**PREVIEW**

**Perilous Gambit**

**(Mike Stoneman Thriller #5)**

Chapter 2 – Alarming discovery

MIKE STONEMAN WAS PERPLEXED and getting frustrated. He was staring into the bottom Dr. Michelle McNeill’s bedroom closet. Michelle, the county medical examiner, was running late, which was unusual for her, but not her fault. The body that came into the morgue late that afternoon was a high priority. Michelle completed the portions of the autopsy process that required her personal attention, and left the remainder to her assistant, Natalie. But, by the time she arrived at her Third Avenue apartment, she needed to hustle if they were going to make their pre-theater dinner reservation. Mike’s assignment was to fetch her silver two-inch pumps. They were supposed to be on the rack on the floor on the left side of the closet.

When Mike could not locate them, he was confused, since Michelle was the most organized person he knew. Other shoes were there in the rack, but not the silver pumps. Mike decided to open the right side of the double door. As it swung outward, Mike noticed two things. The missing silver pumps where there, on the hardwood floor just inside the threshold. But what really caught his eye was the dress covering the entire inside surface of the closet door.

It was sheathed in clear plastic, as if just returned from the dry cleaner, and hanging from a swiveling hanger hook draped over the top of the door. The dress was a shining white, covered with tiny white beads and lace fringes. It had long sleeves with white silk gloves dangling from its lace cuffs. There was no question. It was a wedding dress.

Mike had seen the inside of Michelle’s closet enough times to know that this dress had not been there as recently as a few days earlier. He grabbed the silver shoes, carefully unhooked the dress hanger, and carried them both down the narrow hallway.

Michelle was looking into the bathroom mirror, applying makeup at an efficient but unhurried pace.

He set the shoes down on the floor. “Here you go. And, by the way,” He held up the dress. “Is there something you want to tell me?”

Michelle didn’t look away from the mirror, where she was applying mascara. “Oh, Mike, you didn’t touch Rachel’s dress, did you?”

A very relieved Mike exhaled, not conscious of how tense he had been. “No. I mean, it’s still in its plastic. But – why is Rachel’s wedding dress hanging in your closet?”

Michelle was now brushing eyeshadow on her lids. “We picked it up this morning at the Vera Wang sample sale. She didn’t have time to take it back to Brooklyn before her shift, so I said I’d hold it here for her. She’s was supposed to be here a half hour ago, but then again, so was I. I guess we’re both running late. I hope she gets here before we have to leave. I’ll text her as soon as I’m finished.”

After returning the dress to its place, Mike walked to the living room and sat down, trying to assess why his heart was still racing after seeing the wedding gown. He glanced at his wristwatch. If they were going to make it to the restaurant in time to have dinner and still make the curtain for *Wicked*, they needed to be down on the street hailing a cab in the next few minutes. At that moment, the house phone rang, indicating that someone was ringing up from the lobby.

“I’ll get that,” Michelle called out, emerging from the bathroom wearing the silver pumps and looking ready to leave. “It’s probably Rachel.”

Michelle picked up the white phone hanging on the wall, looking like a leftover from the 70s. As soon as she brought the receiver to her ear, her expression changed from calm to concerned.

“Rachel, what’s the matter? . . . Slow down, Honey . . . What? . . . Never mind. Just come right up.”

“What’s that all about?” Mike asked.

Michelle stood frozen, the phone receiver still in her hand, tethered to the wall unit by its short coiled cord. “I’m not sure. Rachel’s coming up. She was distraught – almost hysterical. I’ve never heard her sound like that. Something’s very wrong.”

\* \* \*

To find out why Rachel is distraught, pick up your copy of [*Perilous Gambit* (Mike Stoneman Thriller #5)](https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B08BZMDSVT). Order on amazon.com or visit my website at www.kevingchapman.com.