

PERCHANCE TO DREAM

A MALONE NOVEL

Excerpt

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CHAPTER

ONE

The sun shone brightly through the east-facing window of Adrian Reid's office at Brentwood BMW on Santa Monica Boulevard. It made a full yellow oblong splash on the beige carpet. Reid was the owner of the dealership, one of the largest luxury brand car dealerships in Los Angeles. That alone meant he had money, but the money hadn't only come from running a successful upmarket automobile dealership. Reid came from a long line of wealthy Angelenos, a descendant of old California money.

"We expected them home yesterday evening," Reid said. "When they weren't in their rooms when we woke up this morning, my wife called Sabrina Griffith. Sabrina said they had not been down there—she had not even expected them."

"Given what you've told me," I said, "it seems your daughters, both adults in the eyes of the law, left on their own and are voluntarily absent from home."

Reid nodded in agreement.

"It appears so," he said. "That's why I called you for help instead of going to the police."

"Not much the cops could do anyway until they've been missing for seventy-two hours," I said. "Unless you have some reason to believe any circumstances exist that endangers either of them in some way."

"No, I haven't any reason to believe that," Reid said. "It's just that this is so unlike them. I only want to make sure they are safe."

"They've never disappeared before?"

"No, never. I'm sure you understand how young people these days sometimes behave irresponsibly. My daughters have sometimes exercised poor judgment, but neither has ever been in any real trouble. I allow them a good deal of independence without undue parental interference. They pretty much come and go as they please, though my wife and I have always known where they were, in a general sense. Nothing like this has ever happened before."

"Can you think of any reason they might have run away?" I said.

Reid shook his head. "None."

"Everything all right at home, no recent arguments?" I said.

"Everything at home has been fine," Reid said, "nothing out of the ordinary. No arguments I can recall. Wait, now that you mention it. We had a minor disagreement Friday evening. I didn't attach any importance to it at the time, and had forgotten all about it."

"Tell me about it," I said. "What was the disagreement about?"

"Money. We've never disagreed over anything else. It was only a minor thing."

I said, "Can you be more specific?"

"I give each of my daughters an allowance—you might say a generous allowance. And I don't keep them strictly to a budget. It isn't unusual for one or both of them to

come to me for more money. Friday evening, they asked for an amount that was both unusual and more than seemed reasonable to me. Also, they weren't very forthcoming about why they needed such a large amount. I didn't give it to them, though I ended up giving them a smaller amount. Things were a little frosty between us afterward, but I assumed they would get over it. You know how it is. Kids these days seem to have a sense of entitlement. They don't like hearing the word no."

"Was it after the disagreement that they said they were going down to Laguna Beach to visit Sabrina Griffith for the weekend?"

"Possibly," Reid said, "though I'm not sure at this point. They had mentioned no plans to go to Laguna Beach until Saturday morning unless they had told my wife earlier. I can call her and ask if you like."

"You can't think of any other reason they may have gone away?" I said.

"No, none. I can't imagine that our dispute over the money had anything to do with their disappearance. It's not like it was unusual. I've told them no before when they have asked for more than seemed reasonable. In those instances, they pouted for a while then got over it."

"What does their mother think?" I said.

"Their mother lives in Palm Springs," Reid said. "We divorced years ago. My wife, Tracy, is their stepmom. She's at as much of a loss to explain this as I am."

"Do your daughters and your wife get along?" I said.

"Oh yes," Reid said. "They get along very well. Tracy is only three years older than Sienna, my older daughter. I think the girls regard Tracy more like an older sister than a stepparent. They are like the three musketeers, one for all and all for one. They shop together, see movies together. You name it. I'm always the odd man out at home."

"Your daughters left home Saturday morning?" I said.

Reid nodded. "At eleven or thereabouts. They said they were driving down to Laguna Beach for the weekend and left in Sienna's car."

"What kind of car is it?"

