



PROLOGUE

SEPTEMBER 11, 2008

ARLINGTON COUNTY, VIRGINIA

Federal Agent Eva Montana perched on a backless bench southwest of the Pentagon desperate for answers. The one hundred and eighty-three other benches surrounding her represented the souls who had perished here seven years earlier. She clutched a moist hanky in her hand, grabbing at memories of her twin sister, Jillie, who died in the attack. A passenger plane, piloted by deranged terrorists, had plunged into the office where Jillie worked as a military prosecutor.

Eva's heart broke for her vibrant and strong sister. The President's words from an hour earlier provided no comfort: *Seven years ago at this hour, a doomed airliner plunged from the sky, split the rock and steel of this building, and changed our world forever. The years that followed have seen justice delivered to evil men and battles fought in distant lands. But each day on this year—each year on this day, our thoughts return to this place.*

For Eva, the fight had just begun. A tear rolled down her cheek, which she swiped away with her hanky. Though she and Jillie had committed their lives to pursuing justice, now it was up to Eva. Their dad loved to brag when introducing them, “*Meet my daughters, the agent and the prosecutor. Eva nails 'em and Jillie jails 'em.*”

Eva choked back a sob. Since losing her twin sister, she drove herself harder to capture the guilty. Her younger twin, by several minutes, had always needed her protection, and on 9/11/2001, Eva wasn't there. Looking down, she saw the engraving honoring her sister. She traced with her finger the grooves spelling out *Jillian Vander Goes*, and recalled battles they'd fought together as young girls. Her mind veered to one summer they spent at Grandpa and Grandma Vander Goes' farm in Zeeland, Michigan. She pictured Jillie laughing under the huge beech tree...

Eva giggled with her ten-year-old sister, Jillie, in the farmyard. Wearing identical purple outfits and heart-shaped sunglasses, both girls counted their newfound treasures from their summer vacation.

"Look!" Eva cried, holding up a small red rock. "It's from Grandpa Marty."

Jillie tickled her sister's cheek with a blue feather. "Grandma Joanne gave me this!"

They both giggled again. That is, until a dark shadow crept across their blanket under the beech tree.

"What are 'ya makin' so much noise about?" the older boy said.

Eva hid her treasures behind her back. "It's our party. You aren't invited."

"Sit by me, Ricky." Jillie made room for him on the blanket.

"Let me see what you're hiding."

Ricky O'Neal reached over and grabbed Jillie's feather.

"Leave her alone."

Eva snatched the feather from his hands. As she handed it to Jillie, Ricky swiped her red rock that had tumbled to the blanket.

"It's a dumb rock."

"Give it back!" Eva leapt to her feet. "Grandpa found it in Lake Michigan."

"If you can catch me."

Ricky took off with her rock and Eva chased him around the tree. He zigged and zagged through the yard before speeding on his longer legs toward his grandfather's farm down the road. Eva tossed off her sunglasses and ran after him. He barged into his grandmother's house, banging the screen door behind him. Eva knocked and knocked, but no one came.

Finally Grandmother O'Neal appeared behind the screen door, wiping her hands on an apron. "Are you one of Martin's twin granddaughters?"

"Yes, and Ricky stole my rock," she answered breathlessly.

"Which twin are you?"

"I'm Eva, the toughest one."

"Well, Eva, my grandson is no thief. You go home. Tell your grandfather Martin to keep you there."

Grandmother O'Neal banged the door shut in Eva's face. She fumed but knew there was nothing to do but go back to the farm. Jillie stood at the end of the long driveway.

"Did he give you our red rock?" she asked.

"Nah. Don't let that creep back in the yard." Eva wiggled her finger at Jillie. "We need Grandpa's help."

They hurried past wire fencing on the side of the garage. Brown chickens pecked around the dirt. Inside the garage, Eva walked up to her grandpa, who stood at his workbench. Next to him, a red coffee can was attached to a small electric motor. It turned slowly. Something banged in the can.

"Do you have anything we can hide our treasures in?" Eva asked.

