

ATLANTA JUSTICE

BOOK THREE

BREACH OF TRUST

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CHAPTER ONE

Mia Shaw gripped a bundle of brightly colored helium balloons with the word *congratulations* splashed all over them. The elevator chimed, and the doors opened onto the tenth floor. She stepped out, almost running into a tall guy who was trying to get on. “Sorry,” she muttered as she glanced up. She quickly brushed by the man with her armful of balloons, anxious to get to her friend’s apartment.

Mia walked down the long hallway and banged on Chase Jackson’s door. She didn’t know why he wasn’t answering his phone or responding to her texts. They’d agreed to go out to dinner that evening to celebrate his first successful year as a partner. They both worked at the prestigious Atlanta firm Finley & Hughes. Mia, like Chase, worked on high-stakes litigation defending huge corporations.

Unlike her two best friends, Mia worked on the “dark side,” as they called it. But her life wasn’t like theirs. She had a six-figure debt weighing her down from law school at Emory, and working at Finley & Hughes was the best way to pay that off. She also wasn’t on a moral crusade to save the world like her friends. She was just trying to get by.

Mia had been slammed at work today, but she wasn’t going

to let this anniversary go unnoticed. Many people crashed and burned after being elected partner. They couldn't take the heat or the pressure, but not Chase. He had taken on the extra responsibility and thrived in his first year in partnership. Chase was not only a great friend, he was savvy and willing to help Mia negotiate firm politics. Since he was three years ahead of her, she relied on his insight and advice.

"Chase!" She banged on the door again. "I know you're in there. You're probably working, but I told you that I'm taking you out to celebrate." She tapped her black heel on the floor as she waited. "We have a reservation in Buckhead, and we're going to be late."

It was only the second week in January, so their billable hours had started over for the year, and Chase would be eager to get a jump on making his objectives, just like the rest of the lawyers at the firm. He was even more of a workaholic than she was, and that was saying a lot, but she didn't want him to ignore this big career milestone. Once he got out of the apartment, he'd be glad she made him go.

Deciding to take matters into her own hands, she tried the door, expecting it to be locked, but it wasn't. *Strange*. But she wasn't deterred. She was bound and determined to drag Chase out to celebrate.

Mia walked through the door and yelled his name again. But she only got a few steps inside before she stopped short. The hair on the back of her neck stood up as she took in the scene of disarray. Her grip on the balloons loosened, and they floated up to the ceiling.

She took a few steps farther into the living room, which looked like an F5 tornado had gone through it. Two lamps were smashed on the floor, the bookshelf was turned over, and the navy cushions were pulled off the couch and strewn on the floor.

What in the world had happened?

"Chase?"

She worked her way through the apartment room by room. When she entered his bedroom, she heard herself let out a piercing scream.

Blood. There was so much blood.

Her friend's body lay on the bedroom floor. His blue eyes were open, but there was no light behind them.

She knew he was dead, but she had to check for a pulse. Her hands shook as she made contact. The life was gone from his body.

Slowly she backed out of the bedroom, shaking, unable to bear the grisly scene any longer. Tears started to well up in her eyes, and anger quickly followed. She pulled her phone out of her purse and dialed 911, trying to keep her breath steady.

"This is 911. What is the nature of your emergency?"

"My friend was murdered."



Mia sat at the Midtown police precinct, still reeling from the horrid events of the evening. What was supposed to have been a night of celebration had turned into her worst nightmare. She'd given her statement to the detectives, but it felt like she kept repeating herself over and over. Now another detective had come into the room to talk to her.

"Let's talk about the maintenance man," Detective Rossi said. "You told Detective Smith a few things, but I want to start at the beginning for myself."

Mia wasn't sure why the detectives had traded off, but she was willing to stay all night if it meant catching Chase's killer. "I don't know his full name. I just know that Chase called him David. Chase had multiple run-ins with the guy. The most recent one was an actual fight."

Detective Rossi opened his notebook. "Tell me about that."

"There's a history there. It started shortly after David began working at the apartment complex. Chase got frustrated because

the guy was always running behind or was a no-show on multiple occasions when he was supposed to fix things. Chase felt disrespected because he'd taken time off work to meet David and had been stood up. But things changed when Chase came into work last week with a black eye. He told me the two of them had seen each other out the night before. From what I understand, David had been drinking heavily at the bar. The two of them got into it, and David provoked Chase, so he took a swing at him. Unfortunately for Chase, David swung back and connected hard. The fight was the last straw. Chase was planning to go to the building manager and even higher up the chain to the corporate office."

Detective Rossi's dark eyes locked onto hers. "Do you know if Chase made that threat known to David?"

Mia nodded. "He told David to his face that he was going up the chain. It was also a pretty hot topic in the office because everyone wanted to know why Chase had a black eye. It's not every day that happens. He was asking if anyone at the firm had contacts with the company that owned the building."

Detective Rossi jotted down a few notes. "So Chase could go to corporate and get the guy canned?"

"He didn't say that exactly, but I think at the very least he wanted David to know that he had the power to do that." She took in a breath.

"Did Chase ever mention being afraid of him?"

She couldn't help but smile. "Chase wasn't afraid of anyone or anything. But he also wasn't stupid. He probably knew better than to get into an all-out brawl with the guy, so David must have really ticked Chase off for him to take a swing. But I could never get the exact details of why Chase punched first." It hit her in that moment that maybe Chase *should* have been afraid. "Are you going to track down this guy?"

"We're actually bringing him in now. His name is David McDonald."

Hearing his full name sent a chill down her spine. “He could be the killer.”

“We’ll get to the bottom of this. For now, you should go home and try to get some rest.”

