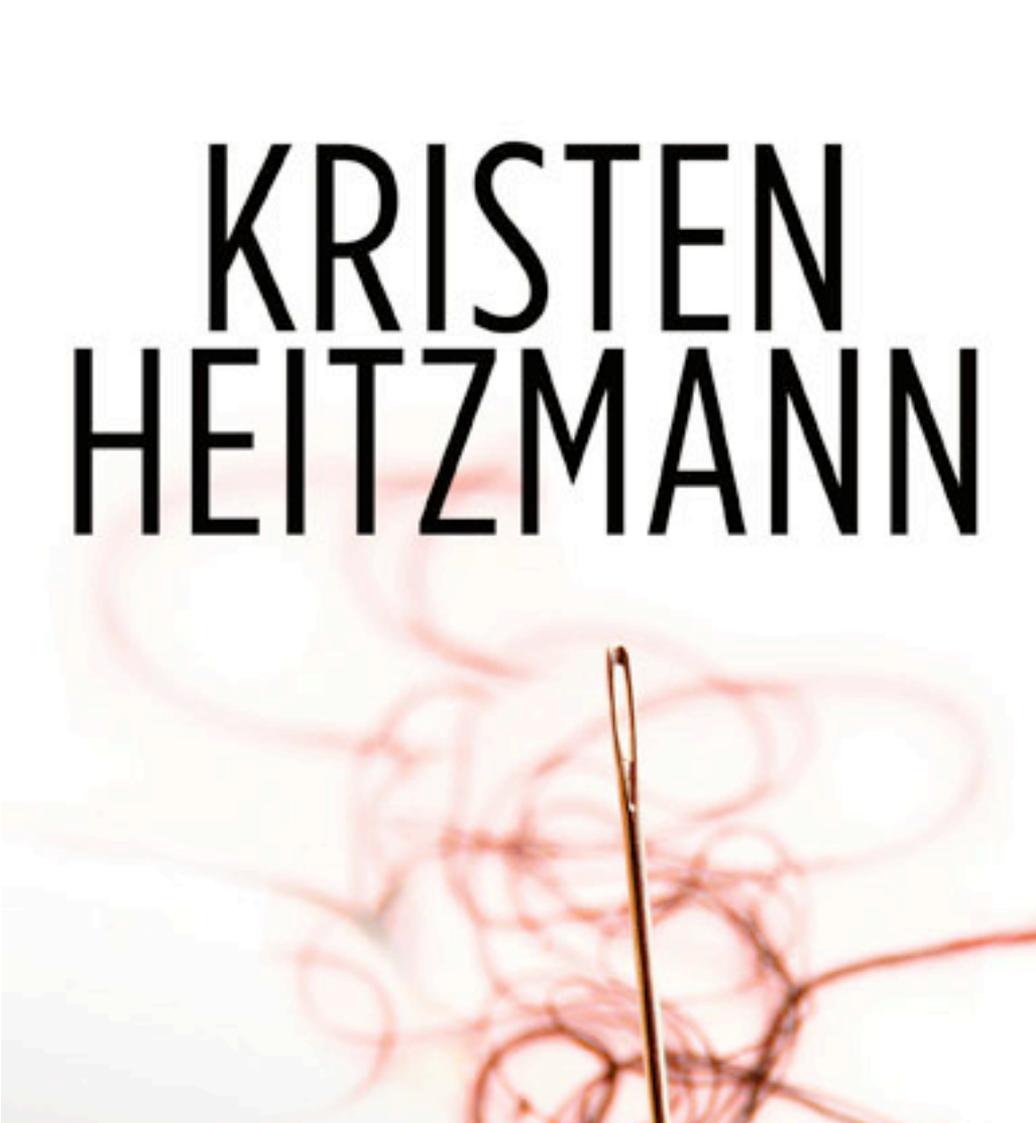
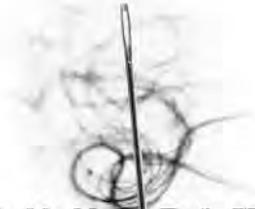


KRISTEN  
HEITZMANN



INDIVISIBLE IN

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*To my precious family:  
you guys are everything.*

# One

What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.

