

chapter 1



sultry seductress. A pleasure goddess. That's what I will The boys are being be tonight.

Josephine thought, as she chuckled to herself while she stared back at the full-length mirror. " looked after, dinner is in the oven and I can't forget the main course, he's on his way ome."

Josephine said, out loud to her reflection as if she were talking to another person. One by one she pulled out every single sexy piece of clothing she owned. She was very excited about this evening and very frustrated that she couldn't seem to find what she was looking for. After hours of rummaging through her closet, she finally settled on the slinky black dress. It made her look thin—well thinner. It hugged her shapely curves just right. Josephine quickly slipped out of her bathrobe into the slinky black dress. She looked at the cascade of auburn hair that came down to the middle of her back. *Rick loves long hair* she thought to herself as she fiddled with it; pulling it this way and that. Making the decision to finally pull it back, she left some loose hanging tendrils in front and back. *It will all come down anyways.* Laughing she made the final adjustments to her hair and wardrobe.

Quickly she gave herself a once over and then hastily ran down the stairs. Surveying the room, she wanted to make sure that she had the right atmosphere in the house. The table was set for two, with candlelight, several candles in fact. In the ice bucket was contained a nice bottle of Rosé wine and the crystal wine glasses were just waiting to be used. Everything was perfect. Heading upstairs, she stopped and poked her head into the bathroom, ensuring that everything was ready. The bath foam was sitting on the edge of the Jacuzzi, the bubble jets set, and the candles. They had been strategically placed, *tonight is going to be heaven*, and Josephine smiled to herself as she continued upstairs.

Satisfied, Josephine walked into her room, she quickly took another glance at herself in the mirror to make sure she was looking her best and then she sat down on the window ledge, one leg dangling. Patiently, she waited. Looking down at the street to see if Rick had arrived home yet, when she didn't see him she turned her emerald eyes skywards. Making herself more comfortable she watched as the day sky, slowly start to fade. The once blinding yellow sun had turned to a great big ball of orange and the bright blue sky was now turning to darker shades of blue with a touch of light mauve breaking through. As the sky faded, and the darkness of the night chased the day away, Josephine contemplated her life. Actually, no she was *celebrating* her life. She had two beautiful children, Charlie being the oldest and full of child innocence, which continued to be reflected in his enormous brown eyes, and yes although he was mischievous, it was hidden behind his angelic face. Josephine smiled as she thought him and his beautiful contagious laugh. He was a happy child and anyone looking into those big brown eyes could see that. His younger brother Alex was only four months old. With his chubby little legs and his chubby little toes, he was adorable and he was the child that when you looked at him you thought *'I want to eat him up'*. Laughing at her own thoughts, she wandered back to Alex. He had a head full of dark brown hair like his older brother and the same huge brown eyes. *'A spitting image of his brother'* is what people called him, she thought to herself.

Josephine was happy with her life; she was a remarkable private eye for an elite security company. A lot of hard work and dedication got her to her position. All the training courses both classroom and defensive. As well, she was a black belt in Kung Fu and she had a license to carry a firearm. Her career was extremely fulfilling. Now, she had her family, something she had dreamed of from when she was a little girl. Her childhood was difficult and as a little girl, she had made one vow; she would be different from those in her family. Josephine was. She did what she had always dreamed of doing. She had her family and a great career. She had Rick Macloud, her husband and her family. Nothing could come between them, how could she not be content with that?

Rick was on his way home; she had called him earlier to confirm that he wasn't working late and she also let him know that she needed whip cream. *There are so many uses for whip cream. Yummy.* So for now or at least until Rick arrived she figured she would read. Still settled on the ledge of the window Josephine was already getting into the book when she was startled by the loud "DING DONG!" She all but fell off the ledge. Immediately regaining her balance, she headed for the door. "DING DONG!" "Okay. Okay. I'm coming. Hang on!" She said out loud knowing full well that no one could hear her. Josephine had already reached the door as another DING DONG sounded off in her ear. Nanook and Timber were barking up a storm. It was as if chaos had erupted all at once. After stumbling over both mammoth dogs, she managed to turn the lock, and open the door. Without looking up, "Couldn't wait to see me huh? Fumbled around with your keys thinking of me all sexied up for you? Eh?" Josephine said laughing.

"Hum, hum." The husky voice of a male said. Josephine's smile faded and color ran into her cheeks.

"Oh my god, I am so sorry. I was expecting my husband." She rushed out in a slur of words as she held on to both dogs by their choker chains, both dogs were pulling and growling at the intruders

"Are you Mrs. Josephine Macloud?" The man asked.

"Who wants to know?" She asked as her security training kicked in. She had no time to censor her words.

"I'm homicide detective Easterbrook and this is my partner Detective Davis. May we come in?"