Jillie wrinkled her nose. "Ricky took the red rock you gave us."

"That's too bad." Grandpa reached up to a shelf. "I have better rocks up here."

As he pulled a yellow tin can from a shelf, it rattled. Eva clapped her hands in delight. Grandpa dumped the contents onto his workbench.

"Take this." He gave her the yellow can and pointed to smooth, shiny stones on the bench. "These Petoskey stones are valuable once they're polished up."

"Cool," Eva said. "They're prettier than the one Ricky stoled."

Grandpa started whistling. He pulled the electric plug from the wall. Eva and Jillie watched as he tipped the machine on its side and removed the cover off the red coffee can. He held it out so the girls could see inside.

"I'm polishing Petoskey stones with this liquid abrasive. When they're done, they'll shine just like these here on the bench. I found these beauties up north, on the beach of Lake Michigan."

He picked up two shiny stones and placed them in the bottom of Eva's yellow can. "Here's one for each of you. Now, don't let Ricky see them."

"We won't!"

Eva sped with the can to the beech tree, with Jillie close behind. Eva popped off the lid. Her "younger" sister put in their collection of feathers, acorns, and a dried turtle shell. They set the can at the base of the tree. Jillie added on top pictures she'd drawn of them at the beach.

"Let's swing."

Eva headed for the tire swing Grandpa had hung on the tree. She climbed on the tire and straddled the rope, coaxing Jillie, "Give me a push, then hop on."

Soon, Jillie was sitting inside the tire below Eva. Their blond hair blew in the breeze as they drifted to and fro. Around the corner of the house came Ricky, holding his hand next to his jeans' pocket. Eva spotted him first.

“Jillie, stop the swing. Here comes the thief.”

Her sister dragged her feet until the swing quit moving. In a flash, Ricky was upon them.

“You can’t come in our yard,” Eva ordered.

“My grandmother says I have to give your stone back.”

Eva reached out her hand from her perch above him. “Give it to me.”

Ricky reached into his pocket and took out a baby garter snake with three stripes on its back. He thrust it toward Jillie and she screamed.

Eva reached down and yanked the little creature above her head.

“Thank you! Is this a trade for the rock?”

“No way.” Ricky dug furiously into his pocket and reached his hand toward Jillie.

“Here’s your stupid rock. I found the snake on the way here.”

Eva admired the little snake, which coiled around her hand. “I don’t think we want the rock. We have nicer ones, and now we have a snake.”

Ricky shoved the rock into his pocket. “I only showed you the snake because I need a can to put it in.”

He looked over at their yellow can and took one step toward it. Jillie leapt from the swing, followed by Eva. All three collided under the tree. Jillie grabbed the can and fled toward Grandpa in the garage.

Eva looked at her empty hand. “Where did the snake go?”

She searched along the ground with Ricky helping.

“You lost my snake,” he grumbled.

Eva shook her head. “Nope, it’s ours. You just gave it to us.”

Jillie joined the search party. “Grandpa’s guarding our can. He says Ricky should go home.”

“No way. I want my snake.”

Eva stood upright. “Go ahead and look all you want. He’s miles away. It’s your fault for trying to steal our coffee can.”

“I’m keeping the rock then.”

Ricky headed for his grandma’s house.

“You can have it. We have nicer ones,” Eva yelled behind him.

He disappeared around the corner of the house.

Eva whispered in her sister’s ear, “Let’s bury our can where Ricky can’t find it.”

The two girls waited for Grandpa to leave the garage. Eva borrowed his shovel. Jillie opened the screen door into the chicken yard and stood guard against Ricky’s surprise attacks. Eva quickly buried the can in the sandy soil

near the garage, smoothing the dirt over their treasure. Feeling clever, Eva joined Jillie outside the fence.

“When should we dig this up?” Jillie wondered aloud.

“When we’re old enough to drive Dad’s car, we’ll come from Virginia ourselves. That’ll teach Ricky to swipe our stuff. Let’s wash up.”