"A 2018 BMW, a 230i coupe. The color is metallic sunset orange. We gave it to Sienna as a graduation gift when she finished high school two years ago."

"Can you give me the license plate number?" I said.

"Yes, I have the information here on my computer," Reid said.

He swiveled his chair to face the iMac on the wood table against the back office wall, typed on the keyboard, and then peered at the Retina display. He read the license plate number over his shoulder to me. I wrote it down in my notebook.

"Does your younger daughter have a car?" I said.

"Yes, but Bailey's car is at the house in the garage. They both left in Sienna's car."

"If you've no objection, I will have a friend at LAPD list the car in CLETS. It's a law enforcement telecommunications database. That way, if any California law enforcement officer comes across the vehicle and checks the registration, they will see the vehicle has been flagged. The cops might find the car for us, and that could help us find your daughters."

"Can you do it without creating any publicity?" Reid said. "Here's the thing. I'm running for the District 11 city council seat. The last thing I need is for this situation to show up in the Times or on the local news. A story about my daughters running away might not look so good to the voters."

“It won’t make the circumstances public knowledge,” I said. “The information will only be available to law enforcement. I’ll have the vehicle listed as an overdue motorist. If the police find the car, they will only check your daughters’ welfare and then call you.”

“Very well, that’s fine then,” Reid said. “Go ahead with it if you think it will help. I just don’t want to air any dirty laundry in public about a private family situation.”

I nodded my understanding and stood up.

“I’d like to speak with your wife,” I said. “Is she at home now?”

“Yes, I believe so,” Reid said. “I’ll call her and let her know you’re coming.”

“Try not to worry, Mr. Reid,” I said. “It’s been my experience this kind of thing usually resolves itself. In the meantime, I will do my best to locate your daughters.”

“Thank you, Mr. Malone,” Reid said, rising and reaching across the desk. We shook hands. I told him I’d be in touch and left his office.

Driving away from the dealership towards Reid’s residence on South Bundy, I felt sure I’d just taken on a routine missing persons case. I suspected the circumstances were that a couple of spoiled rich brats had taken off for the weekend to register their displeasure after their father had refused to finance an extravagant shopping trip or some such. I half expected I’d get a call from Reid later in the day, telling me his daughters had returned home before I even had the chance to get started looking for them. That had been a reoccurring experience I’d had with runaways in my days as a patrol officer at LAPD. I figured Reid’s daughters would return home as soon as the money he had given them the past Friday ran out. If not, I believed I’d find the Reid girls quickly without too much trouble.

CHAPTER TWO

The Reids lived in a gated community on South Bundy Drive between Dorthy and Montana Avenue, near to the infamous, nondescript condo where someone had brutally murdered Nicole Brown Simpson and her friend Ron Goldman back in 1994. The house was less than three miles from the auto dealership, a short work commute which would be the envy of anyone accustomed to slogging through the more usual longer distances to work and back in the brutal L.A. traffic. It was a spacious Spanish-style white stucco two-story with a tan rolled ceramic tile roof. I figured it was worth between four and five million dollars.

Tracy Reid was the epitome of the trophy wife, a tall bleached blonde not over twenty-four, and at least twenty years younger than her husband. The makeup she had applied meant to give her an older look hadn't quite succeeded. Without it, I figured she'd be innocently beautiful. Mrs. Reid sat on a couch wearing tiny shorts, her long shapely tan legs crossed, and wearing a tight top that accentuated her surgically enhanced breasts. I tried not to drool on my notebook while we talked.

Tracy Reid wasn't able to tell me much of anything her husband hadn't at least mentioned, though she added some finer details. She also gave me descriptions of her two stepdaughters.

Sienna—twenty years old; 5 feet 8 inches; 125 pounds; athletic build; shoulder length naturally red hair; green eyes; fair complexion; square face. When she left home Saturday morning, she wore a lime green long sleeve tee over black yoga pants with Nike athletic shoes.