"Where is your identification, I want to see it." She said once again as her security instincts remained in full force. The detectives took out their badges and showed them to her. She looked carefully at both badges and both men. There was a pause.

"Now may we come in?" He said as his agitation started to rear its ugly head.

"Sure." She held her dogs close to her and motioned with a nod of head to come in. When they were in, she released her dogs but maintained voice control over them. "What can I do for you detectives?" *Kind of a lame question* she thought. *I should be panicking right now. Homicide detectives don't show up on front doors every day.* As the words that Josephine thought to herself sunk into her thick, stubborn, brain panic actually did start to form inside her gut. The pit of her stomach started doing funny things. Her body started to convulse as if she were going to puke. Leaning her hands on the table to brace herself. *It's Rick. Something has happened to Rick.* The words shimmered in her mind. No sooner did she think the words, did detective Easterbrook confirm them.

"There has been an accident. I am sorry we have to tell you this but there has been an accident and your husband has died. We need you come down and I.D the body." Josephine's body went limp. If the second detective wasn't standing behind her she would have fallen to the ground and landed on her ass taking her table cloth with her.

"What? How? Oh God! Not Rick! Not Rick! There must be some mistake." She sobbed with her hand covering her mouth with fresh tears streaming from her eyes. "This can't be, I spoke to him not two hours ago, he was picking up some groceries for me before he came home," she fumbled out through hallowed breaths.

"Ma'am, we're terribly sorry for your loss, but we really need you to come identify the body." Detective Easterbrook said gently. Josephine needed time to assimilate the information.

"Do I have to come now?" She asked, her voice was pleading.

"I'm afraid so, we'll take you down to the where the body is." Easterbrook said as he chose his words carefully. "An officer will drive you back afterwards." Josephine wiped her face and tried to control her short breaths.

"No. I'll call my mother, she'll get me." Josephine wanted someone to comfort her she didn't want to be around a police man who couldn't offer his support. Josephine tried to get her breathing under control as she fought hard to keep back the tears, but the battle was useless. The tears came anyways. Josephine dragged herself to the phone and was about to pick up the receiver when the phone rang. "Hello." Josephine said. "Who's this? Mallory? Thank god. I was just going to call my mom. Since I have you though." The sobs were getting harder to control. "I need a favor. Something terrible has happened. It's Rick. He's... He's." She couldn't get the words out, the phone fell from her hand and she slid down the kitchen wall to the floor. Detective Easterbrook picked up the receiver. While Detective Davis attended to Josephine.

"This is Detective Easterbrook, I can't get into specifics, but I can tell you that we need Josephine to come with us, can you please come pick her up." He muttered out an address. He hung up the receiver. "How is she?" He asked his partner grimly.

"She'll be fine. It's the shock." Davis said casually as he shrugged his shoulders. Josephine was sitting at the table with her cheek down. Davis took it upon himself to find a glass and get some water. When she came to Davis shoved the glass towards her. "Here drink some of this, it should help." He said gruffly. He hadn't intended for it to come out that way it just did. Embarrassed he shrugged. Josephine smiled warily accepting his unspoken and pathetic attempt at an apology.

"When she's up, let's get going." Easterbrook said gently. It was a command though and Josephine heard it.

At the morgue, the detectives escorted her to where Rick was. Detective Easterbrook tapped on the window, the curtain opened and Josephine found a young man in a white lab coat waiting on the other side. Detective Easterbrook nodded his head and the young man pulled back the blanket. All the way. Josephine nodded her head but not before a horrified gasp escaped from her throat. Immediately the man in the white coat pulled the cover back over Rick's body.

Somewhere in that moment of insanity, she heard the detective cursing the stupidity of the "new guy" on staff. She also picked up part of a conversation that she was not supposed to be privy to. "The blood loss is unexplainable." Josephine's conscious self-ignored the comment, but her sub-conscious stored it away for further examination.

Detective Easterbrook apologized to Josephine for the brutality of what she saw as he escorted to the reception area, where she found Mallory waiting with the same puffy eyes she herself was donning. Mallory ran up to her friend pulled her close and hugged her tightly.

"I'm so sorry." Mallory offered.

"Please just take me home." Josephine whispered. Both women left and the ride home was silent except for the sobs that escaped Josephine.

It was late when Josephine and Mallory returned home. Marcia and Rachel were already there, Mallory had called them on her way to get Josephine. All Josephine wanted to do was crawl in bed and go to sleep. Rachel, Josephine's mom offered to stay and help her out for the next couple of days. She wasn't old but the stress of the night looked as if it aged her, her short strawberry blond hair was ruffled, she had bags under her eyes. She looked as if she had new stress lines etched into her gentle caring face.

