

# Chapter 1

He's making my life miserable," April Foster said. "Every time I turn around, he's there. I could be getting coffee or eating out somewhere. Or just walking down the street. The guy always shows up."

Rollie Torres quickly typed notes on his laptop as the young woman spoke. She had brought her case to Raven Investigation, hoping to get help. Rollie was working part-time for the company. He was still in college, studying criminology. His goal was to eventually become a police officer.

"You know," Rollie said. "Dealing with stalkers is not something we normally do. You may have to go to the police with this."

Raven Investigation offered several different services. Searching for missing people and doing background checks were two of them. The company did investigate couples. One partner or the other was suspected of cheating.

But April's story was different. She was being stalked by a stranger. The man had become obsessed with her. It was easy to see why, Rollie thought. The young woman was really pretty. She had huge dark eyes and beautiful skin.

All of a sudden April leaned forward. "Do I remind you of anyone?" she asked.

"No. Not really," he said, sure that he would remember if he *had* met her. But then he took a closer look. Something about her eyes was familiar.

"Think back to high school," April said. "You went to Wilson, right? You're Rollie Torres."

"I did go to Wilson," Rollie said. But he

honestly didn't remember ever seeing April there.

“We were in the same history class. It was four years ago.”

Then Rollie looked at her more carefully. It couldn't be. Margaret Fierster? This was the girl who had been called names all through high school. Kids told cruel jokes about her size and her looks. There were comments about being fat. Guys would call out names of animals as she walked by.

Rollie never made jokes about Margaret or called her names. But he would laugh along with his friends. Remembering that now made him feel ashamed. And he was also embarrassed. A girl like April Foster would probably never go out with him. And here he had once treated her so badly.

“Margaret?”

“That's right,” April said proudly. “I lost all that weight. And look at me now! I'm

a model. And I'm also studying to be an actor."

"Wow! You look great," he said.

"Did you know that I had a major crush on you back then? I thought you were the best-looking guy in school." April laughed. "I spent a lot of time staring at your yearbook picture."

"No. I never knew," he said, feeling a little uncomfortable. Margaret ... or April ... had to have known he'd been among the people laughing at her. Maybe she didn't remember that after so many years.

"It was a long time ago," she said. "And now here we are. I've got a whole new problem. The stalker. He won't leave me alone. You said I should tell the police about it. But I already tried that. They were no help at all. Supposedly there was going to be an investigation. But never once did the police come to see me. Not even when I called to say the guy was right there in the same room.

“It’s happened several times now. Most recently was at the theater downtown. I’m in a play there. Actually it just ended last night. But anyway, the guy would sneak in. And I’d see him staring at me. One time I called the police. But no one came to check it out. I guess they weren’t taking me seriously. It made me furious that this guy could get away with it. And there was nothing I could do.”

“Do you know the guy? Has he ever spoken to you?” Rollie asked.

“I have no idea who he is. And he’s never said a word to me. He only watches from a distance. But there is something else. He always has a silk scarf with him. Red silk. He waits until I see him. Then he ties a knot in the scarf and pulls it tight. It’s like he’s pretending to strangle me. I feel like it must be all he thinks about. I’m terrified, Rollie. I really need your help.”

He got up from his chair. “Wait here,

April. I'll talk to my boss. Maybe there's something we can do."

Mr. Dumas looked up when he saw Rollie coming. "What is it, Torres?"

"I'd like to take on a case, Mr. Dumas. It's a stalking."

Ren Dumas wasn't impressed. The tough ex-cop had seen it all. He looked back down at the papers on his desk.

"The woman could be in real danger," Rollie told his boss.

"Who? April Foster?" Dumas said. His tone of voice made it clear he didn't take the woman seriously. Just like the cops, Rollie noted. "I see her over there. Did she tell you about the stalker with the red silk scarf? I don't believe a word of her story. But we need the business. So sure. Let's take the case. It'll be good experience for you."

"Thanks, Mr. Dumas," Rollie said. He walked back to his desk. "It's all set," he said to April. "We'll help you."

“Thank you!” she said. “I really appreciate it. Knowing the guy is out there somewhere waiting for me has been so stressful. I’ve hardly been able to sleep. And it makes it hard to focus on my acting.”

“Let’s get started. First I need a description of the guy. Have you been able to get a picture of him?”

“No. Any time he’s been around, my phone is somewhere else. But I can tell you what he looks like. His hair is dark brown. I think his eyes are brown too. I’d say he’s about six feet tall. And weighs ...” April looked at Rollie as if she were comparing the two men. “How much do you weigh?” she asked him.

“Around 190,” Rollie said.

“Okay. He probably weighs about 175. He’s pretty skinny. Not well-built at all.”

“How old do you think he is?” Rollie asked.

“Forty, maybe?”

“Any other features I should know about?”

“He’s got this really long nose and not much of a chin, if I’m remembering right. And it might sound strange. But his eyes appear to be really narrow. Like he’s angry or squinting. They never seem to be all the way open.” April shook her head. “He’s weird, Rollie. Really weird. He probably can’t get a real girlfriend. So he came up with this sick fantasy about me.

“I told you I’d never spoken to him. But I think I might have once. It was just before this all started. I got a call from a man. He said he was a fan of mine. Then he asked me if I ever dated fans. When I told him no, he said there was a first time for everything. And I shouldn’t make a decision I’d regret. It sounded like a threat to me.”

It was no surprise that a man would want to be with April. Her face alone was so beautiful. The way she dressed added to



her looks. She wasn't exactly shy about it. Rollie was sure she got attention from a lot of men. For many, April would be hard to resist. He could just imagine what the guys from Wilson High would say now.

“Do you know how this fan got your number?” Rollie asked.

“Someone at the theater gave it to him,” April said. “At first I thought it was a mistake. It was against policy for our personal information to be given out. But I'd gone out with the guy a couple of times. He wanted a relationship but I wasn't interested. That's when he got really upset. Now I wonder. Did he give out my number to get back at me?”

“What's his name?” Rollie asked.

“It's Danny Jones. I think he moved away. But he has nothing to do with the stalker anyway,” April said.

Rollie nodded. “You never know. He might have some information that could be

helpful. I'll check into it. But back to the stalker. When does the guy usually show up?"

"Like I said. He'd show up at the theater. But sometimes he hangs out on the street across from where I live. That really scares me. I'm afraid that he'll break into my apartment."

Rollie tried to be reassuring. "He's probably harmless. Most guys like this are. But there's always the exception. So we have to take it seriously. Don't worry, April. We'll find him and put a stop to it. Then if he continues to bother you, I'll take steps to get a restraining order."

"I feel so much better now. It's good to know you'll help me with this," April said. "I have to admit something, Rollie. I knew you worked here. I've been following you on all the networking sites. It looks like your life is going really well. Don't laugh when I tell you this. I always wanted you to be my

first boyfriend. I'd imagine us going out. Is that silly or what?"

Rollie smiled at her, uncertain of what to say.

"Sorry," April said. "That must have sounded weird. It's not like I'm stalking you or anything." She laughed at her own joke.

"I'm just glad you are going to help me. You'll be tracking me all the time, right?" April asked. "You need to be there in case the guy shows up. It's always at random times. He's even followed me on dates. Maybe it would be a good idea for us to go out together. Then you could see him in action."