Bailey—eighteen years old; 5 feet 6 inches; 110 pounds; thin build; bobbed reddish-brown hair; brown eyes; medium complexion; oval-shaped face. When last seen, she wore a light gray crewneck over blue denim skinny jeans with Reebok athletic shoes.

Reid gave me a recent photograph of each girl, and an additional photo of Sienna standing beside the metallic sunset orange BMW her father and stepmother had given her as a high school graduation present. Mrs. Reid also gave me a list of their friends, close acquaintances, and local relatives, so far as she knew them.

"Did they mention going to Laguna Beach before their argument with your husband?" I said.

"Not that I recall," Reid said. "I didn't connect the two things at all. I had the impression Saturday morning that it was more of a spur-of-the-moment thing. Sienna can be impulsive at times, and Bailey tends to follow the lead of her big sis, who has a more dominant personality."

"Did they seem upset with their father Saturday morning?"

"Not at all," Reid said. "I think the word argument is too strong a term for it. It was only a minor tiff over money. There were no raised voices or anything like that. The girls

wanted more than Adrian thought they needed. He said no. They pouted Friday evening before going to bed. It seemed it had all blown over by Saturday morning.”

“Did you see them leave Saturday morning, Mrs. Reid?”

“Yes, I did. They came down for breakfast, and that’s when they told me they were driving down to Laguna Beach to spend the weekend with Sabrina. We said goodbye when they left around eleven.”

“Did they take luggage with them?”

“Yes, Sienna had her backpack and Bailey an overnighter bag, just what you would expect for a weekend trip.”

“Who is Sabrina Griffith, exactly?” I said. “A friend?”

“Yes, more Sienna’s friend. She and Sienna are the same age. But they all attended Palisades Charter High School together.”

“You’ve no idea where they might have gone?” I said.

“None.”

“You can’t even make a guess?”

“I really can’t,” Reid said. “It totally shocked me to learn they hadn’t gone to see Sabrina in Laguna Beach as they had told me they were planning to do. They have done nothing like this ever before.”

“Might they have gone to Palm Springs to visit their mother?”

“I doubt it,” Reid said. “The girls don’t get along well with their mom. Though they never talk about it much, I sense they feel a little like their mom abandoned them when she moved to Palm Springs.”

“Did their mother remarry after the divorce?”

“No idea,” Reid said. “We have little contact with Sherry. Once in a blue moon when she is in L.A., she calls to see the girls. She never sets foot in the house. She always picks the girls up and then drops them off out front.”

“I see.”

“Do you think I should call her?” Reid said.

“I’ll take care of it,” I said. “Better if I handle all the contacts with the friends and family members on the list you’ve given me. It makes it easier for me to keep track of who I’ve talked to and who I have left to contact.”

Reid nodded. “That makes perfect sense,” she said.

“Could you say which two or three people on the list they might have been more inclined to stay with?”

“Not really,” Reid said. “They are both very sociable and have lots of friends, but neither has what you might call a best friend. With young people today, everything is more centered on the group they hang out with than on individual friends, if that makes sense.”

“Sure, I understand,” I said.

After interviewing Tracy Reid, I got back in the car to drive to my office in Hollywood. I wanted to make some calls and set some things in motion before tackling the list Tracy Reid had given me. Mrs. Reid had seemed candid while answering my questions, yet I couldn’t help wondering if she was holding anything back. Adrian Reid had told me a close relationship existed between his present wife and his daughters. Perhaps the girls had sworn her to secrecy about their whereabouts. Also, Tracy Reid

hadn't seemed nearly as worried about her missing stepdaughters as their father had appeared when I had spoken with him.

CHAPTER **THREE**

From the office, I called Jaime Reyes, a Detective III at LAPD Robbery-Homicide, and my former partner when I was on LAPD. Reyes was always happy to put the full resources of the department at my disposal whenever I had a case and needed help from the police.

When Reyes answered the phone, I said, "I need a vehicle entered in CLETS pronto."