Marcia offered the same as well, and she looked bad compared to her usual self. Her usual sky blue eyes looked darker and puffy from obvious crying bouts. She had bags under her eyes as well. Her flowing sunshine blond hair was pulled back in what looked like an old lady bun. Mallory looked rather composed. She stood tall and her hair was in a ponytail, her amber eyes were darker and puffy along with bags. All in all everyone looked as good as could be considering.

"Is there anything we can do for you?" Marcia offered with her smooth soft voice.

"No. Thanks anyways. I am going to bed," Josephine answered quietly. She didn't ask about the boys because she knew the answer, everything was done. She heard Mallory yell as she headed upstairs.

"If you need anything, let us know," Mallory called out after her.

"Thanks." Josephine called back in a barely audible voice.

Mallory locked and closed the front door and let the dogs out into the backyard. She fed the fish brought the dogs back in. She locked the patio door, and finally turned out the lights.



For Josephine this had been the longest day of her life. She found both boys in her room. They were out like lights and oblivious to how their life had without warning changed. Josephine put Alex to bed first since he was still in his cradle, which was in her room and then she picked up Charlie and brought him to his bed. As she tucked him in she realized that she would be going to bed by herself for the first time in ten years, as the thoughts came flooding back the tears welled in her eyes and finally spilled once again. She quickly went to the washroom and put on her p-jays. She didn't bother to put up the gate because someone was downstairs and since Charlie could walk and Alex could barely turn over she had nothing to worry about. She had leaned over the stair railing and called out to Nanook and Timber, "upstairs." She said as she pulled away from the railing and turned to walk into her room when she caught a glimpse of her wedding picture on the wall. She leaned back against the railing for balance, for just a brief moment. She turned and went to her room and silently cried herself to sleep.

Josephine tossed and turned the whole night; she woke up from nightmares twice; this last time it was Ricks' body she saw. Motionless. Gray. He was on a gurney in the morgue. There were marks on what was left of his neck, his throat had been ravaged. In hindsight, she had figured the coroner was new or something because she got the distinct feeling, she was not supposed to see Ricks' entire body. When she finally sank back into a deep slumber Alex woke up. Sighing in frustration he pushed the cradle over got her nursing pillow and picked up Alex. She fed him and he went back to sleep right away. She put him back down and got out of bed to check on Charlie. She peeked in his room and saw that he was sound asleep; she went in anyways and pulled his covers over him. She looked at the clock and it read five o'clock on the dot. She tried to get back to sleep but it was a futile attempt. Since she couldn't get back to sleep Josephine decided to let the dogs out, when they were done she went back upstairs to her room and they followed. She crawled back into bed and grabbed the remote. She turned on the television. The

news was still talking about her husbands' brutal death. She didn't even listen to what was being said, she just quickly changed the channel and ended up watching Buffy the Vampire Slayer.

Both kids were up at seven thirty, and so the first day of her new life had begun.

"Where's daddy?" Charlie asked. He quickly answered his own question "Daddy went to work." Charlie shrugged his shoulders in his new spider man pajamas and laughed.

Josephine gulped hard. *So it begins.* She thought to herself. She didn't answer Charlie, she wasn't ready to face the reality yet and besides that she needed time to try and figure out exactly how she would explain death to a three year old. Josephine was visibly distressed and her heart was breaking. Again she felt the tears begin to fill her eyes.

"Are you sad? Are you ok mommy?" Charlie asked innocently. When Josephine didn't answer he proudly handed her a tissue. As she looked into Charlie's big brown eyes and saw the concerned look on his face, it brought a warm feeling to her and she put on a brave smile.

"I am ok baby," she said weakly. "Mommy is tired that is all."

Josephine had taken a shower and gave both Alex and Charlie a bath. She told both of them that they would be staying with grandma and Aunt Mallory and even Aunt Marcia today because mommy had some errands to run. Charlie was excited and couldn't wait to go downstairs.

"Hurry up mommy, hurry up." Charlie bellowed as he slid down the stairs on his bum. Josephine finished dressing Alex and dragged her butt downstairs. She found her mom and friends already waiting for her and they had a fresh pot of coffee waiting. Everyone looked better this morning, her mom didn't look old anymore and her friends well they looked refreshed. The bags under the eyes were still present, but the wonders of makeup are a miracle. Josephine did her best to put on a smile, but everyone present knew it was a front.

"I have to do stuff today, like the funeral arrangements. I am going to need some help. I don't think I can do this on my own." Josephine said as she tried to swallow back the sob that forming in her throat.

"I'll help you," Mallory said. Marcia didn't protest because although she was one of Josephine's best friends she wasn't quite as strong as Mallory and she knew instinctively that Josephine needed someone much stronger than her to aid her in the tasks that lie ahead.

