



*INTO THE  
WHIRLWIND*



A NOVEL BY

ELIZABETH CAMDEN



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Elizabeth Camden, *Into the Whirlwind*  
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CHICAGO  
OCTOBER 8, 1871

A wall of fire towered over Mollie. The city of Chicago had been burning for hours, the scorching wind stirring up firestorms that barreled down the narrow streets and illuminated the night sky. It was getting hard to breathe. Smoke and ash hung in the air, coating Mollie's throat until her thirst grew more painful than the blistering heat. The crush of people jostling to flee northward made it hard to even keep standing.

The city Mollie loved so well was being destroyed as flames engulfed buildings, weakening them until they collapsed into piles of rubble, blocking escape routes and sending throngs of people into greater panic. By tomorrow, Chicago would be nothing more than a smoldering ruin.

"Mollie, watch out!" Zack shouted. She followed his line of sight. A riderless horse careened straight at her, cutting through the people packed on the street. A woman screamed and dove for cover, but Mollie was trapped by the wagon beside her. She flinched away from the stallion's flailing hooves just as Zack's

hands closed around her waist, hauling her out of harm's way a second before the horse barreled past.

"Thank you," she gasped before her throat seized in a fit of coughing.

"Come on," he commanded, grabbing her hand and pulling her forward. "We've got to get across the river before the bridge burns. We can make it, Mollie." He grinned down at her, his teeth flashing white against his soot-stained face.

Zack Kazmarek was a savior in the chaos, his powerful build shouldering through the crowd and helping them both get farther north. A layer of ash covered his coat, but it couldn't disguise the jacket's fine cut or his confident manner as he pushed onward. Zack had accompanied her into a literal inferno, but never once had he complained.

Why would a man who disliked her be so generous? For three years, Zack had been icily aloof toward her, so why should he risk his life to help her?

The crowd thickened near the Rush Street Bridge. Ahead of them, people yelled and started pushing the crowd back. It was impossible to hear what they were saying over the roar of wind and the clamoring bells, but as she got closer, Mollie saw the problem.

The bridge was on fire.

"We can still make a run for it," Mollie said, and she pushed forward.

The bridge was a hundred yards long, and orange flames were licking at the wooden railings. The planking smoldered where cinders ignited the wood, but most of the bridge looked sound. A few people made a dash for it, and with the wall of fire behind them, Mollie intended to get across that bridge.

Zack's hand was like iron as he hauled her back and whirled her to face him. His eyes glittered in a face streaked with soot

and sweat as he stepped closer, shouting over the roar of wind and fire.

“That bridge isn’t going to hold!” he shouted. “I won’t watch you kill yourself. We can make it to the bridge on Clark Street.”

In all the years she had known the impeccable Zack Kazmarek, there had never been a hint of a pulse beneath his tailored suits and starched collars, but now he looked at her with desperation in his eyes. He grasped her arms as though he couldn’t bear to let her go and it made her think . . . well, it looked as if he actually cared about her. Which was impossible . . . they barely knew each other.

Until six days ago, they had never even had a real conversation. Until six days ago, Zack was merely the lawyer who signed her paychecks and intimidated the stuffing out of her.

Six days ago was another lifetime. . . .

*SIX DAYS EARLIER*

The paper was thick and creamy, embossed with a gold letterhead and engraved ink. Mollie read the note for a second time.

*Miss Knox,*

*I would like to meet with you to discuss a potential business venture. I will call at the 57th Illinois Watch Company at 2 p.m. this afternoon.*

*Zachariasz Kazmarek,  
Attorney for Hartman’s, Inc.*

Despite the note’s formal tone, Mollie was smart enough to be scared stiff.

Zack Kazmarek was the legal mastermind behind the city’s most elite mercantile empire. Half of Chicago was in his back

pocket, and the other half was afraid of him. Mollie fell into both categories. He had always been coolly polite to her, but Mollie knew better than to let that lull her into a false sense of security. After all, the rumors about Mr. Kazmarek were legendary.

The workshop was filled with the sounds of whirring lathes as workers constructed the tiny watch components, but the distinctive tapping of Frank Spencer's cane cut through the noise.

"Good news?" he asked.

"I don't know," Mollie said. She leaned closer so her voice would not be heard over the steady grind of the workshop and read the note to Frank in a low voice. Frank's sightless eyes stared straight ahead as he absorbed the words, memorizing them with his impressive mind. Not many people would have hired a blind man for their attorney, but Mollie was eternally grateful to Frank for saving her father's life at the Battle of Winston Cliff, and he would always have a home at the 57th Illinois Watch Company. Frank was like a second father to her, and she trusted him implicitly.