—MARK 10:9, KING JAMES VERSION

Wrapped in a woolen throw, Jonah stared out through moon-silvered evergreen spires. He drew in the clean, sharp air of the rugged mountains, air that made you work but came with a purity lost in lower, milder climes. The piercing stars were visible to an amazing depth, the sickle moon casting the clearing around his cabin in stark relief. He had not expected to sleep—didn't dare with memories tugging so hard.

He shut his eyes and let the night enclose him. The chilled tip of his nose stung as he breathed the piquant scents of wild grasses, earth, and pine, a heady overlay with a hint of moisture condensing in the cold and dark.

The beam above moaned with the motion of the porch swing, a rhythmic counterpart to the rush of Kicking Horse Creek out of sight in the dark except for flashes of white where water struck rock. He felt something brush against his hand and looked down. A white, powdery moth fluttered at the lighted face of his watch. The fluffy *whoosh* of an owl passed, a silent shadow in search of a small, beating heart.

His pulse made a low throb in his ears. He moved the breath in and out through his lungs, filling his senses easier than stilling the thoughts.

Somewhere in the rocky crags a coyote yipped, one of the few predators that had enlarged its range in spite of human encroachment, a bold and canny cohabiter, bearing ever bolder offspring. A long howl sailed into the night, a territorial declaration, signaling roving males to stay away, any females to come hither. He pressed up from the swing and leaned on the rail, trying to get a bead on the coyote's location. After a time, he turned and went inside.

---

Piper loved morning, the brightness, the cleanness of a new day. But morning started with the sunrise, not when the sky was still black and the room shivery. She burrowed her feet deeper beneath the down comforter, avoiding for one more moment the cold floorboards. It was too brief a moment.

She crabbed her hand across the lace-covered bedstand and stopped the alarm on the cell phone before it could nag her. She would do her own nagging, as she had ever since she'd realized no one else intended to. Not that they didn't care, just that she was on her own when it came to responsibility, reliability, accountability.

She lit the lamp, groomed, and dressed without shedding the film of sleep. Just a few years ago, she could have slept all day—if she'd let herself. She slipped on her jacket and turned up the collar, switched on the iPod in her pocket and inserted the ear buds. Enya's "Only Time" accompanied her out the door.

The first gasp of cold air pierced her fog. She drew a flashlight from the other pocket and trudged behind the beam down the steep path, weaving through the pines. Even August nights lost the days' warmth to the thin mountain atmosphere, which the sun would heat once again.

Streaks of deep magenta broke through the black tree silhouettes, announcing dawn, but around her, darkness clung. Over the music, she detected the rushing of Kicking Horse Creek, which paralleled the main street through Old Town. She turned off the music. Neither dark and muddy nor sluggish and green, the creek ran frothy white and clear down to the rocky bed.

She couldn't see the water from the path even if the sun were up, but its voice carried up the stony crags. She replaced the headphones and picked her way down the steepest stretch of the path. Her nostrils constricted. She slapped a hand to her mouth and nose to block a putrid scent carried on the sharp air. She swung her light, and the beam caught a furry mound of carnage. She hurried past, gagging.

The path ended behind the Half Moon, but she continued on to the

next door, unlocked the bakery, and let herself into Sarge's kitchen. Soon, warm, yeasty aromas tinged with almond, vanilla, and cinnamon banished the dead animal stench in her nostrils. She had memorized the recipes the first week, easy enough as Sarge had served the same eight things since opening the bakery thirty years ago. After twenty years in army kitchens, he saw no need for variety in the mess.

She hadn't baked before, but she'd taken to it, and with a little freedom, the slightest leeway, she might shine. But three weeks into the job, she had yet to sneak a variation by Sarge or convince him to feature anything not indelibly written on the dusty menu board.

