

CHAPTER ONE

JENNIFER BERNSTEIN LUNGED FORWARD AND popped the glove compartment of her white Camry. The darkness of the parking garage of the Tampa Airport Marriott limited her sight. Her fingers searched for the first pen she could grab. Opening her brown leather Hartman folder and ripping a piece of paper from the pad, the twenty-three year old woman's body shook from the tremor of the impact.

Jennifer sat still for a moment, her heart pounding, recalling what just happened. She opened the door and staggered out.

A composed voice in her mind softly spoke. "Take a deep slow breath and ...relax."

The voice was not hers. Puzzled from the source she shifted cautiously and stared.

Behind her, too far to have uttered the words so calmly, the stranger stood. He was tall and thin, with tanned skin and dark mesmerizing eyes. The eyes held a power all to themselves.

He walked toward her, reaching out his fingers gently touched her forearm. "Are you alright?"

Jennifer, surprised by his presence felt her emotion controlled. "I don't know," she stammered out.

"I would like you to listen to my voice."

He lifted her arm slightly. Removing his touch, her arm remained in place.

"Good, my words are comforting to you. You feel calm and ...relaxed. The muscles in your neck and shoulders are... relaxing. Now take a deep slow breath and ...relax."

Jennifer's limp body hung as if supported by threads like a puppet. All anxieties from the car accident were removed.

He raised both hands toward her face. "It's remarkable how you resemble your mother."

Jennifer's pulse rate increased. How did he know about her family?

"Tonight you are going to assist me with an endeavor, one that will give me great pleasure, one that will resolve deep discomfort in my heart." He paused and looked beyond her eyes and into her soul.

Jennifer could not speak.

He studied her mind looking for something, he knew he was close.

"Tell me what you are feeling?"

Jennifer Bernstein search for answers. "I can't," she forced out.

"I urge you to tell me what you feel."

Searching for a way out of this her thoughts darted between frustration and fear. "I don't know."

"Then you provide no purpose."

The man looked at his car and without saying a word, Jennifer understood his intentions. From the trunk of his car Jennifer lifted a cold metal object. In her mind she recognized the shape. The arm that the stranger had touched raised the gun to her left temple.

Tears ran down from Jennifer's eyes. "Don't make me do

this." She whispered.

"You want to please me don't you?" he asked.

In Jennifer's mind she was screaming "no, no," but the only word to come out was yes. Her finger fumbled and found the trigger. Her eyes shot open in terror as she quickly realized what was about to happen.

The stranger spoke urging, "be calm, relaxed and confident." Squinting his eyes, he tilted his head anticipating the brief moment of joy he was about to be given.

"Let me heighten your moment."

As he spoke those words, Jennifer's mind went into slow motion. The muscles in her right fingers tensed. Sweat surfaced on her forehead. A force was pulling her finger against the cold metal of the trigger. She could feel it begin to move. She tried to resist but something prevented her.

"When you are gone I'll see you on the other side." As he spoke those words the familiar tightening of his neck and throbbing pain in his temples began. He forced his fingers into his palm making a tight fist as the pain increased.

Jennifer's stomach heaved, she gagged and choked, her frozen arm held its position. Her ears echoed with the loud bang.

The stranger allowed her to see the bullet enter the chamber and explode in brilliant amber. The spiraling slug elongated as it moved through the barrel and found its new home. A blue grey trail of warm smoke followed behind the bullet and escaped from her head wound.

Titus absorbed the fleeting moments of her life, watching her story unfold in his mind, he was lost in trace. The pounding in his head was like thunder. The blood drained from his face as an eerie feeling of loneliness took over. The coldness of her death resurfaced his haunting memories...murder. He walked silently away from the carnage without looking back and uttered the words..."devils work." With his pain gone,

his mind was clear.

The lonely sound of the wind blowing thorough the concrete pillars removed the residual stench of gunpowder from the building. The slamming of the metal door to the steps brought closure as he descended into the spell.