Frank rubbed his lean jaw as he considered the message. "In all the years we've been dealing with Hartman's, they have never come in person to the workshop. This is odd." Concern was plain in his tone. Frank was the only other person in the company who understood how precarious their financial situation was.

The 57th Illinois Watch Company made the most beautiful watches in America. With enameled dials and hand-engraved gold cases, each watch was a marvel of engineering combined with spectacular artistry. They were also outrageously expensive, which meant Hartman's was the only store in Chicago that could afford to carry them. With its marble floors and crystal chandeliers, Hartman's supplied the millionaires of Chicago with sapphires from India, perfume from France, and Italian

suede leather so soft it draped over the hand like silk. They also sold the jewel-encrusted timepieces from the workshop of the 57th Illinois Watch Company.

When she inherited the company three years ago, Mollie realized their glaring vulnerability. They sold *all* their watches to Louis Hartman's grand store, and having only one client meant they could be wiped out the moment the mercantile king decided to use another company to supply watches for his store. Her company was at the mercy of Hartman's, which was why a sudden visit from the store's lawyer was so worrisome.

Mr. Kazmarek intimidated Mollie down to her fingertips, and she twisted the note between her hands. "I was about to settle down to lunch, but now I'm too nervous to eat anything," she confessed.

Frank looked anxious too, rubbing his hands against his vest, his eyes darting around the workshop as though he could still see. "Is everything presentable? If the lawyer is coming, he may want to inspect the property."

Mollie surveyed the workshop. She loved every square inch of this old building, with its exposed brick walls and high windows. The cavernous room was dominated by twenty worktables set at shoulder height so the technicians could work without stooping. Each technician had a jeweler's loupe over one eye and used pins and tweezers to fit delicate components together. On the other side of the room, the artisans engraved the gold watch covers. Her most valuable assets were Ulysses and Alice Adair, a married couple whose artistic creations fashioned from gold, enamel, and gemstones were soaring hymns to beauty.

Mollie's earliest memories were of playing among these tables, watching in awe as her father created the most beautiful watches in the world. When she was younger, Mollie was convinced her father was as clever as Leonardo da Vinci as he

assembled whirring, ticking pieces of metal into tiny machines that kept perfect time. Unlike the ordinary watchmakers on the East Coast, Silas Knox's watches were masterpieces of artistry, and the elite of Chicago gladly paid staggering sums for them.

Mollie had the artistic skill of a small head of cabbage, but she excelled at business and knew every facet of watchmaking from the ground up. She learned to make mainsprings when she was only ten years old. By age twelve, she could attach winding screws to the internal mechanisms and eventually mastered every phase of the watchmaking process. Now that she was in charge of the company, she balanced the accounts and managed the business operations, but she still loved donning her jeweler's loupe and assembling the delicate gaskets, springs, and rotating wheels as she indulged in the sheer joy of making a pocket watch. And the best part was that tomorrow morning she got to wake up and do it all again.

But only if she could keep the business afloat. "Alice, can you help me straighten up the office before Mr. Kazmarek gets here? I need this place to look spotless."

Alice set down her engraving tool. "An important meeting, is it?" she asked, her voice still carrying a trace of an Irish lilt. Alice's artistic skill had brought her a long way from the girl who fled the Irish potato famine two decades earlier.

There was no need to spread anxiety around the workshop before she even understood why Mr. Kazmarek was coming. "Just a meeting with one of Hartman's men," Mollie said casually.

Alice pushed herself to her feet. "Come on, let's fix you up, then. With that hair and outfit, you look like the prison warden getting ready to lock up the inmates for the night."

Mollie glanced down at her starched white shirt and plain skirt. "What's wrong with how I look?"



“Braids don’t belong on any woman over the age of twelve unless she intends to frighten the children.”

With her mass of spiraling dark curls, braids were the only way Mollie could beat her hair into submission. “This is a business meeting, not a social call.”

Alice grasped Mollie’s shoulders and guided her toward the washroom, where an old mirror hung on the outside of the door. “And if the business is with Hartman’s, you need to look the part. Stylish, elegant, and rich.” Alice shrugged out of her silk Japanese shawl and draped it around Mollie’s shoulders.