"I think it's better if I stay and help your mom. By the way Rick's parents are coming to town they won't be here for a couple of days they have to arrange for some stuff. Mallory made sure to call them last night." Marcia added. Josephine looked at her friend and silently thanked her. Josephine knew that was her task but last night she handled about as much as she could take.

Josephine and Mallory headed out. While Mallory drove Josephine called her insurance broker and her lawyer she advised both people of last night's events. Mallory noted that she didn't go into details she just gave the short version. Josephine set up her meetings and then she got off the phone.

"Something is very wrong with how Rick died." Josephine blurted out. Mallory was more than a little taken aback by the comment.

"You think?" Mallory said with a somewhat puzzled look on her face.

"No. There was something about the way he died. I mean the police said something about an animal, Mallory he had a goddamned frigging wound, that what from what I saw looked like tooth marks on his neck. His throat was non-existent. What kind of animal do you know that does that? I also heard someone say that they couldn't explain the 'loss of blood' go figure that." Josephine was all but shouting at Mallory.

"Is it possible you misunderstood?" Mallory asked. "You had an extremely rough night Josephine. Maybe you should give Manny a call? After all, he's a cop and you are friends. It's not like you haven't teamed up on cases before," Mallory added. He might be able to clear some of the questions up. I mean it, you should give him a call." Mallory suggested in the hopes that it might calm Josephine down.

"You know what, you're right." Josephine said as she hit the button that was programmed to dial Manny's direct line. "Manny? Hi it's Josephine. Thank you. I need a big favor. Can you please pull all the reports including the forensic ones on Rick? I know. Pause. I'm asking a lot and you'd be risking your job, but I gotta tell you, something's not right. I saw Rick last night, *all of him*. I think the coroner was new. I saw the marks. I saw everything on Ricks' body. I know I shouldn't have seen those. Something's not right and that's the reason I'm asking for help. I know I am not a P.I. anymore, but every instinct in me is screaming to me that something is off. Please Manny, I wouldn't ask otherwise." There was pleading in Josephine's voice. "I need to do this Manny." There was a pause. "Thank you, I owe you big time." Josephine said with conviction and emotion. She meant every word.

"Well what did Manny say?" Mallory asked.

"Manny is going to get me the files I need." Josephine said as she let out a small sigh of relief.

"Really?" Mallory asked surprised. "He is going to get them for you, just like that?" Mallory asked a little shocked.

"Why?" Josephine asked. "I can just picture Manny now my *little* six-foot mafia friend." She laughed. "The cigarette hanging out the corner of his mouth, his mop of brown hair slicked back and his clean-cut baby face with those ever-dark piercing eyes." She said laughing. "Can't you just imagine him barking out orders with his suave Italian accent?" Josephine asked, laughing so hard that it hurt. It felt good to laugh even though it was at her friends' expense. Mallory joined Josephine's laughter as she pictured the image. *Manny is a true friend, both professionally and personally. You know what they say it's not what you know but whom you know that counts.* Josephine thought to herself.



Mallory drove up to the curb and parked directly across from the funeral home. Josephine said nothing. The car was eerily silent. If it was possible to hear a person wince then Mallory heard Josephine loud and clear. Both women exited the vehicle and while crossing the street Mallory wrapped her arm across Josephine's shoulder. They walked into the quiet, parlor of death. "Have you ever noticed how serene it is in these places?" Mallory stated in a low voice trying to ease the tension.

Josephine gave Mallory an exasperated look as new tears formed in her already puffy eyes, while the old ones dried and streaked her face. Stepping through the door Josephine's heart began to race, the sorrow that overwhelmed her made her nauseous, she couldn't help but feel like her soul was being ripped out. All that remained was the void in her chest and it was as black as a starless night. Mallory sighed at her own stupidity and hung her head when she saw the pain in her friends' misty eyes.

"I'm so sorry, I was just... just trying to ease the tension is all." Josephine looked at her and feigned a smile.

"I know. I know you were. It's okay," Josephine said reassuringly to her friend. Just then, a short, slightly pudgy man appeared in a dark suit. Looking at both women he chose his words-- carefully.

"My name is Kevin Belmont. Please accept my sincere condolences on your loss." He said as he handed a box of tissue to Josephine. He waited a moment. Two, before he spoke again. "I would like to start by showing you the caskets. I find that most people are uncomfortable around them and it only adds discomfort. Pause. . Please follow me." He said with a smile and extended his arm in a leading gesture. Josephine and Mallory followed the man in complete silence. Pointing out the caskets he advised the women of the prices. Josephine chose what she wanted. Next were the details of the service and the cards that would be handed out. Josephine wasted no time. This was an extremely painful ordeal and all she wanted to do was get out of that place. When everything was finished, she stood up and shook hands with the man. Mallory and her left, and headed home. Josephine knew she needed to make adjustments and amendments to her will; however, this would all be dealt with after the funeral. Right now she was overwhelmed. *How will I deal with all of this?* Josephine thought to herself. She wanted to scream.