"If you have a legitimate reason to have a vehicle entered in CLETS, I suggest you call or visit Hollywood Community Police Station. We don't do that here at RHD. We investigate robberies and homicides."

"There is far too much specialization in police work these days," I said.

"We live in a technological age," Reyes said. "Specialization is the most efficient use of limited resources."

I said, "It's only an overdue motorist entry. All you have to do is make a quick call to the communications division."

"I know how it works, bro," Reyes said. "An overdue motorist entry? What am I, Travelers Aid?"

"If you will have the vehicle entered for me, I'll buy you a case of Dos Equis Amber beer in the recyclable bottles. You can even keep the deposit when you recycle the empties."

Reyes said, "Are you attempting to bribe a police officer?"

"Yes."

After a loud sigh into the phone, Reyes said, "Okay, give me the information."

I gave him the license plate number and vehicle description along with the names of Sienna and Bailey Reid as the vehicle occupants. For the reporting person, I gave him Adrian Reid's name and contact information. Reyes put me on hold to use another line. He came back on the phone a few minutes later.

"Okay, they have entered it in CLETS," Reyes said.

I said, "Thank you, podjo."

"You're welcome. When do I get the beer?"

"Soon as I finish work this evening, I'll drop it by your crib, pal," I said. "You come pretty cheap when it comes to bribes."

"You have no idea," Reyes said. "You could have had me for a six-pack, but I took you for a whole case."

"Live and learn," I said. "See you later."

I hung up and looked over the list of names I'd written in my notebook that Tracy Reid had given me. Sometimes when people gave you a list of the names of friends and relatives, they unconsciously prioritize them by perceived importance. For that reason, I figured the people most closely associated with the Reid sisters were at the top of the

list. That's where I intended to start. I'd work my way down the list of names from there. The first name on the list was Michelle Crawford.

Rule three from the private detective's handbook said when in doubt, get out of the office and knock on doors. Rule four said when you had no leads, get out of the office and knock on doors. I didn't know what else to do, and I had no leads to the whereabouts of the Reid girls. So, I left the office to look for some doors to knock on.

The drive back to Brentwood was easier than the drive over that morning. The traffic was lighter, relatively speaking since it was L.A. traffic. It took me nearly forty minutes to get to Michelle Crawford's family home on Parkyns Street. The house was a massive Mediterranean-style estate that took up most of the corner of the block at Parkyns and North Rockingham Avenue. I parked the car in the circle drive out front and went to the front door. I rang the doorbell.

I spoke to the maid who answered the door for about five minutes. The maid told me in a mixture of Spanish and broken English that Miss Crawford was out of town. She wouldn't tell me where or when Miss Crawford was expected back. After a while, the maid wilted under the steady pressure of my not inconsiderable interrogation skills and told me Miss Crawford was on vacation with her mother and sisters in Honolulu. But, she refused to give me a phone number where I could reach them there. I left the house wishing I could have had five minutes with that maid in a room with a bright light and a thick telephone directory in my hands. Then I could have made her talk. The problem was there were no printed telephone books anymore as phone directories were all online now. That was a real shame.

From the Crawford place, I drove over to a Best Buy store on West Pico Boulevard and found Colin Pope, the second person on my list. All Tracy Reid had had on him was a phone number. When I'd called it, Pope told me he was at work but would talk with me if I wanted to drop by. Colin, a blond-haired surfer type with good manners, was very willing to help me. The only problem was he wasn't a genius, and he knew nothing about the whereabouts of the Reid sisters. Because Colin wasn't the sharpest tool in the shed, it took him a long time to tell me so. All I learned from him was that he and Sienna were in a few of the same classes when they had attended high school together. He was a nice young man but provided nothing relevant to my investigation.