She lifted and folded the dough over the plump, rum-soaked raisins, tucking them in like well-fed babies under a fluffy blanket, then put them to bed in the nice warm oven. Down for their nap, just like yesterday, and the day before, and the day before that. Sweet little raisin rolls, just the way Sarge liked them.

She closed the oven, moved to the other end of the counter, and checked the measuring cup in which she had sprinkled yeast over warm water and whisked in sour cream and sugar. Cutting together flour, butter, and salt, she glanced quickly toward the door. No Sarge yet.

She combined the ingredients to make a coarse dough that when properly rolled and folded should bake into lovely light croissants—not something Sarge could envision. The back door banged. He came in, hung his red plaid coat on the hook, and turned his head like a vulture's on the end of his question-mark spine. She did hurt for him. The photo in the front of the store showed a strong, military physique. It couldn't be easy to curl up like a lemon rind in the sun.

"Good morning, Sarge."

"Humph." His sunken eyes peered down his long bulbous nose. Lucky he had rank or his moniker might have been Beak. Or Gonzo. Sarge fit, although he didn't look capable of any spit-flecked rants today. Lately his pain had been bad enough to reduce the rages to sarcastic skirmishes of parleyed insults she could swear he enjoyed. She'd even imagined a glimmer of relief, once or twice, that she was there.

"Are those the currant scones?"

“Already baking. The rolls too.”

He toddled toward her, hands bent at his chest like a bald eaglet just out of the egg. He scowled. “What is it this time?”

She checked her surprise. “Gruyère and sun-dried tomato croissants.”

“Not in my store.” He pushed through the swinging door to the front.

She stared after him. Progress. He’d asked what she was making, not accused her of stealing the ingredients.



Breathing the honey scent of beeswax, Tia lowered the candles into the clear amber liquid, curbing her natural impatience. Any pause or jerk would leave a flaw each ensuing dip would reinforce. She worked hard to keep her hand steady. Dipping tapers had trained her in self-control better than any scolding instructor.

She raised the wooden bar looped with six double wicks. As soon as the air touched the wax, it paled to ocher. She fitted the bar onto the side braces to cool the tapers before lowering them again, each plunge having the potential to reclaim with greedy heat what solidity the cool air had bestowed. The life metaphor struck her again. The destructive power of pain; the strength of endurance. She would give them all they needed to stand strong, even though their fate was to burn away, the glow and aroma of their passing a benediction.

A knock brought her out of her thoughts, and she wended through the dim shop where little by little she had replaced the former knickknacks with candles, scented oils, and hand-thrown melting pots. She looked around, satisfied that nothing she saw was made in China. “Just a sec,” she called through the door, tangling with the keys since she hadn’t opened yet.

“Try this.” Piper raised the drooping croissant.

Tia bit into the buttery, melted-cheesy pastry, savoring a chewy tang of sun-dried tomatoes and fresh basil. She leaned her shoulder to the doorjamb and sighed. Not all Piper’s creations worked, but this one... “Mmm.”

“You like it?”

“Oh yeah.”

“You’re not just encouraging me because you hope I’ll get better if I keep trying?”

“No, it’s really—”

Piper snatched the croissant out of her hands, turned the bitten end around in the parchment, and held it out to someone else. “Try something new?”

Tia leaned out far enough to see the person approaching. Lanky in jeans, mountain boots, and brown leather jacket bearing the police department emblem, he looked as ragged as a night spent with Johnny Walker, though she didn’t smell it on him, had not, in fact, for years. Even so, every muscle in her hardened—a visceral reflex as automatic as breathing.

He said, “Excuse me?”

His features were edged, and in an instant she realized what day it was.

“The croissant.” Piper flashed her sunny smile.

“Oh. No. Thanks.”

“One bite,” Piper cajoled, a hypnotic maneuver she had mastered. “And your honest opinion.”