"Mallory, I 'm changing my will and insurance policy. I'm adding you and Marcia as beneficiaries in trust for my policy, in case anything happens to me. You should also know that both you and Marcia will be named as guardians for the boys." Josephine announced. "All of this is going to happen after Rick's funeral. I just wanted you to know." Josephine added.

"What? Why? What are you thinking about doing?" Mallory asked in a concerned voice.

"Nothing. This situation just put things into perspective for me. Anything could happen at any time to me and in the event that something does happen, I need to know that the kids and pooches will be provided for. I need to make sure that I have taken care of my loved ones. That's all. The boys are my main concern." Josephine said matter of factly. Mallory was about to protest, but Josephine eyes shone with that determined look, the one that said, *'don't bother to question my motives'*. Mallory backed off for now. That wasn't to say she wouldn't figure out what Missy was up to and why.

As Mallory drove home Josephine closed her eyes and went over all the events of the night before, it was a painful process but her gut said she was missing something. *Homicide Detectives, ravaged throat, pin pricks or tooth marks. What am I missing?* Josephine's eyes flew open. "What's wrong Josephine? What are you thinking?" Mallory questioned. Josephine looked at her friend and seeing the concern in her eyes she immediately sought to remove her friends concern.

"Nothing Mallory, I was...er...just thinking of last night, that's all." Josephine tried to sound causal and calm, when she saw the tension leave Mallory's face she forced herself to relax for her friend's sake.

That night was a difficult night. Although Josephine had her mom and friends there for support, it was still difficult. Everywhere Josephine turned or looked there was something reminding her of Rick. The most difficult part was that she had to pick out a suit for him to be buried in. She would also have to eventually go through his clothes and pack them away. *How do other people get through this?* Josephine asked herself. *I don't know if I can do this, if I can be strong enough for my children. God, little Alex would never know his father and Charlie; he'll only have vague memories. Why God, why did you take him?* Josephine was screamed inside her mind. She found her emotions in conflict; sadness against anger, hate against anguish. The battle was constant her emotions were in turmoil and she was struggling

to be strong. Eventually she knew though, the inevitable would come. She would breakdown. She tried to close her eyes so that she could get some sleep. Tomorrow was another day. It would be a long day

chapter 2

Manny's day wasn't going to get any easier. He had just finished lunch with Josephine, assessed her emotional state and tried to figure out just how much she knew about Rick's death. He reluctantly provided her with the reports like she had requested.

"Josephine, you know I'm very sorry for what happened to Rick. You have my deepest sympathies," he said as he walked with her to her car.

"Thank you Manny, she said as she pulled him in for a hug. "You've been a good friend and you have given me everything I need to solve this. She said as she kissed him on the cheek and stepped into her car. Manny reached for his cell phone as he watched his friend drive away. He called his silent partner. "Yeah, it's me. We have to meet as soon as possible. I have just handed off all the paperwork concerning Rick's death to Josephine. Let's meet at the coffee shop up on Lexington in, say, a half hour." Putting his phone away Manny walked to his car, he got in and put the car in first gear. He left to meet his colleague. *Josephine, what are you getting yourself into? You should have just left things alone and move on. What triggered you?* The ringing phone interrupted Manny's thoughts. *Great, it is the chief.* Manny answered the phone, "Hello Chief, what's up? Yeah I know that this investigation is classified. Well, she's my friend and she's a colleague. Bottom line, Sir, I feel responsible for this mess. We owe it to her; she doesn't even know what is coming for her. Maybe we should..." Manny was cut off in mid-sentence, by the Chief's protest. "No, nothing will be divulged. I understand. Well, from what Josephine and I talked about, I could not really assess the situation and determine what she remembers. Already done. I have already called him. He is going to play ex-cop for now and monitor the situation. I am on my way to meet him now. I'll keep you posted." Click. *If anything happens to you, Josephine... God forbid I run into the bastard.*

Meanwhile, Donovan O'Hara was heading out the door when his phone rang. He ignored the call, but he stayed and listened to the message. "Mr. O'Hara, my name is Josephine Macloud. Manny recommended that I give you a call." The message ended with Josephine rambling out her phone number. Donovan quickly grabbed a pen and paper and jotted down the phone number. With the number in his hand, he headed out for his rendezvous. Donovan arrived at the coffee shop shortly after Manny did. Walking inside he looked around and found Manny sitting at a table in the corner. Manny had his back to the door, yet when the rays of the sun were suddenly blocked, he knew instinctively that his massive friend was there. Manny, turned and smiled and motioned for him to come and join him at the table instead of getting up to greet him. Manny sat watching as his friend casually walked over, he noted that Donovan's face, which was normally solid as stone, was donning a smile, the smile didn't quite hide the truth of what he did for a living; his face said with no uncertainty that he was an experienced man, and that he was a warrior just like Manny. When Donovan reached the table, his friend was already standing to greet him with a strong handshake. Donovan reciprocated the gesture and then pulled out a chair and sat down.