Mollie traced a finger along the hand-printed silk. “This looks like it belongs in the Louvre.”

“It belongs around your shoulders,” Alice asserted. She liberated Mollie’s inky black hair and fluffed the strands until they hung down her back in a wanton display of poor taste. With her pale skin and sky blue eyes, Mollie knew she was pretty enough, but her hair was a nightmare, always spilling out of whatever bun or braid she tried to force it into.

“Alice, I’ve met with Mr. Kazmarek dozens of times with my hair in braids. He hasn’t turned to stone yet.”

Frank pulled up a chair and took a seat. “What is he like, this Mr. Kazmarek?”

Mollie studied her thumbnail while Alice kept working at her hair. In truth, Mollie had always been overwhelmed whenever she met with Hartman’s attorney. “I don’t know much about him. I negotiate the quarterly payments, deliver the designs for the coming season’s watches, and leave.”

“But what is he *like*?” Frank pressed. “Does he have a sense of humor? Does he meet your eyes when you speak with him? Or is he always glancing about as you negotiate?”

“I don’t really know,” she confessed. “I try to finish business as quickly as possible and get out. He has a little blue finch in

his office named Lizzie. That bird never stops flitting about the cage, and sometimes she even breaks into song.”

Frank sighed in frustration. “Mollie, you have been meeting with this man for three years, and all you know about him is that he has a pet finch?”

Putting it that way, she did feel a little foolish. It was a lot easier to watch the bird than to meet the eyes of the man who held the future of her company in his hands. There were glaciers in the North Sea that shed more warmth than Mr. Kazmarek. He was a handsome man, towering well over six feet, with dark eyes and black hair. Or was it brown? She didn’t really know . . . it made her too nervous to look directly at him.

“Well, the rumors about how he conducts business are pretty shocking,” she confessed, leaning forward to relay a few of the choicest rumors about Mr. Kazmarek’s strong-arm tactics for dealing with the seamier side of Chicago’s mercantile world.

Alice finished arranging her hair. “There,” she said with satisfaction. “You look like a Botticelli masterpiece.”

Mollie stared at the results in amazement. She supposed her hair did look rather fetching the way Alice had it tumbling down like the women in one of the great romantic paintings so popular in Europe now. Two delicate gold combs anchored her hair at the crown of her head, leaving the rest free to spill down her back, but it was completely impractical. “This hairstyle will last for about five minutes,” Mollie said. Even now a few strands were falling forward and she reached to smooth them back into place.

“Leave them! The goal isn’t order,” Alice said. “I know that must seem strange to that accountant’s brain of yours, but trust me, you look fabulous.”

“Stunning,” Frank agreed.

Mollie shot an amused glance at her blind attorney. “How would you know?”

“I know Alice Adair, and her artistic judgment is flawless. Leave your hair alone. You need to impress Hartman’s man.”

There was a crash from the other side of the room. A metal bowl clanged to the floor and sprayed a fine layer of dust at the feet of Declan McNabb. The diamond powder! Declan, their metal polisher, used a paste of diamond powder and almond oil to buff their metal into a mirrorlike shine. He had just spilled a hundred dollars’ worth of diamond powder on the floor, and Mollie was not sure it could be salvaged.

But that wasn’t her concern. It was the panic in Declan’s eyes that was the problem.

“Wh . . . wh . . . why . . . why . . .”

Mollie knelt beside Declan and placed a hand on his knee. How awful to see a grown man become unglued this way. Declan was a strong, handsome man, but when the tremors hit, he was as fragile as an eggshell. “Calm down, Declan. Write the words if you can’t speak them.”

Declan reached for the pad of paper on his table, his trembling hands scribbling the words. *Why is a lawyer coming? Are we in trouble?*

His questions were a stab in Mollie’s heart. They weren’t in trouble *today*, but they would be if they lost their contract with Hartman’s, and then people like Frank and Declan would be out of a job. Declan could never find another job. He suffered from the nameless affliction that tormented so many veterans of the Civil War—the trembling and panic that came from nowhere and descended like a suffocating cloud, making it impossible to see daylight.

