

Chapter One

It is 7:35 a.m. when Kevin Christenson drives into the parking lot of Darrius Corporation in Denver, Colorado, or D.C., as all the employees call it. Kevin feels like he hasn't completely awakened yet, last night's conversation with Brian about the company's rumors had made it difficult to fall asleep. Today, however, everything looked just like the gossiping it was.

Kevin is proud of his work as the safety director at D.C., the fifth largest gold mining company in the world; they have nine mines in the UK, four in the US and two in Canada. Kevin's responsibility is to all fifteen mines.

Kevin is a thirty-six-year-old bachelor who doesn't take much care of his appearance, but is attractive. Six feet tall and his body is fit. He has short brown hair and small, lively green eyes.

The D.C. building Kevin works at is a two-story, rather large building. The front of it is all glass windows, including the second floor. It has tight security, with at least four security guards on duty at any given time. The guard office is just inside the front doors of the building, to the right of the main forum. Everyone that enters the building must have a security card that they swipe on a card reader inside the first set of doors.

Kevin uses his card to walk in. The main forum has an elevator that leads to the upstairs. The only door in the forum, besides the door for the stairs and the security room, leads to a hallway that goes to the back of the building. It has multiple

offices on both sides before the hallway ends a thousand feet back.

Before three years ago, security wasn't of much importance to D.C., but they had a break-in in which nearly three-quarters of their documents were stolen. The documents contained information about D.C. customers, maps of all the mines D.C. has, and above all, billing documents to customers they mine gold for.

D.C. now holds all that information on computers and hard drives. It's stored at both the Denver branch, and the main branch in Topeka, Kansas. D.C. and the Denver police never understood, and still don't, why the computers were left behind in the robbery, and why the four petty cash boxes were, too. The robbers even closed the file cabinet doors and desk drawers when they were done with them. They also left the security camera tapes behind. From those tapes, police counted twelve robbers; they all wore similar black pants, black shirts, and black ski masks.

The police were never able to solve the case. To this day, no one knows what happened to the documents, or why they were stolen. D.C. did its own investigation and found nothing.

A few minutes after Kevin got to his office, took off his coat, and laid it on his office chair, the loud phone rings. It's Tom Brice, his supervisor. A few seconds later, Kevin tells Brice he's on his way. Kevin leaves and goes to Brice's office.

“Morning. Sorry to bother you so early, but there’s something important that came up,” Brice says after Kevin enters his office.

“No problem,” says Kevin.

“We’ve been having a lot of problems with the Riley mine in Canada, the one next to the Colonial mine. I need you to head a team and clear the mine so we can go back to work there.”

“I haven’t been there,” Kevin begins to explain, “but I read the journals about it yesterday. Miners refuse to go back into the mine, temperatures reaching two hundred and twenty degrees, and one miner suffering third-degree burns.”

“I need you to do a complete investigation on it and clear it for more mining.”

“Anyone specific you want on my team?” Kevin asks.

“Not yet. Is there anyone you have in mind?” Brice asks.

“A geologist, I’m thinking. Somebody from the United States Geological Survey, the USGS,” Kevin answers.

“Ok, I’ll call you tonight.”

Kevin stands up and leaves Brice’s office. He held back from Brice the little bit of fear he has about Riley after what he’s heard and read about it, but he’s optimistic. “Perhaps the rumors aren’t all true,” he thinks to himself, and he brushes the dark thoughts away.

At the end of that day, just before six p.m., Kevin was making his way to his truck in the D.C. parking lot when he heard Brian calling, “Hold on!”

Brian is in charge of associate support; he provides the equipment that the miners need. He travels almost on a regular basis for the company. He is thirty-four years old, five feet eleven inches tall, with short blond hair. He's usually ready for a chat, and always seems to be very well informed about the Darrius Corporation.

Before working for D.C., he was a warehouse supervisor for a food service company that went out of business. When the company shut down, Kevin helped Brian get the associate support position at D.C. They've been best friends for seven years, since they met at church.

He catches up with Kevin in the parking lot. Kevin puts his briefcase on the driver's seat in his truck and leans his arms on the top of the driver's door.

"Is it true? You're going to the Riley mine?" Brian asks.

"Yeah."

