

Untitled by Maurine Howell

The second he heard her on his answer machine, he knew he should have killed her when he'd had the chance.

"This is Dallas Sheffield," the familiar voice invaded his quiet office. "I need to talk to you."

He hadn't thought about Dallas in years. She hadn't been part of his life's plan in the ten years since they'd agreed to keep their secret. But that didn't mean he hadn't kept a watchful eye on her. This couldn't be good.

"I'm doing the Twelve Step thing for adult children of alcoholics," she continued. "We're almost to step nine. Making amends. You're on my list." A pause. "I recall some things, but I need you to help me remember the rest. So please call me. My number is . . ."

He didn't hear the rest. His stomach burned with the thought of what she did remember. She could mean only one thing. He had to make sure she never remembered the rest. It would ruin everything he'd labored to accomplish for the last twenty-five years. He would be disgraced and go to prison, for crissake.

He took a deep breath and flexed his hands. Damn. Her timing sucked. Everything was beginning to fall into place. The brass ring within his reach.

His stomach roiled, acid churning, and a sharp pain rented through him. His heartbeat thundered in his ears. He yanked open the center drawer of his mahogany desk. Where the hell were the antacids? With a shaky hand he reached for the bottle, fumbled the lid off and shook out a handful. He stared a moment at the chalky tablets, then palmed them into his mouth. Stay calm. Don't panic. If he panicked, he couldn't think. He had come up with something to silence Dallas forever.

Editor's Critique: The opening line hooks the reader and immediately shows what genre this story belongs in. The villain's point of view (at least I hope this is the villain!) is an intriguing one, often providing much of the excitement in a romantic suspense story. You immerse us so well using his voice, and one page is not enough for this editor. I love how you show us how this character is breaking down mentally and physically. I don't want poor Dallas to die, but one gets the feeling that this phone call is this guy's stressor. As a romantic suspense junkie, I'm eager to find out what happens next. Well done! Best of luck with the contest and enjoy the rest of the week!