During the war, Mollie’s father had been a member of the 57th Illinois Infantry, a regiment that met its end backed against a cliff and was decimated in a three-day shootout that killed, crippled, or maimed the majority of the soldiers. The survivors

of that battle were like brothers to her father, and he sent out word that any wounded veteran of the 57th could find employment at his watchmaking factory in Chicago. He renamed the company in honor of his old battalion, and fifteen of the forty employees were veterans with various afflictions. Alice's husband had lost his right leg, but was still one of the world's best gold engravers. Gunner Wilson, or Old Gunner, as they sometimes called him, had lost an arm, but kept the workshop as clean as a surgical operating room. Frank had been blinded by flying shrapnel, and when there wasn't enough legal work to keep him occupied, he was able to polish metal. Declan was a healthy, able-bodied man, but his shattered mind left him with soul-destroying attacks of anxiety.

Mollie found the dustpan and nudged the top layer of the precious diamond powder into the pan, but most of it was ruined. "I don't want you to worry about this," she said to Declan. "I am always in talks with the buyers at Hartman's, making sure we are delivering what their customers want. This is no different."

Not quite true, but Declan was getting worse, a layer of perspiration soaking his skin and the muscles in his face twitching. What must it be like to be trapped inside a shattered mind? Declan was only thirty-two years old, a handsome man who had been in college when he volunteered for the Union Army. It was hard to look past his infirmity to see the courageous man her father once knew. As badly as she ached for Declan, Mollie feared the impression he would make on Mr. Kazmarek.

Mollie swept the last of the ruined diamond powder into the dustpan. It wasn't the first time Declan's trembling hands had spilled the diamond powder or broken a tool, and it wouldn't be the last. Declan was a liability to the company, and the prudent thing would be to ask him to leave for the rest of the day.

What sort of impression would a twitchy, mentally unstable metal polisher make on Mr. Kazmarek? Every instinct urged her to get Declan out of sight. How else could she present a lean, competent organization to their only client?

But she couldn't send Declan home. He was an intelligent man who would know exactly why he had been asked to leave, and she could not do that to him. She would not deny the human dignity of the men who made this company great.

Let Zack Kazmarek see the 57th in all its magnificent, imperfect glory. Mollie would ensure these people would have employment for as long as they kept turning out the world's most beautiful timepieces.



Given Frank's gentle scolding for her ignorance about Hartman's attorney, Mollie took care to scrutinize Zack Kazmarek as he paid his first visit to the workshop. He was a tall man with a powerful build, dark hair, and fierce black eyes that scanned the workshop like a hawk searching for prey. He looked flawless and intimidating in his tailored jacket, vest, and stiff white collar. Even the wind blowing from the open door behind him did not ruffle his carefully groomed hair.

Mollie hurried forward to meet him, scurrying up the half flight of stairs to join him on the landing. "Mr. Kazmarek, welcome to the 57th Illinois Watch Company. We are honored to have you here."

He took her hand but said nothing as he scrutinized her. That piercing gaze had been known to quell union leaders and businessmen all across the city, and she bobbed her head in an anxious greeting. Another gust of wind blew in behind him, and Alice's artfully placed combs began to slip from their mooring. Why had she let Alice talk her into this ridiculous hairstyle?

“You look different,” Mr. Kazmarek said with an impassive face.

In the three years they had known each other, it was the first personal comment he had ever made to her. “Won’t you come inside? I’d be pleased to show you our workroom. We have a total of forty employees, divided into eighteen distinct specializations.” She took a few steps down the stairs as she gestured toward the tables. “Everything from the cutting of metal to the engraving of the gold covers is done right here in the workshop.”

He made no move to follow her or to close the door, and the gusting wind was a problem. She darted back up the stairs and pulled the heavy door shut. “We can’t allow unsavory debris in the workroom,” she said apologetically. “The mechanisms inside the watches are very delicate.”

A hint of a smile hovered on his face. “Did you really just say *unsavory debris*?” It was the first time he had ever smiled at her, and she noticed the corner of his front tooth was chipped. Just a tiny flaw in his otherwise impeccable appearance. How was it she had never noticed it before?

If she wasn’t so nervous, she might have shared in his amusement. “Each watch consists of 115 separate pieces, most smaller than a grain of rice,” she said. “Once they are assembled, any dust or, yes, *unsavory debris*, can add friction and throw off the pivoting and rotating parts. We must keep the workshop in pristine condition.”

As she stepped down the half flight of stairs, the weight of her hair slid further down the side of her head, the combs barely holding as she began showing Mr. Kazmarek the shop. “We make all the screws, gaskets, and springs right here in the shop. You will notice that we have a set of brand-new lathes for polishing the metalwork.”

Mr. Kazmarek seemed disinterested. “Is there someplace we

can go to speak in private? As my note indicated, I have a business proposition I'd like to discuss."