"Make yourself comfortable Donovan. We are going to be here for a while." Donovan looked a little perplexed, as he pulled the chair toward the table. The waitress came by and dropped off a menu, full of dessert and pastries.

"I'll give you gentlemen a few minutes. Can I get you any drinks in the meantime?" she asked.

"I'll have a café au lait," Manny said. "I'm trying to lay off the hard stuff," he glanced in Donovan's direction. The waitress nodded and looked over at Donovan.

"I'll have a double espresso, with a little cream on the side, please." Donovan said with a small hint of a smile on his face.

Both men watched as the petite waitress walked away. They noted how her ass swayed side to side as she walked, and how her ponytail followed the same movement. Donovan and Manny both shook their heads, "Ah to be young again," Donovan sighed.

"Yeah, yeah, I know what you mean," Manny added.

"Manny, you going to order some grub?" Donovan asked, as he waved the dessert menu in front of him.

"Maybe, let me see the menu." Manny took it from Donovan's hand. When the waitress returned with the coffees, she bent over the table and placed them down gently, exposing her cleavage to both men. "Can I take your orders now?" she asked.

"I will have the lemon meringue pie, please, with a scoop of vanilla ice cream on the side," Donovan said. She jotted it down on her pad. She looked at Manny.

"I'll have the apple crumble pie, with a scoop of butterscotch ice cream on the side," Manny said.

"Thank you, I'll be back shortly," she said, as she took the menus, turned, and walked away.

"Now, let's get down to business." Manny was already reaching for his black leather case that held a laptop and some folders.

Donovan reached over and put his hand on the case. "Can we eat first, and then talk?"

"Fine, food first," Manny said, with a hint of annoyance in his eyes.

"Well, let me tell you what happened before I got here." Donovan started to say. "I got a call from Josephine Macloud just before I left the house to come and meet you. She said you had recommended me for a job. I took her number before calling her back I wanted to wait and see what's up before calling her. Is this what our little meeting is about?" Donovan asked.

"Yeah! I'm sorry I didn't tell you when I called, but I didn't want to explain things over the phone. I also got a call from the chief," Manny said.

"Well what's the skinny and why did you recommended me for a job?" Donovan asked.

"It's actually because of Josephine. I think she's going to start digging into Rick's death, actually I know she will. She seems to think that there is more to his death than meets the eye, if you catch my meaning. I'm not exactly sure what she's thinking, I can only guess that it's not good." Manny shook his head.

"Did something go wrong with the memory suppression?" Donovan tilted his head sideways, waiting for an answer.

"The conversation I had with her today indicates no. She doesn't seem to remember anything. If she had she would have remembered you, don't you think?" Manny said. It was a statement.

"Then what's the problem, and what exactly do you want me to do?" Donovan asked as he sipped some espresso. Just as Manny was about to expose his little operation to Donovan, the waitress came over with their food.

"The apple crumble is yours," she placed the plate down in front of Manny. "The lemon meringue is for you," and she placed the plate down in front of Donovan.

"Thanks." Both of them said at the same time. The waitress smiled sweetly, turned and walked away.

"So, where were we?" Donovan said, as he picked up his fork and dug into the pie.

"I was about to tell you what has to be done," Manny said, as he lifted the piece of pie to his mouth. "Basically, in a nutshell, you're to monitor the situation with Josephine."

"Why are you putting me on this? Why not just have some cops monitor her and tap the lines?" Donovan asked.

"For one we have to figure out if any of the memories were triggered. Josephine, you and I are the only ones that were privy to the operation. Maybe the memories weren't triggered, and she is just guessing and pulling at strings. The Chief said he wants you there, besides this is your area of expertise, if anything goes down you're all that stands between Josephine and what's coming for her. As for Josephine and line taps, I know her, she will not talk about this on the phone. Second, I think and I *stress*, 'the I think part', she is going to start her own little investigation. I really do not want to see her hurt. I already feel responsible as it is," Manny said, playing with the remainder of his pie like a kid. "Listen, this situation doesn't sit right with me. My gut tells me she is up to something. It's also saying..." He trailed off.

"Well, spill it. What's on your mind?" Donovan asked, although he already knew the answer.

