

Chapter 1

Hungry



Nancy's stomach growled as she walked with Brenda toward their favorite lunch spot—a burrito joint with dirty floors, old furniture, and cheap, oversized burritos. After a long morning analyzing spreadsheets, reading reports, and engaging in heated discussions that lasted well into the lunch hour, Nancy was tired, hungry, and in need of food . . . quickly.

She didn't want to think about the bad news the spreadsheets revealed. She didn't want to worry about the reports anymore. And she didn't want to talk to one more person about the future of her company. All she wanted to do was eat. Yet instead of turning left into the burrito joint, she grabbed Brenda's arm and whispered, "Keep walking." Her intuition was stronger than her hunger, and it told her that the man with the mustache in the blue suit was following them.

"What's the matter?" Brenda asked, as Nancy began to jog instead of walk.

Nancy pointed and nodded toward the man following them.

“Again,” Brenda said.

“Yes, again. Come on. Let’s lose him,” Nancy said as she grabbed Brenda’s arm and they ran down the street. Moments later, they came to an intersection, turned left, made a quick right, and then took the next left, zigzagging their way through downtown, hoping to lose their pursuer.

The first time Nancy realized that someone was following her, a few months ago, it terrified her. She’d called her husband, a retired police officer, in a panic, only to learn at her board meeting later that day that it was probably some form of corporate spying. *More like idiot espionage*, she thought. She was told it came with the job of being the newly appointed CEO of a company that everyone was watching. With its stock price in the tank, revenue falling, and rumors swirling, the company was a likely acquisition target, which meant that business reporters, investors, potential acquirers, and powerful businesspeople were doing their due diligence on the company, and it also meant that they wanted to know more about the new CEO.

Her life wasn’t in jeopardy, but her privacy was, and Nancy didn’t like it one bit. She did whatever it took to keep the prying eyes out of her life, even if it meant forgoing mouthwatering burritos and running through downtown streets. Thankfully, her effort paid off, and when Nancy and Brenda stopped in the middle of the street and looked around, their pursuer was nowhere in sight. They had lost him, and now it was time to eat. But where?

Nancy noticed a long line of people at the end of the street, and as she and Brenda approached, they realized

that these people were waiting to eat at a restaurant. Brenda looked up and read the sign on the building: GRAND-MA'S SOUP HOUSE.

"Let's eat here," Brenda said.

"Are you serious?" replied Nancy. "We *make* soup. We live and breathe soup. We are surrounded by soup every day of our lives. Do you think I really want to eat soup for lunch? I've had enough soup."

"Oh, come on," Brenda said. "Where else are we going to eat? And besides, look at this line. It's almost 1:30 and the place is still packed. It must be good. Plus, they probably have sandwiches and salads, too."

"Fine," Nancy said, realizing that her hunger was getting the best of her. "But if it's not good, you're buying the burritos tomorrow."

"Deal," Brenda replied.