A business proposition didn't sound like he was getting ready to cancel their contract, but she couldn't be sure, and her heart thudded like it was about to leap from her chest. She forced her voice to be calm. "I have an office at the back of the shop. I'd like to ask our attorney to join us. I never make any decisions without Frank Spencer's advice."

"Naturally," Mr. Kazmarek said. As they walked toward the office, Mollie noticed he was not entirely disinterested in the 57th. His dark eyes scanned everything, taking in the arrangement of the worktables, the tidy bins of supplies, even noting Ulysses Adair's crutch propped against his worktable. As they passed Ulysses, she asked him to send Frank to her office.

It was going to be a tight fit inside. She had no desk, just a large table filling most of the space where Mollie conducted the business operations of the company. Stacks of accounting books and technical manuals usually cluttered the table, but in preparation for the meeting, she had stashed them in the storage room.

"Please have a seat," she said as she led him into the office. "Can I get you something to drink? We always have a kettle of tea warming."

Was he even listening to her? He wasn't looking her in the eyes, but there was a half smile on his face. "I can't tell you how tempted I am to pull that comb out."

Her eyes widened. His voice was smooth and low, like warm chocolate with a dash of cream. It was entirely inappropriate for a business meeting. Even as he spoke, the comb slid lower and more tendrils of hair broke free. This was ridiculous. It was going to be impossible to concentrate when her hair was about to come tumbling down.

“Would you excuse me for a moment? I’ll go find what is keeping Mr. Spencer.”

The moment the office door closed she ripped both combs from her hair. It streamed behind her as she scurried to Alice’s worktable. “Quick! I am about to go into the most important business meeting of my life and I look like the harlot of Babylon.”

Alice smothered her laughter as she twisted Mollie’s hair back atop her head. “I’ll use a few pins this time,” she said.



How could her sensible attorney take a disliking to a man so quickly? By the time Mollie returned to her office, Frank and Mr. Kazmarek were trading swipes at each other.

“So you never actually attended law school,” Mr. Kazmarek stated bluntly.

Frank sat a little straighter in his chair. “I obtained my license by clerking for two judges from the Illinois Supreme Court,” he said stiffly. “It is an entirely acceptable way to attain a legal education. It was how Abraham Lincoln became qualified to practice law.”

One of Mr. Kazmarek’s dark brows flew upward. “So you are comparing yourself to *Abraham Lincoln*?”

“It is a much better way to learn the law than sitting in a classroom at Yale.” The way Frank said *Yale* made the school sound like a pair of unwashed socks.

Mollie’s eyes widened. Hadn’t she just told Frank of Mr. Kazmarek’s infamous reputation? Or the rumors about the fish? “My goodness,” she said pleasantly. “I leave for two minutes, and I find the Goths assaulting the Visigoths.”

Mr. Kazmarek shot to his feet. Was he flushing? It was impossible for her to tell as he cleared his throat, adjusted his collar, and assumed the formal demeanor she was so accustomed to



seeing from him. He held out a chair for her, and she clenched the rim of the seat so her hands wouldn't tremble.

"I'll get right down to business," Mr. Kazmarek said as he sat once again. All trace of his earlier humor vanished, and he projected the air of brisk professionalism Mollie was accustomed to. "A few years ago, Hartman's made the strategic decision to begin acquiring our best suppliers. It makes sense for us to own the major artisans who supply our goods. We have been consistently impressed with your watches and would like to buy the 57th Illinois Watch Company."

Mollie couldn't speak. She thought they might have a complaint with her watches, or she feared they might want to terminate their contract, but never had she imagined they might want to buy her out. While she sat in dumbfounded amazement, Mr. Kazmarek continued to outline the deal.

"We want the entire company. That means all the equipment and inventory in stock. The deal would need to include all the property, technology, and artistic designs of the past and present."

While he talked, Mollie's brain snapped out of paralysis and began calculating numbers. She had fifteen thousand dollars' worth of unsold inventory, but the real value of the company was in their equipment and designs. The reputation of the 57th was also worth something. She couldn't consider selling for anything less than forty thousand. Maybe even forty-five if she wanted to push her luck.

When Mr. Kazmarek got around to talking figures, her heart almost stopped. "Given the value of current inventory and your reputation for quality, we are prepared to offer sixty thousand dollars. Payable in cash. Immediately."