"C'mon, tell me you don't think the same thing is happening all over again except with different players?" Manny answered without looking up at Donovan. "I know. It's guilt about what happened. What proof do we have? The guy was a pile of ash along with a wooden stake. We don't know who knew, we don't even know if his buddies knew. I have already been over this a thousand times in my mind," Manny said, now looking directly at Donovan. "Don't you think it is a bit coincidental that Rick died two years later...to the very day. I feel responsible for this. Josephine is suffering because we called her in." Manny said, as he slammed his fists into the table, making the pie plates rattle and the coffee spill over.

"She is a great P.I. with a unique ability. She's also trustworthy. You know this couldn't have gone down any other way," Donovan stated.

"Well, if she is so trustworthy, why did we have her hypnotized?" Manny asked accusingly.

"We didn't have a choice; rather I didn't have a choice. The division I work with is very secretive. We can't have people running around with information that could wreak havoc if it ever got out. Besides, it was for her protection as much as it was for ours. Trust me Manny, I feel terrible about what has happened," Donovan stated. There was no blame just truth.

"We could have trusted her with this. I doubt that she would've told anyone that she tracked down a vampire that brutally murdered some innocent fifty years ago. People would have thought she was a crackpot. This whole thing doesn't feel right and it didn't sit with me from the beginning and now, because of what we did, look at the consequences. She may have consented willingly but in the end, we

had no right. Right now, all I know is, I'm feeling guilty as hell about Rick's death," Manny said with guilt in his eyes. He didn't try to hide his shame.

Donovan looked at Manny and saw the torment in his face. "You can't do this to yourself. Josephine knew what she was getting into she wasn't blind. For all you and I know..." he trailed off.

"Don't. Even. Go. There. We have been investigating the paranormal for too long now for you to even consider that this was a regular death or random act. Someone is gunning for her, I am sure of it, and I think...no, I know we both know what's coming after her. It's a vampire and we both know it. It's Nawzir, it's Jonah, or it's both? That is the real question, though, isn't it?" Manny said, with his brows furrowed and his jaw tight.

Donovan couldn't hide his agreement. He knew that a vampire had killed Rick. The reports that the police put out were just a cover up. Something to say, you know, to keep attention away from what had actually happened. Donovan knew, most vampires kept to themselves, except for the few rogue ones. However, in all his years of service he never knew, of any vampire that had targeted people. *Moreover, what is with the two-year delay? Why not go after Josephine and her family right away?* Donovan sat in silence, as if pondering what Manny had said and like Manny he plucked away at his pie in silence.

"Let me see the files on Rick and what our surveillance picked up on Josephine," Donovan managed to say through a mouthful of food.

Manny bent down and picked up the black bag he had been carrying and placed it on the table. He opened the bag and pulled out two files. The first file contained everything that pertained to Rick's death. The second contained information from the case two years ago. "Did you bring the case file from fifty years ago?" Donovan asked. When Manny looked up at his friend, Donovan clearly saw and interpreted what Manny's eyes were saying, *do you think I am stupid or something?*

"No. I don't think you're stupid, it was a simple question, that's all I had to ask, and it's in my nature;" Donovan smiled knowing that he was irritating his friend. Manny grimaced and pulled out another file.

Donovan took the remaining files, and started rifling through them. He was paying special attention to the details of the very first murder and comparing them to Rick's death. Manny watched as Donovan nodded his head several times and managed to make an "hmm" sound. Manny was fidgeting and becoming more impatient as he continued watching Donovan. "Well? What are you thinking?" Manny finally asked.

"There's no question, Manny. The two incidences are identical. The only thing that appears to be different is the actual wound. Don't get me wrong, they both had their throats ripped out, but the actual bite marks look slightly different. I guess that would be expected, since two different vampires committed the acts. Tell me again, what Josephine knows and why do you think she has this urge to find out more?" Donovan asked as he tapped his fingers against the table.

"Personally I think it's just her instincts as a private investigator. You can also thank the flimsy coroner down at the morgue; he certainly didn't help our situation. Actually, he's the reason this started. He pulled the blanket further back than he should have. Josephine saw the bite marks, the ravaged throat, everything. That's when I guess she started thinking. I don't think it is more than that, unless the trauma of losing Rick set off some sort of defense mechanism in her sub-conscious. On a conscious level, I don't think she has any clue, and what scares me the most right now is that we know that a vamp is here. I'm certain that Rick's death was no random attack; I think she's next. She's vulnerable right now. Josephine will not recall anything or realize why this is happening to her. That's why I recommended you. I need

you to go in and keep an eye on things. Actually, to be frank, when she called and asked for the files, I agreed to give her the copies. When we met up for lunch I gave her the files, and your name." Manny sighed and took a deep breath. "It occurred to me to get you involved as quickly as possible. When she picked up the files, I told her to call you. I told her you were retired and just looking for some extra bucks. Since she has called you, it means she's definitely up to something. In any case, I'm glad that your name's on the table."