She knew sleep wouldn’t come easily tonight. Her first priority was to start looking into David McDonald.



The next day, Mia sat in front of her laptop at home, trying to find out everything she could about David McDonald, but his social media presence was nonexistent. The more she looked and came up empty, the more suspicious she became. Who was this guy?

Given the circumstances, she wasn’t going into the office today. She needed some time to get her head around what had happened, and everyone at the firm was more than understanding about it. From the calls she’d gotten, the entire office was reeling from the news.

When her doorbell rang, she jumped up to get it, knowing who was on the other side. She opened the door and grabbed her best friend, Sophie Knight, in a bear hug.

“Why didn’t you call me last night?” Sophie asked.

“It was so late when I got home from the police station, and I knew you’d get out of bed and come over.”

Sophie’s blue eyes softened. “Of course I would have. Please let me know what I can do.”

Mia had cried last night in the privacy of her home with no one around, but right now she didn’t need tears—she needed action. “Just you being here is important to me.”

They walked into the living room and sat beside each other on the couch.

“What are the police saying?” Sophie asked.

“They brought in the maintenance manager—a guy named David McDonald.” Just uttering his name made her sick.

“Do you know him?”

Mia shook her head. “No. But Chase told me all about him. He seemed a bit unstable, with a bad temper, and had a rocky relationship with Chase. Including an actual fight last week. What if this guy lost it and killed Chase? Chase was threatening to go to corporate about him. Maybe he feared for his job.”

“Murder isn’t exactly the best way to keep your job, though,” Sophie pointed out.

“You’re right, but this guy seems like a wild card. He doesn’t even exist on social media.”

“At all?” Sophie asked. “That is really strange. How old is he?”

“He’s thirty-nine. That much I was able to glean from scouring the internet. I’ve only made my way through basic social media, though. I still have a lot more digging to do.”

“You didn’t sleep, did you?” Sophie asked knowingly.

The dark circles under Mia’s eyes were probably betraying her. “What can you expect?”

Sophie grabbed her hand. “You don’t have to be so strong right now. You witnessed an atrocity. It’s okay to need time to grieve and vent and get your feelings out.”

Sophie was the emotional one of their friend group. Mia had gone to law school with Sophie at Emory. She still remembered meeting the tall, thin blonde and initially making prejudgments about why Barbie was at law school. Mia had felt so average by comparison—average height, average build, average brown hair and eyes. But Sophie had taught her an important lesson about not judging a book by its cover. Sophie was the furthest thing from an airhead that Mia could have imagined. And once they’d shared their first coffee and Con Law outlines, it had been an instant friendship. They’d met the third member of their tight-knit group, Kate Sullivan James, through the Atlanta Women Attorneys group.

Mia looked at her friend. “You’re much more in touch with

your feelings than I'll ever be. Honestly, I think I'm still in shock. I don't think it's fully hit me that Chase is really dead and I'll never see him again." As those last words came out in a shaky voice, the tears threatened to come back.

But then her cell phone started buzzing. Mia looked at the screen. "It's the police."

"Get it," Sophie urged.

"Hello," Mia answered.

"Is this Ms. Shaw?" a male voice asked.

"Yes."

"It's Detective Rossi."

"What is it?" She held her breath.

"I wanted to let you know that we've arrested David McDonald. He is in our custody."

She blew out a breath. "Thank you." She considered for a moment and then said, "I tried to do some digging into who he is, and frankly, he's a blank slate. I hope you'll have more luck than me."

"He's a former ATF agent. That probably explains the lack of public information on him."

She hadn't seen that coming. "ATF?"

"Yeah, do you know about the ATF?"

"Yes, I've heard of them. They mainly deal with guns and arson, right?"

"That's part of it, yes, although they do other things."

Her mind couldn't process this new information. How did this fit into the overall picture? "I'm a little shocked that he's a former Fed. Why was he working as a maintenance manager?"

"We're looking into all of that," Detective Rossi said. "But those jobs can be really tough, especially if there's undercover work. Please don't feel like you need to carry on your own investigation here. We'll keep you fully apprised. He's in lockup right now and can't hurt anyone else."

"Thank you, Detective."

“Let us know if you need anything.”

She hung up and looked at her friend.

“What is it?” Sophie asked.

“Chase’s killer was a former ATF agent. That’s why I couldn’t find anything out about him. They’ve arrested him, though.”

“The police have to have something on him. Maybe they found some evidence to tie him to the murder.” Sophie paused. “I don’t know that it would be healthy for you to get too deep in the weeds on this. The police are doing their jobs. You’ve told them what you know.”

“I hear you.” Mia knew Sophie was right, but rational reactions weren’t her strong suit right now. She looked at her friend, who was a prosecutor in the district attorney’s office. “I’ll need your help navigating the criminal justice system. I want to understand each step of the process.”

Sophie nodded. “Whatever you need.”

“You should get back to work.” Mia hated that she was taking time away from Sophie like this.

“Don’t give it a second thought. Kate has a hearing this morning, or she would be here too.”

Mia was fortunate to have such loving friends, but she also knew that getting through this was going to be a highly personal process. At least now she knew what she needed to do. She walked Sophie out and then picked up her phone to make a call.

“Hey, Mia,” Walt Fitzpatrick answered. “I hope you’ve reconsidered my dinner offer.”

She smiled. Her law school friend was an assistant US attorney at the Department of Justice working in the Northern District of Georgia. Lately he’d been trying to get her to go out with him. “Hi, Walt. That’s actually not why I’m calling. I need your help.”

“For you, just say the word.”

“I need you to see what you can find out about a former ATF agent. His name is David McDonald. And I think he’s a murderer.”