big. He’ll pay. Best we get.”

“Best they get,” Peabody corrected. “Tubbs and Jacobs.”

They swung into the bull pen as Officer Troy Trueheart stepped out. He was tall, and he was built, and he was as fresh as a peach with the fuzz still on it.

“Oh, Lieutenant, there’s a woman here to see you.”

“About what?”

“She said it was personal.” He glanced around, frowned. “I don’t see her. I don’t think she left. I just got her some coffee a few minutes ago.”

“Name?”

“Lombard. Mrs. Lombard.”

“Well, if you round her up, let me know.”

“Dallas? I’ll write up the report. I’d like to,” Peabody added. “Feels like taking it all the way through.”

“I’ll remind you of that when this goes to court.”

Eve walked through the bull pen and to her office.

It was a stingy room with barely any space for the desk, a spare chair, and the skinny pane of glass masquerading as a window. She didn’t have any problem spotting the woman.

She sat in the spare chair, sipping coffee from a recyclable cup. Her hair was reddish blond, worn in a cap that had apparently exploded into curls. Her skin was very white, except for the pink on her cheeks, the pink on her lips. Her eyes were grass green.

Middle fifties, Eve judged, filing it all away in a fingersnap. A big-boned body in a green dress with black collar and cuffs. Black heels, and the requisite enormous black purse sitting neatly on the floor by her feet.

She squeaked when Eve came in, nearly spilled the coffee, then hastily set it aside.

*“There you are!”*

She leaped up, the pink in her face deepening, her eyes going bright. There was a twang to her voice, and something in it set Eve’s nerves on edge.

“Mrs. Lombard? You’re not allowed to wander around the offices.”

“I just wanted to see where you worked. Why, honey, just *look* at you.” She rushed forward, and would have had Eve in an embrace if Eve’s reflexes weren’t so quick.

“Hold it. Who are you? What do you want?”

Those green eyes widened, went swimming. “Why, honey, don’t you know me? I’m your mama!”