"Is that it?" Donovan asked, with a raised eyebrow.

"What she thinks is that you're a reliable and trustworthy friend that I'd give my life for," Manny smiled teasingly.

"So she thinks that I have worked with you before and I'm a dead beat out of work looking for some extra money." Donovan corrected and let out a laugh that sounded like a grunt.

"Huhum," Manny cleared his throat. "I made it seem like I had no clue what she was up to," Manny continued.

"Well, at least we can rule out that her memories resurfaced. Now, we just have to figure why the visit to the morgue got her wheels turning. We also have to figure out why she called me, besides the fact that you told her too. Looking through your notes, I notice that she is planning to see her lawyer and insurance broker. Is she amending her will? She certainly is going to great lengths to ensure that business is taken care of, in case something does happen to her. And by the way what does the chief have to say about all this?" Donovan asked as he chugged down the last of his espresso.

"Well, he wants to make damn sure our butts are covered. We have been given a go-ahead to investigate and monitor the situation. Obviously this is deemed as classified and no one is to know," Manny added.

"What about unseen complications such as other persons becoming involved? We don't have control over that. More importantly, what if the need arises that we have to invoke Josephine's memories..." Donovan trailed off.

"Listen; just do what has to be done. We cannot have people knowing that vampires, ghouls and goblins exist. We are the twenty-first century. We have to use our common sense and ensure that none of this gets out. We'll be the laughing stock of the media and branded as lunatics." Manny stated matter-of-factly.

"Got it. But I don't like charades. It's dangerous. What about the vamp or person that took care of business two years ago? What if the person or *it* should rear its ugly face? Then what? I don't like this one bit," Donovan slammed his hand palm down on the table. "We know for certain someone or something is out there that is every bit as dangerous as the person targeting Josephine," Donovan said, showing some concern.

"Well, let's hope he is one of the good guys," Manny said, with a forced smile. Just then, the petite waitress as if on cue came back.

"Would you gentlemen like anything else? Perhaps a refill on your coffees?"

"No, thanks, just the bill, please," Manny said, smiling at her.

"Separate or together?" The waitress asked.

"One bill will be fine, thanks." Donovan said, looking up at her.

"I won't be a moment." The waitress turned herself around and headed to the cash. She came back within a minute. She slid the black booklet onto the centre of the table. "Here you go." She said carefully, so as not to assume who would be paying. "Thanks for coming and have a great day," she said, and then she walked away.

Donovan slid his hand across the table and snatched the booklet before Manny could get it. He looked at the tiny white paper inside and then reached in his back pocket and pulled out his wallet. He put some cash in the booklet along with the bill and closed it shut.

"Thanks!" Manny said.

"Anytime. Besides, we haven't done this in a while. It brings back memories of the good old days, when things were less complicated." Donovan smiled as he gathered up all the files and placed them in a neat pile. Manny closed his leather case and got up. Putting the leather case strap over his shoulder, he pushed in the chair and held out his hand. Donovan got up and pushed his chair aside and shook Manny's hand.

"I guess I'll be seeing you around," he said, as his hand dropped.

"No, not really, but you will be able to contact me twenty-four seven. I can't get involved; otherwise Josephine will think something is up," Manny said.

"Ah, I see. No problem. Anyways, I've got a lady to call." Donovan said, with a wink. Both men walked out of the coffee shop. "I'll be in touch Manny. Take care," Donovan said, as he walked toward his car.

"Take care, buddy, and *be* careful." Manny said, as he sat his car with one foot still out.

Donovan pulled out before Manny did. He pulled out the paper with Josephine's number and dialed her number. "Hello Josephine, its Donovan. I'm returning your call. What can I do for you? Well, we would have to talk about it first. I was not really looking for work, but since Manny recommended me, I'm willing to explore the opportunity. Did you want to meet somewhere? Well, I'm in my car: I can meet you wherever is most convenient. Okay then, I'll see you shortly. What's the address?" Donovan made a mental note. "Bye for now." Donovan hung up the phone.



Meanwhile, Manny had called in to report what had happened. "Let me speak to the chief," he told the receptionist. "Hey, Chief, it's me, Josephine has left and already made contact with Donovan. He is going to make contact with her. Yeah, he's been briefed on the situation and the package has been delivered. When he makes contact with her the first time, we will have more of an idea what is going down and we'll set up a schedule at that point. That's all I have to report for now. Will do, sir, bye." Manny hung up the phone. *God Josephine, I hope you have not bitten off more than you can chew. God help us if you did.*

