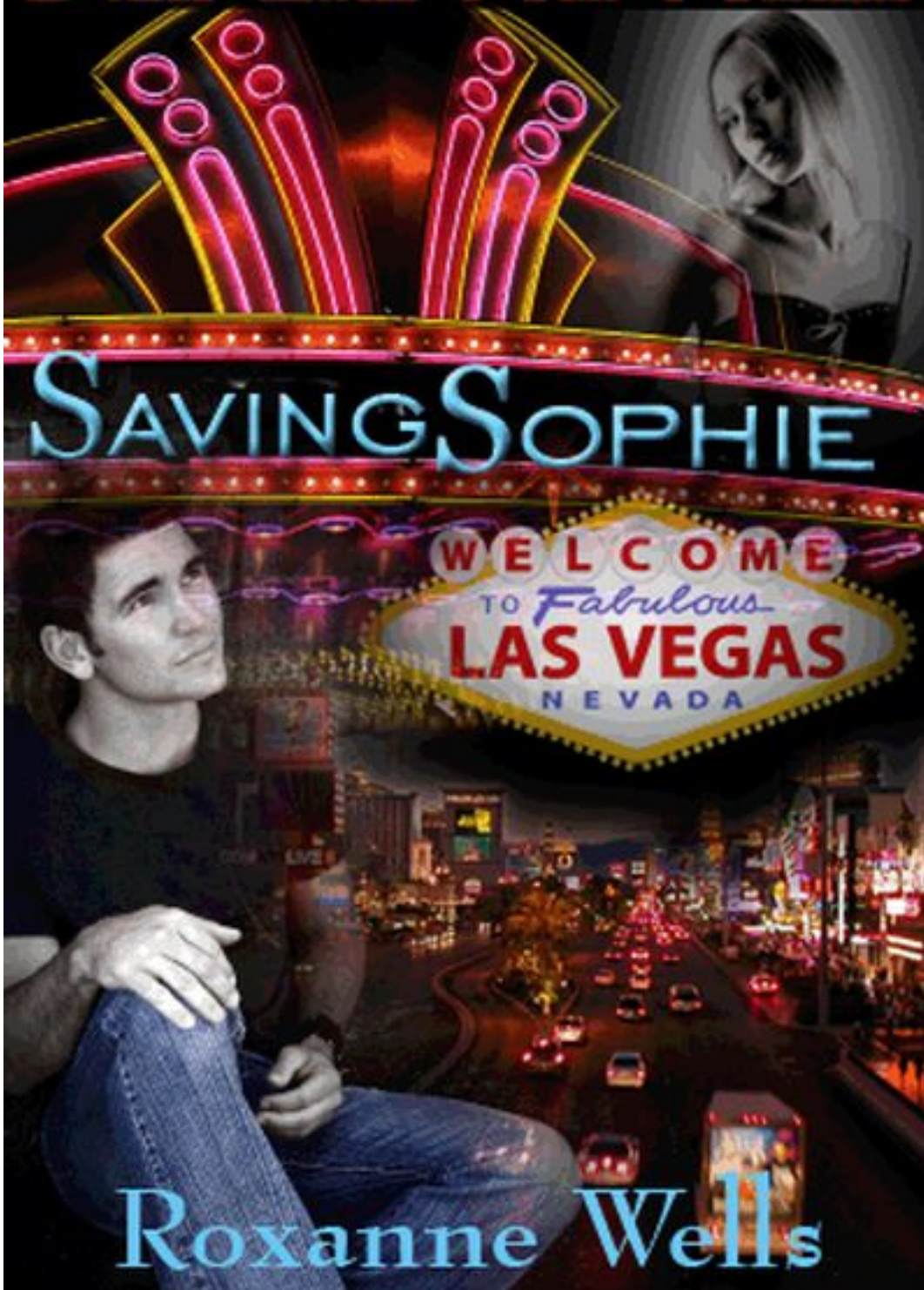


Dark Eden Press Presents



SAVING SOPHIE

WELCOME
TO *Fabulous*
LAS VEGAS
NEVADA

Roxanne Wells

A Dark Eden Press Publication



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Saving Sophie

Roxanne Wells

To all the cab drivers of Las Vegas who have been
there at just the right time.

Chapter One

Words of Wisdom

Why is it that every time you leave the presence of your mother she has to say some kind of words of wisdom? Why can't she just say, "See ya," or "lock the damn door when you leave?" No, my mother has to give me one long last speech about safety or the damn boogiemana saga before I depart. I love her, but shit; every time I visit it's a new horror story.

