

# IN THE ARMS OF THE ENEMY

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## Chapter 1

It was a great day to catch a killer.

Jonathan Adam Blakely pulled into the driveway of the McGregor Ranch. The rumbling of the distant thunder was getting closer and toward the west, the sky looked black. As one gust of wind kicked up its swirling heels and died, another took its place. These were welcome respites in the sweltering heat, but even these blasts of air were heavy with moisture.

Adam didn't care. Another crack of thunder turned his world into a film noir atmosphere accentuating his morbid mood.

He rolled down the window to watch a riding lesson in the arena and almost suffocated with a blast from the stifling heat. The hay, horses and pine needles from the bordering forest preserve scented the sauna. Reminders of the stables of home.

The riders tried to control their horses with one hand, as they wiped sand out of their eyes with the other. Several of them were looking up at the massive oncoming wall cloud and leaving the arena. All looked soaked from the steamy humidity.

A redhead rode passed him on a bay, her face shining with beads of perspiration. She caught his eye and looked like she was going to stop, when her horse swerved at the sound of thunder. The woman regained control and kept on going.

Adam kept his eyes peeled on the arena, trying to spot his quarry. He'd never met a murderess face to face, and he doubted she'd wear a sign around her neck stating 'killer.'

I don't give a damn anymore about anything, except finding Maggie McGregor, Adam thought. He'd do anything to bring to justice the woman who'd been responsible for destroying his father. And since his FBI friends couldn't or wouldn't help him, he'd decided to concoct a new identity--Adam Grant, playboy entrepreneur. He was determined to see what this she-devil might look like.

A woman was standing in the center of the arena circled by a few riders. Her brash voice screamed at her students to get their animals into the barn before the storm hit.

A strong gust sent a garbage can flying across the arena, and one of her riders lost control. The thoroughbred sidestepped, bucked and bolted. The frightened teenager lost her balance, tried to hang onto the animal's neck and finally lost her grip. The momentum of the sudden stop caused her to pitch over the side of the animal and land on her rear, still holding the reins. The redhead rode up and slid off.

He couldn't hear the conversation, but the mini-drama interested him. The girl

was crying, apparently frightened, and her horse snorted and pawed the ground, looking anxious to be back in the barn.

The woman gave the girl a little hug, and the girl's face lit up. The woman laughed with her, sending a warm pleasant sensation over Adam. He wondered who she was. She cared about children that much he knew.

The riding instructor walked up to them with a frown. She said something, shaking her head, and the redhead held her hands in a surrender posture. She mounted and trotted to back to the gate. Adam watched her leave the ring.

Adam's shoved his thoughts aside as a black anvil thundercloud blotted out the sun. The wind died down and the sky shifted to resemble an ugly bruise he'd sported once after a fight in high school.

He drove away from the arena and parked his truck and trailer close to the large sliding barn door. An older man, leather-skinned, bronzed by the wind and sun, crouched, fiddling with something on the side of a tractor. When Adam approached, the man handed him a screwdriver, and asked for his help.

"See this? You just screw that sucker in until it's tight. I'll be holdin' the piece on—like this."

Amused, Adam did what he was told, crouching down beside him.

"Yes, yes. That's right. Good."

He stood up and appraised Adam. "Thanks. You our summer help? Bit old for a high school lad, I think."

Adam grinned and handed the old man his screwdriver. "No, I'm Adam Grant."

"Sorry. I was expecting a boy who wanted a summer job and didn't show up yesterday. I don't know what made me expect him today. I'm Cullum McGregor." He brushed himself off on bib overalls and shook hands.

A firm grip. A self-assured, kindly, tough old man who'd give a kid a summer job. Not the kind of man who'd raise a daughter to kill horses.

"I'll be glad to help, if you need a hand." Adam remembered his role. He gave the man a shy shrug. "I haven't been around working farms much. I'm a city boy."

"Mr. Grant . . ."

"Adam."

"What's a city boy like you doin' here? Little out of your element, aren't you, son?"

Adam smiled. "Renting an apartment and boarding my horse."

"Ah yes. You'd be the one renting the apartment."

"That would be me. Where should I put my horse?"

Cullum McGregor opened his mouth, but shut it again as he looked at the sky. "Nasty bit of weather. Wouldn't surprise me if that one spawns a tornado," Cullum said.

The sky looked like God's fury ready to unleash itself upon an unsuspecting mankind for their manifold sins.

"Come on Adam. Let me show you your stall."

Cullum led Adam into the barn and down the aisle where curious heads poked noses over stall doors. He stopped at an empty space with ankle deep bedding.

"This'll be your horse's stall," Cullum said.

Adam nodded and peered inside. "What's that on the ground?" he asked. And, before the old man could answer Adam asked, "And what's that for?" Adam pointed to

the grate.

Cullum's eyes narrowed at him, before he grinned. "Haven't been around horses much, have you?"

Adam shook his head.

"Well son, let's start with where we keep 'em. The horse is kept in a stall--it's like their bedroom. The shavin's are their blankets and that grate on the door keeps their teeth from nibblin' on passers by." Cullum slid the stall door open and switched on the light, as Adam kicked through the sawdust.

Good quality bedding. Looking at the peeling paint on the walls, he thought the old man's priority lay with the comfort of his animals and not appearances.

A loud clap of thunder crashed overhead. The stall light flickered. He heard whinnying, and looked outside the stall. Soaked riders led their panicky horses down the aisle. Someone yelled something from outside, but the unleashed combination of wind and rain was so loud, he could hardly hear anything.

"Close the barn door," someone yelled.

The redhead he'd seen in the arena led her bay down the aisle pointing to the outside. "There's a horse still out back. And . . ." she said looking at Adam, "there's a horse in a trailer, outside."

"Um . . ." Adam said, desperate to get Bluebird inside, but not allowing himself to blow his cover, "could someone help . . .?" Adam shook his head, trying not to grimace at his pretended stupidity.

"My daughter can help you," Cullum said. Adam looked around for the instructor, but didn't see her.

"Where is she?"

"Here," the woman replied, reaching out her hand for the formal handshake with one hand and holding onto her reins with the other.

"My daughter, Maggie," Cullum said. "Maggie, this is our new boarder, Adam Grant.

"Hi."

Adam took her hand and stared at the woman who had the largest aquamarine eyes and most luscious copper hair he'd ever seen in a--murderess. This was Maggie McGregor?