In the living room, Eva surprised Grandma Joanne. She looked up from her book with red eyes.

“Grandma, are you hurt?” Eva asked.

Her grandma wiped away her tears. “I’m fine, little one. Are you and Jillie ready to open your present?”

She scurried into the kitchen and handed them each a wrapped package.

“This is for my favorite granddaughters.”

Eva grinned. “We’re your only ones.”

“Yes, sweetie, and I’m happy you are here. Open your presents.”

Eva ripped off the paper. Inside a little box was a gold necklace with a charm.

“It’s a shoe.”

“Not just any shoe. A wooden Dutch shoe. Your heritage is Dutch, you know. Let me put them on you.”

She fastened the gold chain around their necks. “Your grandpa’s parents were born in the Netherlands. Maybe someday you will visit there.”

Eva headed for the back door with Jillie in hot pursuit. Grandma protested.

“Don’t wear your necklaces outside. You might lose them.”

Jillie stopped. “Eva, if we go out there, Ricky will sneak back.”

“Is Ricky O’Neal bothering you girls?” Grandma’s hands were on her hips.

“He stole our rock,” Eva said. “When I chased him to his house, his grandmother wasn’t nice to me.”

Grandma Joanne took off her apron. “Don’t worry about Mrs. O’Neal. She doesn’t like me either. In fact, that’s probably why she acted mean to you.”

Eva dropped down on the kitchen chair. She loved a good story.

“Why doesn’t she like you, Grandma?”

Jillie crept up to the table and sat. So did Grandma. “It’s something silly, like Ricky taking your stone. His grandma thinks I took something of hers.”

“Oh no!” Jillie objected. “You didn’t, did you?”

Grandma Joanne’s cheeks blushed. “Ricky’s Grandma used to be Helen Barnes who lived on the neighboring farm. Her parents knew Grandpa Marty’s parents, but this is not for young girls like you two. You go check on Grandpa.”

Eva wrinkled her nose. "It is for us girls. Did Helen like Grandpa and wanna marry him?"

Grandma Joanne turned in surprise. "Yes! When Grandpa was in the war, Helen wrote him letters. She set her cap on him. When he came home with me as his new wife, she got her knickers in a knot."

"What are knickers, Grandma?" Eva asked, frowning.

Grandma blushed again. "When you graduate from high school, I'll let you read my diary. It's all in there."

Eva came over and hugged her grandma. "I'm glad you're my grandmother and not the other one. I'll love you forever."

Jarred back to the present by sounds of soft crying, Eva clenched her fists, thinking of all the pain. Grieving families wandered the grounds for their time alone following the memorial service. A man and teenage boy walked to another bench shaped like a bent springboard attached to the ground at one end.

She stirred on Jillie's bench. Soon the public would be allowed to enter. A thought pierced Eva's mind. Would her life, and her family, ever be free from the influences of evil? Then she recalled what Grandpa Vander Goes wrote in his letter saying he couldn't attend the memorial.

"I lived with Aunt Deane in the Netherlands when Hitler invaded, and did all I could to help the Resistance. I've since regretted not doing more. Perhaps you can visit me soon and read my war journals. Don't let evil around us discourage you. Remember Jesus' promise, 'I am going to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.'"

Grandpa had never told Eva that he resisted the Nazis. What had he done? No wonder she and Jillie were determined to pursue justice. While Eva waited to be in the heaven Jesus spoke of, she must continue Grandpa Marty's and Jillie's quest. Peace replaced her angst and Eva stood, gazing across the memorial where other families gathered to honor those who died.

She gave a final look at Jillie's name on the bench. Duty called. This afternoon, she'd attend a hearing on Capitol Hill to stop the threat of terrorism in Cuba and Latin America. Her orders were clear. First and foremost, Eva must remain strong in her faith. She would do all in her power to uphold justice, and protect her family, no matter the cost. What price had Grandpa Marty paid against the Nazis, she wondered.

Eva left the Pentagon filled with a deep desire to find out and to uncover just what Marty meant in his letter about his fight against evil.