"Mom, please, stop watching the news. I'm a cab driver, and there's no hit out for me."

She took my face in her hands and kissed my cheek. She was a tiny woman with a big heart and a temper that was unpredictable. Her hair was the color of a Hershey bar and her eyes were an ice blue.

"I know, Jesse, but I have to warn my boy of what's going on out there. The "Cab Cutter" just gets into random cabs and does his thing. There doesn't have to be a reason. The guy is just a crazy man."

"This is Las Vegas, a town of multiple weirdos. I can handle it," I said rolling my eyes.

I could see the motherly worry in her eyes.

"You call me in a few days and be safe out there."

"Will do Josephine and thanks for dinner," I said while heading out the door. I felt a slap to the back of my head. "I hate when you do that." I smoothed down the back of my hair.

"I hate when you call me Josephine."

See her unpredictable temper?

"Bye mother."

"Bye, son," she said, waving from the front door.

I sat down in my Chrysler 300 and took in the new leather smell. Life was good.

I had a new ride, a new cab license, and had already made a grand this week. It was only Thursday. I drove out of the driveway lighting a cigarette one handed while moving into traffic. Too bad my bad habits would ruin the new car smell.

My life had taken a weird turn recently when my long time girlfriend, Kate decided that she and her friend Toni, who just happened to be a woman, were in love. Not the greatest ego booster; well life's a bitch and so is my ex for that matter so what the hell. Anyway, I'm over it. I've moved on. I quit my job at the car insurance company and I'm on to bigger and better things. Okay, so some of you wouldn't consider being a cab driver *bigger and better* so I needed a change, okay? Sheesh, give me a break. I figure I can meet a lot of people this way and work my own hours. I've already gotten two phone numbers from straight women. I glanced in the rearview mirror and took a long hit off the cigarette.

"Ah, shit, what if they're not straight?" the thought occurred, then easily dismissed with a quick chuckle. They wouldn't have given me their number if they were gay. Okay, so I'm a little paranoid about women now.

I flicked the cigarette out the window and flipped the stereo on. *Aerosmith* blasted *Dream On* as I hit the 15 freeway south and got off at Flamingo. It was show time. The Las Vegas strip lights were calling me, and so were the cash tips. I pulled into the Bellagio and inched my way up the taxi lane. A beautiful blonde opened the door before the valet attendant could get to it.

"You gotta be quicker than that sweetie, if you want a tip," she called out to the attendant, smiling as she closed the door, sliding across the leather seat. "I hate Vegas. Take me to the Mirage."

She offered me a winning smile.

"All right," I said, accelerating toward the main street.

I watched her through the rearview mirror as she leaned against the glass and stared out the window. As usual summer brought traffic to a standstill, Vegas was crazy on the strip any day of the week. I slid the dial to turn up the air conditioning a notch and glanced in the rearview mirror again. She was staring at me.

"I like your picture," she said.

The blond cast a quick glance at my cab license before turning to look back out the

window once again.

“Thanks, I’m new to all this.”

“Really?” It sounded like she didn’t believe it but my mouth ran away with me.

“Yeah, thought I’d try something different for a change.” It sounded lame to my ears, so I shifted slightly, throwing off the urge to say something equally stupid.

The heat in August was unbearable to say the least and the air still wasn’t cold enough inside the car. I inched the car forward as the light turned red for the second time.

“What the hell? I could have walked there faster than this,” she said, with an irritation in her voice. “Sorry, but I’m in a hurry. I’m grabbing my stuff and catching the first plane out of here. I hate this fucking town.”

“Most people love to come to Vegas,” I said flashing my pearly whites.

“You’re too cute and much too young to understand---.”

“Jesse. Too young? You look younger than me.”

“Okay, so you’re charming too, Mr. Jesse. You gotta last name?” she asked as she leaned forward to look at my ID posted just above the meter. “Mr. Jesse Franklin.”

Her breast slid across the back of my tricep. I felt a hot flash. Suddenly, a wave a sweet aroma filled my senses. “Jesse Franklin,” she repeated softly. She leaned back and slumped in the seat.

“You smell really good,” I said, carefully waiting for a response.

“Coco Chanel,” she said exhaling heavily. I could lick that scent up all night. I rubbed the sweat from the back of my neck.