Mollie was stunned, especially as Mr. Kazmarek continued talking and the deal got even sweeter. "We want Miss Knox to be in charge of ongoing operations and are prepared to pay a

three percent royalty on all future business. We want to move quickly on this deal, so the offer is good only until next Monday morning, a week from today.”

Just as hope began to unfurl in Mollie’s heart, a cloud descended. There was something in this workshop more valuable than beautiful watch designs or enameled dials. “And my employees? What will happen to them?” She held her breath as she waited for his answer.

“Keep them,” he said. “We don’t want to interfere with anything that has gone into the artistry of the watches we see on display at Hartman’s.”

What a relief it would be to have the burden of ownership lifted so she could devote herself to watchmaking once again. No more snapping awake in the middle of the night worrying about invoices and payments. She smiled so wide it made her face hurt. “What do you think, Frank?”

“Why do you need an answer so quickly?” Frank asked. “This company has been in the Knox family for thirty years. Selling it is not something that should be rushed.”

He was right. It was easy to set a valuation for the inventory and equipment, but what about the worth of her father’s internal watch mechanism? Their reputation for beauty and quality had taken decades to establish, and it would take them a while to assess its proper value.

“How about until the end of the month?” she countered. “That will give me time to do a suitable accounting. I’d like to do long-term projections on the value of our designs. And compounded interest on our current equipment, of course.”

It was impossible to read Mr. Kazmarek. How could a man appear so cordial, even as his message was so ruthless? “Monday morning. Nine o’clock. If we don’t have an answer by then, we will make an offer to acquire another watch company.”

The words caused her stomach to sink like a stone. She couldn't afford to lose Hartman's business, but it would be suicide to let him know how rattled she was by the prospect. If he knew he had her over a barrel, he might tighten his deadline even more. "I appreciate your offer and will give it proper consideration."

A bit of humor lightened his gaze. "Why do you say 'proper consideration' with the same tone you say 'unsavory debris'? This is a smashing offer, and you know it."

She did not flinch. "I like the offer. I don't like the deadline."

"It is unconscionable," Frank added. "Maybe that's how they teach lawyers from Yale to operate. Not here."

Mr. Kazmarek's demeanor did not falter as he kept his gaze locked on her. "Don't let Mr. Sunshine over there distract you. I am offering you a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to merge your company with the most prestigious store west of New York. There are people who would sell their firstborn for such an opportunity."

Mollie had a respectable bank account, but sixty thousand dollars was a fortune. And she could keep working here, earning a salary, and enjoying a portion of the profits through the royalty split. The only thing she would lose by accepting the offer was control. For the past three years, at the dawn of every day, she'd worried about how to protect her employees. Her father was a disaster as a businessman, and this company would have run aground had she not been there to rein in his wilder impulses. The long-term survival of the company rested entirely on her shoulders, and Mr. Kazmarek was watching her as if she were a ripe pear about to drop from the tree.

She couldn't think with him in this tiny office. He was too overwhelming, sucking up all the oxygen. He would keep talking, distracting her from the deluge of thoughts that were fighting for space in her mind.

“I will calculate the numbers and be in contact with you soon,” she said, proud of the professional tone she managed to project.

Mr. Kazmarek stared at her. It was odd how quickly he could slip back into the hard-nosed persona that always intimidated her. “I have been doing business with you for three years,” he said in a formal tone. “In all that time, you have consistently impressed me as a businesswoman of faultless logic. Don’t let me down now.”

He stood and took his leave.

Zachariasz Kazmarek surveyed the garden behind the Hartman mansion, sheltered by a screen of poplar trees and wisteria vines. It was hard to believe he was in the middle of Chicago. There were at least forty people gathered for Josephine Hartman's evening soiree on the flagstone terrace of her garden, soft music coming from the open doors leading into the opulent home. Lanterns flickering beneath the leafy trees illuminated the evening.

"Try this," Louis Hartman said as he pressed a snifter into Zack's hand. "It is fifty-year-old cognac imported from the misty hills of southern France. My wife thinks there will be a market for it here."

Zack took a sip of the cognac. Such a drink wasn't normally to his taste, but working at Hartman's meant that certain foibles had to be observed. Josephine's annual trips through Europe were a whirlwind tour to acquire new offerings for the store, and everything was first sampled here in their palatial home. This evening, she was serving caviar from Copenhagen and cognac in glasses from the renowned Venetian glassworks. The linens covering the garden tables came from Ireland, and the candles flickering in the lanterns were made at a monastery in Spain.

