

## Prologue

Gelina pressed back against the storefront, scanning the unfamiliar street. It looked safe. She stepped out of the shadow, her stiletto heels clicking against the concrete as she ran to the curb and dashed across the connecting road.

From the side street the low, powerful hum of a geared-down motor sounded.

She hadn't lost them!

Her heart lurched violently in her chest, pumping terror through her veins. She broke into a dead run down the deserted sidewalk toward a patch of darkness under a broken streetlight.

Maybe I should throw my purse into the middle of the road. Maybe he'll stop looking for me if I give him the money!

Light from the oncoming car pierced the night, spreading in an ever widening swath across the pavement behind her as it approached. She had to hide. But where?

The deeper darkness of a recessed doorway appeared on her left. Gelina darted up the short flight of stairs, then wedged back against the side wall as a long, black car pulled up to the intersection. The black fishnet stockings stretched across her thighs caught on the building's rough stones.

Where to go? Tony won't be satisfied until he makes an example of me. If he finds me, he'll kill me just to show the other girls, she thought frantically.

A sob caught in Gelina's throat, choking off her air. She leaned her head back against the stones and closed her eyes. Oh, God! Oh, God! If You're real, help me. Help me!

White light from the car's headlamps swept across her eyelids. They were turning in her direction. She was trapped! Fear writhed like a living thing in her stomach.

The car started a slow crawl down the street toward her.

No! Oh, God, no! I don't want to die!

With a spasmodic jerk, Gelina spun around and grabbed the knob on one of the double doors beside her. Her clammy hands slipped on the cold, polished brass. Locked!

The hum of the car motor grew louder. Her heart bucked like a wild thing. She grabbed the other knob and gave it a violent twist. The latch clicked back as the gleam of the headlights threw her shadow against the painted wood. At that moment, she yanked the door open and leaped inside the building. She slammed the door closed and collapsed against it, her chest heaving with silent sobs.

The hum of the powerful motor faded away down the street.

"Good evening."

Gelina jerked upright and spun about.

"I'm afraid the service has already started. But better late than never." An elderly man smiled and handed her a leaflet. In the center of the cover was a large cross with the word CROSSROADS emblazoned on the horizontal bar.

Hysterical laughter bubbled up into Gelina's throat. She was in a church. Of all places! Tony would never—

"We're quite crowded because of our guest speaker, but if you'll just come this way, I'll have one of the ushers seat you."

The hysterical laughter died. Gelina stared at the man. Was he blind? Any fool could see she didn't belong in a church. Her long, brassy-blond hair swung side-to-side as she shook her head. "No, thank you. I'll just wait here a moment."

The hum of that powerful motor sounded nearer. A car door slammed. Gelina dropped the leaflet and whirled to face the door. She jumped when the man touched her arm.

"You're in trouble, aren't you?"

Mute with terror, she nodded.

The man gave her a little push as footsteps approached the door. "Go through those doors. Hurry!"

She stumbled forward, caught her balance and ran.