He took a bite and chewed slowly, the muscles rippling along his jaw. “What are the red things?”

“Sun-dried tomatoes.” Piper bit her lower lip.

“Taste a little fishy.”

“The gods speak,” Tia muttered. *Couldn’t he just...*

“Fishy?”

“They’re not fishy, Piper.” Tia folded her arms. *A little tangy maybe.*

His gaze flicked over, weighing, measuring her. Sometimes they went weeks without crossing paths, but every time the encounter arced between them like a chemical adhesion, the two parts of epoxy that did fine until combined, then interacted toxically.

“People who know sun-dried tomatoes will expect that flavor.” She spoke to Piper, but her eyes were locked with Jonah’s.

“I’m sure you’re right.” He held the pastry out.

“No.” Tia raised her hands. “By all means, finish it.” She backed into the shop and closed and locked the door, returning to complacent tapers that had forgotten the burn of the wax.

---

Jonah winced at the sharp report of the door. Tia. Turning, he caught the look of surprise on the young blonde. He had no intention of explaining. “Here.” He tried to return the croissant, but Piper shook her head.

“Do you like it? Would you buy it?”

“You can’t sell—”

“If you like it, you could tell Sarge. Maybe he’d let me try a different thing or two.”

Now he placed her—Sarge’s new baker. No wonder she had the look of a puppy afraid of getting her nose swatted but wanting to please all the same. “Okay.” He started past.

“So, hey. Are you a cop?”

“Chief of police. Can I help you?”

“Who’s responsible for dead things?”

Caught unprepared, his adrenaline surged.

“There’s something on the path between Tia’s house and shop. Who’s responsible for cleaning it up?”

*Something*, not someone. His chest eased. “I’ll take a look.”

Most days he battled the boredom of policing Redford. This wasn’t most days. He turned off the street and cut over to the path. Realizing he still held the croissant, he folded the tissue around it and shoved it into his jacket pocket, then turned upslope until he found what she was talking about by smell before sight.

A raucous white and iridescent blue-black magpie flew up as he stopped several feet from the carcass. A raccoon. But then he realized there were two, only...they weren’t.

---

Annoyed when Piper tapped once more, Tia opened the door less magnanimously.

“Oh...my...gosh.” Piper all but quivered. “Who is he?”

“Jonah Westfall.”

Piper searched her face. “What—did he arrest you or something?”

“Don’t be silly.” No surprise Piper had picked up on it. His mere presence had curdled her mood.

“There are cute guys in town, but he’s all that plus chips.”

No way was she having this discussion. “Does Sarge know you’re out here? I can’t give you the room for free, so I suggest you don’t get fired.” Tia started back to her candles.

“Oh, he threatens, but he won’t do it.”

“I wouldn’t be too sure. Sarge has never allowed anyone in his kitchen before.”

“I know.” Piper followed her. “He’s told me about a thousand times. But about Jonah—”

“I have four orders to fill before I open shop.”

“Come on, Tia. Tell me.”

Tia felt the tapers, then lowered and lifted them once more. “This is a delicate process.” One she had done so often she could do it comatose. A bachelor of science and a master’s degree, and here she was dipping candles.

Piper watched, then surveyed the workshop as she always did, her gaze roving over the shelves of glass bottles with herbs in oils, dried fruits and berries, blocks of wax and bolts of wick. “This is great. You must love what you do.”

“I enjoy it. I wouldn’t say love.”

“Well, what do you love?” Piper peaked her eyebrows like an imp. “A certain rugged lawman?”

Once again it surprised her how freely Piper barged in. They’d known each other what, three weeks? “You’ve gone from silly to ridiculous.”

Piper leaned her palms on the table. “Why? Is he married?”

Tia slid her a dark glance. “Did he look married?”

“Good point.”

Tia straightened. “Now I need to work. And you need to get back before Sarge declares you AWOL.”

“I’m going.” Piper pressed open the back door but called, “To be continued.”

“Or not,” Tia called after her.