Last year, Zack had accompanied the Hartmans on their trip to Europe, visiting Harrods and learning as much as he could about the luxury retail business.

Zack swirled the cognac in his glass. “Your wife said it is the best?”

Louis shrugged his shoulders. “Given what she paid for it, it ought to be.”

“If it has Mrs. Hartman’s approval, it will sell.” Just like those outrageous watches he had been researching all week. Ever since he became the lead attorney for Hartman’s, it never ceased to amaze Zack what rich people would pay for an ounce of perfume or a yard of silk, but those pocket watches were like something a Medici prince would own. Zack didn’t judge how rich people spent their money; he was simply glad they did and that he had finally earned enough to join their ranks. Not that he squandered his money frivolously. In the years since he began earning his appallingly generous salary, there was only one luxury he had purchased for himself. It was a shocking extravagance, but something he enjoyed looking at every day.

Louis leaned in a little closer. “Have you issued the offer to Mollie Knox?” he asked in a low voice.

Just the mention of that woman’s name made Zack stiffen, but he disguised the emotion. “I met with her this afternoon,” he said casually. “She has the offer.”

“Strange bird, that one.”

Zack merely nodded. “I think she will see the wisdom behind the deal. I don’t anticipate any trouble from her.”

He needed to tread carefully here. Louis Hartman had a bizarre mistrust of any close affiliation between his suppliers and employees. Zack’s predecessor had been caught taking bribes from suppliers who were anxious to have their goods sold at Chicago’s premier store. Hartman was a millionaire many times

over, but like most men who had clawed their way to the top, he was obsessed with the bottom line and loathed the prospect of being cheated. Zack knew better than to indulge his irrational yearning for Mollie Knox. Yielding to that weakness could get him fired.

“Get her on board quickly,” Louis said. “I had a good relationship with that woman’s father, so I want this deal locked down tight. Immediately. Don’t let her get sentimental and try to wiggle off the hook.”

Which showed that Louis didn’t know much about Mollie Knox. That woman was the most efficient, practical person he had ever met. She was going to analyze the deal six different ways before signing on the dotted line. She might sell the world’s most gloriously impractical watches, but her brain was as logical as an accounts chart.

“I gave her one week to consider the deal,” Zack said.

“A week? I would have offered her a day.”

Zack shook his head. “That sort of speed will make her suspicious. Trust me, she won’t do anything that might endanger that ragtag gang of people she has working for her. She will be looking for safety and security in this deal. If we push too hard, she’ll balk, and there is no comparable watchmaker in the entire country.”

A waiter stepped onto the terrace, but he carried no champagne or imported delicacies. A troubled look on the man’s face roused Zack’s interest as the waiter headed straight toward him, then leaned over to whisper discreetly.

“Sir, a woman claiming to be your mother is here to see you.”

Zack didn’t let his expression change. “Is she alone?”

“Yes, sir.”

There could be a million reasons for his mother’s unexpected arrival, none of them good. He turned toward Louis, forcing a

pleasant smile to his mouth. “If you’ll excuse me. A bit of family business,” he said, then followed the waiter into the house, down a hallway lit with crystal sconces, and toward the servants’ entrance. Had there been an accident down at the docks? He’d been begging his father to quit his job for years. No sixty-year-old man should still be loading grain elevators, but Zack had failed at pounding that fact into Jozef Kazmarek’s thick skull.

His mother was fidgeting in the room near the servants’ entrance, her colorful but threadbare shawl in stark contrast to the fine black broadcloth the Hartman servants wore.

“Is Papa all right?” Zack asked, holding his breath.

His mother’s smile set him at ease. “Oh yes,” she said as she reached up to hug him. “Well, he has been arrested, but he is perfectly fine aside from that.”

His shoulders sagged. “What has he done this time?”

One might think his mother ought to be upset at a time like this, but she appeared oddly excited. Proud, even. Her eyes sparkled, and she clasped her hands together. “Well, you know there is a Russian delegation in town. . . .”

“A Russian *trade* delegation,” Zack clarified.

His mother waved her hands dismissively. “All the same thing. There is a Russian delegation in town, and your father could not pass up an opportunity like this. He marched right down to City Hall to confront them. . . .”

His mother rambled on, but Zack stopped listening. Last night, he had explained to his parents that the men from Russia were in Chicago only to discuss shipments of dried beef. The Russian delegation had no influence with the czar, nor were they responsible for the massacre following the January Uprising eight years ago in Poland.