"Am I going too?" Brian asks.

"You know I'm going to Riley but you don't know if you're going with me or not? Probably. Brice is going to call me tonight. I would pick my own team, but I don't know who's doing what and who's available, Brice is figuring that out for me. Would you be ready to go up there?"

"Well," Brian says with a low voice, "what about those rumors we talked about last night? I'm a little nervous, it's only been a few months since the California mine."

"I know, I think about what happened there all of the time."

"I couldn't even tell my wife what we saw," Brian explains.

“Look,” Kevin begins to explain, also in a quiet voice, “all we know about Riley is that the miners, when they’re in there, hear people talking, and sometimes screaming. Two workers are missing, the rest of them won’t go back into the mine, and some of them quit. We’ll just take one step at a time. We’ll be careful like we always are, and if it gets too dangerous, we’ll report that the mine has to be shut down for good. We’ll keep it simple.”

“Three people were being dragged away by invisible spirits,” Brian begins to explain. “The temperature in there was jumping from a hundred and ten to two hundred degrees. All that D.C. had to say was ‘Close the mine down and don’t tell anybody.’”

“I don’t know why the Riley mine is doing what it’s doing. I don’t know what was going on in the California mine, but we’re not alone on this, that’s something I know for sure. And you know that too, don’t you?”

“Alright,” Brian says with a voice of little comfort.

“Sometimes I miss my old job.”

“Would you rather have someone else go through what we went through at the California mine? Kevin asks.

Brian agrees and shakes his head *no*. “I’ll see you tonight,” Brian says, reminding Kevin that he, his wife, and kids are going to Kevin’s place for dinner.

“I’ll see you tonight,” Kevin says as he gets in his truck.

Unbeknownst to Kevin and Brian, from afar, somebody was looking at them, spying on them with binoculars.

Kevin starts his truck, puts it in reverse, but then stops, puts it back into park and turns the engine off. He stares towards the car in front of him, but looking at nothing specific. He thinks back to four months ago, when he got a call from the retirement home saying that his mother had just passed away. Kevin was really close to his mom, and especially missed her because he doesn't have any brothers or sisters. He had to deal with the news alone: Evelyn Christenson-Runnel, at eighty-seven years old, stricken with Alzheimer's disease, died in her sleep.

Kevin's dad, Russell Dave Christenson, died when Kevin was eight years old. He was driving home from work in a snowstorm and the roads were iced over. When he was on Highway 13, a two-lane narrow road, he lost control of his car and it went off a cliff. Evelyn remarried a few years later, and her new husband passed away one year ago.

Kevin restarts the truck and goes to a department store to buy a few personal things for the trip. On the way to the checkout line, as he is thinking if he has everything he needs, he stops for a second to consider buying cigarettes, even though he quit smoking a year ago. He doesn't buy any and feels a little frustrated at himself for even thinking about having a cigarette, and knows that whenever he's tempted to smoke, he's under a lot of stress. Even though he didn't show it to Brian, he is a little nervous about the Riley mine as well.

Chapter Two

And the top story tonight at ten: Trooper Carl Bartlett remains in critical condition after being shot on Interstate 31, after pulling over a motorist for a traffic violation. The suspect is still at large. Godnight,” Karen says shortly before she takes the microphone off her shirt.

“Good job, Karen,” Chris the meteorologist says.

“Thanks, guys, but I think I’m going to tell James to give me a better warning next time that I’ll be on my own.”

“Karen, James just called for you,” producer Ron in the control room says over the intercom.

“Well, that was fast!” she says as she gets out of the chair.

“Oh no! Not even two minutes and the big boss man wants to talk to you,” Chris says.

“Hey, maybe he’ll give me a raise!” Karen says jokingly.

“Does he want to see me too?” Chris asks Ron.

The newsroom is quiet. Chris shakes his head *no*.

Karen walks up to the director’s office and knocks.

“Come in,” the director responds with a raised voice.

“Yeah, James,” Karen says as she walks in while leaving the door open behind her.

“Hey, have a seat.”

Karen sits down on the chair in front of the desk.

“How ya doing?” the director asks.

“Good.”

“You did great tonight. Sorry to put you alone up there, but I knew you could do it.”