“So what brought you to Las Vegas?” I asked, glancing in the rearview mirror again. She quickly bit down on her bottom lip and her eyes welled up with tears. “I’m sorry, miss, I didn’t mean to upset you.”

“My boyfriend asked me to marry him and when we got here he decided he wasn’t ready. We live in a small town, Grand Junction, Colorado. When he got here I guess he saw all that he could be missing out on,” she said, tears streaming down her face.

I glanced forward and changed lanes quickly. I grabbed a tissue from the center console and handed it back to her over my shoulder, keeping my eyes on the traffic. My

mom gave me the tissues. Hey, I never thought they'd come in handy so soon.

"Thank you," she said, gratefully taking the offered tissue, wiping her tears away.

"Wow, if it's any consolation, he'll be sorry he let you go, a beautiful woman like you who smells like heaven."

"I can cook, too. The bastard."

I glanced back at her and caught her with a slight grin.

"You're gonna be fine," I said, smiling back and getting into the far lane.

"You sure are handsome for being a cab driver."

"Oh really? What do cab drivers usually look like?"

"Old and greasy," she replied quickly.

I snickered at her quick comeback.

"Well, that I am not. Maybe you should stay a few days and enjoy the sights?"

"No, thank you, I'm sharing a room with Mr. Cold Feet. I'm just going to leave."

"Too bad. I would have enjoyed driving you around," I said, pulling up the Mirage taxi lane.

I didn't want to look back. I had just realized the sexual innuendo and felt like an ass. I glanced back anyway hoping to cover up my gaff but she was too busy reaching into her purse. Thankfully it looked like she hadn't heard my last comment.

I stopped the car and the valet opened her door. I turned around quickly and reached for her wrist.

"Hey, this one is on me. I wouldn't want you to think all the men in Vegas are fools."

A smile swept across her face.

"Thank you, but Mr. Cold Feet is paying," she said.

She grabbed my hand and pressed a wad of cash into my palm, while with her other hand she trailed her fingers down my cheek as she left the car. I watched her exit the car and bump into a man on his way to my cab. She reached into her purse again as that man entered my car and shut the door.

"Luxor, and make it fast. I gotta get outta here," he said.

She walked back to my car and tapped on the window. I lowered it and leaned over the seat.

“I don’t normally do this,” she said, handing me a piece of paper and turning away quickly.

“Good night,” I said as she hurried into the hotel.

“Can we go now?” an irritated voice from the back seat asked, bringing me back to reality.

“Uh, sure, sorry,” I said shoving the paper into my front right pocket.

“I bet you get a lot of play here, dontcha?”

“No, not really.”

“Liar,” the rider mumbled, clearly not believing me.

“Not as much as you think. And, she’s the first woman I’d actually call back. Man, did she smell good.”

I’d enjoy driving you around. What was I thinking?

“Yeah, I can still smell her. What a slut,” he jeered, the look in his eyes making even me feel dirty as I looked back through the mirror.

I narrowed my eyes and sent him a warning look. The man had a black suit on. He straightened his tie and patted the sweat from his brow with a white handkerchief. He was sort of creepy. My mother would have definitely thrown his ass out of the vehicle. I drove on in silence but the traffic got the best of me.

“So are you visiting here?” I asked politely.

“No,” he replied.

“Oh, so you live here?”

“No.”

“Business, then?”

“Can you shut the hell up, cabby? In New York, we don’t talk.”

“O...kay,” I said, lifting my eyebrows.

Just before I reached the Tropicana I glanced in the rearview mirror again. A quick flicker of light glinted off the man’s dark brown hair. It didn’t look like sweat. I had the air-conditioning on high. The red light held me at the intersection. I turned around and saw a drop of moisture drip from his head and fall to my cream colored leather seat. A red splash hit as we both looked up at each other. He quickly swiped the handkerchief across the seat.

“Drive cabby. It’s green,” he said sternly.

I accelerated and got in the right lane.

“Are you hurt?” I asked cautiously.

“No,” he said quickly.

I heard a small squeaky sound and looked back.

“What?” he asked.

“Did you hear that?”

“Hear what?”

“That squeaky sound,” I said, driving into the Luxor parking lot.

“Hey, I’ll pay you extra to drop me off around back.”

“Ummm, can’t do that. Luxor wants us up front,” I said.

Something cold and hard pressed up against my head.

“Do it,” he said.

“Is that a fuckin’ gun?”

“With a silencer,” he said, with a devilish cheery sound in his voice.