In a talent agency office on the sixth floor of an office tower on Wilshire Boulevard, I found the next person on my list—a sleek, stylish, well-mannered young man in his late twenties wearing expensive clothes. His name was Serge Kardashian, no relation to the famous L.A. socialite sisters. He told me he became acquainted with the Reids at a popular under twenty-one dance club they all frequented on Sunset Boulevard. He became friends with them, and they sometimes partied together with others in their common social circle. I learned nothing of value from Serge.

I drew more blanks from the list: "Out of town," "At the mall," "I don't know where you can find her." Then, at last, I found one of Sienna's friends at home before I was ready to call it a day. Her name was Audry Ryan. She lived on North Rockingham Avenue in an upscale neighborhood with tree-lined streets close to the Reids. The residence was a sprawling, ultra-modern white stone-and-glass house. Ryan was a willowy, tall young woman about Tracy Reid's age. She had bobbed brown hair with blond highlights, and wide blue eyes that made her look honest and candid despite what was really going on behind them. Audry told me she had been two years ahead of

Sienna Reid at Palisades Charter High School, but they had met and become friends when they had played on the varsity soccer team during Sienna's sophomore year.

Unlike the others on the list I'd already interviewed, Audry Ryan wasn't single. She told me her husband, Darren Ryan, was a hedge fund manager. Since it seemed unlikely a guy in his twenties would be running a hedge fund, I assumed Audry, like Tracy Reid, had married an older man. Young as she was, Audry sounded like she knew what she was talking about, that she knew about hedge funds.

"I haven't seen either Sienna or Bailey in ages," Ryan said in answer to my question. "Not for at least two weeks or more."

I noticed a little flicker in her blue eyes when she had answered the question. Uh-oh, I thought. I didn't know what was behind the flicker, but I was sure that Ryan's answer was at least partially false.

"At the time, the last time you saw them, did either mention anything about going away?" I said.

There was another flicker in the eyes, but Audry shook her head. "No," she said.

Her eyes were wide and frank, but her upper lip twitched a little when she'd answered the question.

"Any idea where they might have gone?" I said.

"No idea."

Audry looked down, and her fingers picked at imaginary lint on the black track pants she had on.

"Have you heard from them since you last saw them?" I said. "By phone or a text?"

"No, I haven't."

She had moistened her upper lip with the tip of her tongue when she said it.

"Will you give me the names and addresses or phone numbers for the people you know who the Reid girls also associated with?" I said.

"Look, Mr. Malone, I really don't feel comfortable doing that," Ryan said. "They're my friends. I don't want them hassled."

"There's a chance that some of them may have seen Sienna and Bailey more recently than you," I said. "Maybe even since they disappeared Saturday. I will not hassle them. I only want to ask them the same questions I've asked you."

Audry picked up her phone off the coffee table. With reluctance, she gave me a dozen names. All the names were already on my list. Twice while paging through the list of contacts on her phone, she had hesitated as if about to speak a name. But each time it seemed she had decided against naming someone. Her eyes stayed on mine, still wide and honest. Her fingers, no longer picking at the imaginary lint, nervously fingered the hem of her blue silk top.

There was something not quite right about Audry Ryan and her answers to my questions. She was lying to me or maybe holding something back. But I couldn't think what it might be. I didn't believe her, but I had nothing substantial to justify calling her out on her lack of candor. Instead, I left her with a promise, one she might have taken as a threat.

"Thanks for your time and cooperation," I said. "I know it's hard to remember things exactly. If I should run across anything from interviews with the others on my list that might help jog your memory, I'll circle back to you and let you know."

"What—? Oh, yes. Please do," Ryan said.

Walking away from the house, I turned my head to look back just as a window curtain swung back into place. My watch told me it was six-thirty, too late to run down any more of the names on my list. I went to a supermarket on San Vicente Boulevard to buy the case of Dos Equis I'd promised Reyes. Then I drove over to his house to deliver it. On the drive to Reyes' place, I was thinking more about Audrey Ryan than about the Reid sisters. She seemed worth further investigation.