Neither of his parents had ever set foot in Poland, but memories among Chicago’s Polish community were long. All four of



Zack's grandparents were Polish refugees who were driven from their land as Russia whittled away at the dwindling autonomy of their homeland. His grandparents' devotion to Poland had taken root in both of Zack's parents. When the last vestiges of Polish autonomy were wiped away in 1864, his parents responded by doubling their efforts to save Poland.

He turned his attention back to his mother, who was rambling on about how brave his father had been when he'd forced his way inside the room where the Russian delegates were meeting with Chicago's mayor.

Almost as if she had been there to witness it. "Mother, please tell me you didn't go with him to City Hall."

"Of course I did! We needed as many people as possible so we could make an impression on those Russians. There were nine of us from the Polish Society. I was the only woman, and they left me alone, but they arrested all the men. I told everyone you would come and get them out of jail. '*My son is a famous lawyer for Hartman's,*' I told them. They already knew that, since we brag about you all the time." She pinched his cheek. "We are all so proud of you."

He pressed his mouth into a hard line. This wasn't the first time he had bailed members of the Polish community out of jail, nor would it be the last. Did they truly believe their saber-rattling could be heard by the czar? Or that he would care? At least his mother had not been hauled away to face the indignity of sitting in a jail cell. He squeezed her in a big hug and pressed a kiss to her forehead. His soul ached to see her tireless efforts for a cause she could never win. She had been at it all sixty years of her life and would probably be carrying the battle flag until her dying day.

"Is something amiss?" Louis Hartman stood in the doorway, his glittering wife beside him. Zack could feel his mother cringe,

embarrassed by her homespun clothing in light of Josephine's elegance. There was no need for her embarrassment. The Hartmans were fully aware of Zack's gritty roots.

Zack straightened. "My father has need of me back home," he hedged.

Mr. Hartman drew on his cigar, the tip glowing in the gathering darkness. "Not trouble on the docks, is it? Is he still working after all these years?"

Zack nodded. "Still working. I can clear this up in short order."

He didn't have any secrets from Louis Hartman, but he didn't want his mother exposed to any more embarrassment in front of Josephine Hartman. He would never forget the day both Hartmans had paid a call to their grubby tenement overlooking the docks sixteen years earlier. In those days, Zack had been working as a longshoreman, hauling huge crates of imported merchandise out of ships and into the warehouses owned by Louis Hartman. It was Zack's suggestions for streamlining the operations that first brought him praise, but it wasn't until the incident with the fish that Louis Hartman decided to pay him a visit.

In addition to the department store, Hartman's operated the best restaurants in Chicago. Zack had gotten wind that one of Hartman's merchants was substituting cheap trout for genuine white perch, and Zack was incensed. Zack barged into the merchant's genteel office, grimy and sweaty from the docks, hauling a huge basket of trout over one shoulder. Dumping a hundred pounds of dead fish onto the merchant's hand-carved desk, he made his position clear.

"That's what cheap trout looks like. Don't mistake it again." He dropped the dripping basket on the silk rug and returned to the docks.

Zack was only a twenty-year-old longshoreman, but a clever one who had already saved Hartman considerable sums by negotiating deals with the Irish labor unions who shipped their goods. Hartman prized loyalty above all else, and when word of the fish incident reached him, he saw long-term potential in the brash longshoreman. Louis Hartman offered to sponsor Zack to attend college, then bring him into management of the Hartman empire. He needed a lawyer whose allegiance was unquestioned but had the raw, aggressive spirit to tackle the burgeoning industrial world of Chicago.

Growing up, Zack lived with two other Polish families in a tenement apartment amidst the network of warehouses and stockyards that lined the docks. Louis came to the tenement to meet Zack's parents and assure them he would not only pay Zack's expenses at Yale, but also would provide a small stipend to the Kazmareks to compensate for the loss of Zack's wages. His parents had been too proud to accept the stipend, but Zack pounced on the chance to attend college. After college, it was understood Zack would return to Chicago and work for Hartman.

With his new wealth, Zack was able to buy a fine townhouse where he invited his parents to live with him. They accepted his offer, even though his father refused to quit working on the docks.

"Can I loan you a carriage?" Louis asked. "It might be difficult to get a streetcar this late in the evening."

It was true. They could probably still catch the last of the streetcars to the jail, but by the time Zack had secured his father's release, they would be facing a long walk home. "I would appreciate that," Zack said.