“Ah shit. My mother knew you’d be out tonight.”

“Who’s your mother?”

“Yeah, like I’d tell you. Are you the Cab Cutter?”

The man began to chuckle.

“Like I’d tell *you*.”

I slammed on the brakes and heard a sound like a bottle rocket go off. I elbowed the man in the face and took off out of the car. The car rolled forward as he jumped out after me. I ran through the back parking lot and suddenly my body felt weak. I trotted forward trying to stay alert. I felt a drop of sweat run down my cheek. I wiped it and looked at my hand. The yellow lights above beamed down on my hand revealing a black fluid. It was blood. I heard faint footsteps come toward me as I dropped to my knees. A black blanket fell over my left eye. I turned to shield myself at the sound of approaching footsteps.

“Why me?” I asked him desperately.

“You saw the blood from my last victim. I thought I’d change weapons tonight. I got sick of getting blood on my hands.”

I reached up and grabbed his arm, smearing my blood on him. “Not your lucky night,” I said, shooting him a half grin.

“Son of a bitch! I just had this suit cleaned. Not my lucky night, huh? I’ll give you not lucky,” he said, pushing my head back.

The force of his hand threw me backward. I felt the back of my head bounce off the pavement but I felt no pain. All went black as I lay there. I opened my eyes and stared up at him. I couldn’t move. I watched him reach into my front right pocket as he mumbled something about him showing me bad luck. As he stepped back fury raced through me. I lunged forward and grabbed him, but my arms fell through him. A couple was headed our way.

“Call the police!” I shouted. “This man just shot me!”

The couple kept walking, like they hadn’t heard me. The Cab Cutter turned my face away from them, cradling my head.

“My friend had too much to drink,” he said. “I think he’s going to be sick.”

They looked away quickly, disappearing into the darkness. The Cab Cutter drug me over to a dumpster. He struggled to lift my body and threw me over the edge. He slammed the lid down and ran toward my car. The car had hit a light pole and sat idling. I ran toward him as he unfolded a piece of paper. I glanced over his shoulder and read it:

Pick me up at 8pm. My plane leaves at 10. Maybe we can talk. Sophie.

Chapter Two

Torn Between Two Worlds

The Cab Cutter chuckled and threw the piece of paper on the ground. He got into my car, slammed the door shut, and threw it into reverse. I quickly grabbed for the door handle but my hand slipped through the metal.

“Stop! Give me my car back!” I shouted in frustration. He drove forward as the car faced me. I stared down at my hands. What was happening? I wanted to rip this guy apart. I pointed at the car. “Don’t you hurt her! I swear I’ll kill you myself!” The car accelerated toward me. I jumped back and watched it drive through me. A tingling sensation rushed over me. I fell to the ground as the car sped away. I watched the car screech around a corner and was gone. I felt the ground under me as I pushed off of it to stand up. “Why can I feel the ground but nothing else?”

“You’re dying, Jesse,” a voice on my right said.

I quickly looked up at a man leaning against the light pole. He was tall and thin with dark hair. He looked vaguely familiar

“What do you mean I’m dying? Who are you? You can see me? Am I a ghost?” I asked, desperate for answers.

“You don’t recognize me?”

“You do look familiar, but I really need answers quick. A woman is in trouble. I need to get out of here.”

“That’s gonna be a problem.”

“Why?”

“Because your body is in the dumpster and you’re in a coma.”

I walked toward the man and felt a tug backwards. I glanced behind me and saw nothing.

“The further you walk from your body the more you’ll feel that. You need to stay close to it in case you’re allowed to stay.”

I glanced back at the dumpster and then back to the man.

“Look, you don’t understand! The man that just shot me is going after the woman

that I just dropped off!” I shouted, pacing the ground.

“Yeah, and he’s getting closer every minute you waste,” a chuckling voice said to my left.

I turned to see another man. My skin shivered. The man at my right stood up straight and looked more alert. “What are you doing here?” the man on my right asked the new comer.

“I’m here to make sure Jesse doesn’t interfere with Eddie’s plan.”

“Who’s Eddie?” I asked.

The newcomer stepped toward me. His eyes had a sudden red glow to them

“Eddie is the Cab Cutter,” he growled.

A sinking feeling washed over me as he confirmed my fears. I felt a hand on my shoulder and glanced to my right. Then it hit me. I knew who he was. He was my grandfather who had passed away before I was born. I’d seen many pictures of him but here he was behind me. A strength filled me like never before from his touch. I stepped forward and clenched the shirt of the man to my left.

“I’ll make sure his plan never works,” I said, glaring at him.

Heat surrounded my fingertips as smoke rose from my clenched fists. Pain shot through my hands and I immediately let go.

“Strong spirit, but don’t ever touch me again,” he said.

“You’re the devil, aren’t you?”

“Gee, how did you guess?” he asked sarcastically.

I looked back at my grandfather.

“How do I do it? How can I get to her?”

“Why do you want to save her?” my grandfather asked.

“Because she’s innocent, a woman, a decent person that doesn’t deserve to die.”

“That’s a lie. You feel responsible for his motive. You shouldn’t have told Eddie it wasn’t his lucky night. Now, he’ll be out til dawn on a killing spree. Sophie will make three tonight. That’s a record for him. And it’s all your fault,” the devil responded, glancing at his fingernails with a smirk on his face.

“Ah shit, now what do I do?” I asked my grandfather, feeling sick.

He looked into my eyes. I heard him speak but his lips didn’t move. *Tell me out loud why you want to save her.* Suddenly a flash of Sophie’s face entered my mind. Her

smell, her beauty, the sound of her voice as she said my name in the cab. She was the one, the one I needed. The one that would give me love and children.

“I need to save her because I’m going to fall in love with her,” I said out loud.

The devil cringed. He faded in and out, and then rushed toward us. Fire and heat surrounded us and in an instant the horrid feeling of despair disappeared and all that lingered was a black smoke in the shape of a skull and cross bones. I turned to my grandfather who blew the smoke away with a quick breath.

“Don’t listen to him. He scares me too, but he’s powerless against love,” he said as he gripped my arm.

He tugged me forward as we got closer to the dumpster.

“Please don’t make me look at myself.”

“I’m not, but there’s one thing I must do,” he said.

He lifted the lid to the dumpster and took his fist and hit the side of it. The echo of the slammed metal was loud and suddenly a large rat climbed out and scurried away.

“Oh my God, did it eat my face?” I asked in disgust.

I felt a slap upside the back of my head.

“Don’t say God’s name in vain. He may give you a second chance. Respect Him.”

“Yes, sir,” I said, rubbing my head. “Wait a minute. How did you lift the lid on the dumpster? And when is someone going to find me? This is disgusting.”

I ran my hand over the dumpster lid and watched my fingers pass right through it. My grandfather took both my shoulders. His eyes were the same as my mother’s.

“Everything we want in this life and the next can be achieved according to the desire that you hold inside. It’s all about effort, my boy. Now open the lid.”

I stared at the lid. I had no desire to see my head shot through and my body lying in the dumpster.

“I guarantee you’ll be able to feel that woman when she decides to make love to you.” I quickly stared at the lid and grabbed for it. My hand kept sliding right through it. “Hurry, Jesse! There’s another rat in there and it’s gonna chew your nose off!” he shouted.

Flashes of what my face would look like when rats were finished with me, hit me. I grabbed the lid and hit the side of the dumpster. The vibration of the metal rocked my

fist. Nothing came scurrying out. I looked up at my grandfather who was now chuckling. I raised an eyebrow and let the lid fall shut.

“There are no more rats in there, are there?” I asked.

“No,” he said still snickering. “But now you know how to do it.”

His smile faded fast as he glanced around.

“You need to go. She’s waiting outside and Eddie is almost there.”

“How do I get there?”

“Just like the dumpster lid. You want to be somewhere, you just think about being there. Now go!”

“What about my body?”

Just then I saw a janitor over my grandfather’s shoulder pushing a bin toward us.

“He’s going to discover you in about five minutes when he dumps the trash.

You’ll be taken to a hospital and you’ll be listed in critical condition and in a coma. Do your job and save Sophie. It’s clearly not her time, Jesse, and maybe you’ll get to stay.”

“What about the tugging feeling that keeps pulling me back?”

“Fight it for now. You have a job to do. Hurry Jesse,” my grandfather said as he nudged me away from the dumpster.

I nodded and closed my eyes, thinking of where I wanted to go.

“Wait, I have something to say,” he said.

I opened my eyes and looked at him

“Yes, grandfather.”

“I’m proud of you. I’ve always watched over you and tonight I’m glad I was here.”

I smiled and squeezed his arm. He was already beginning to fade.

“I’m glad you were too,” I said, watching him fade away.

I closed my eyes and thought about Sophie. I wanted to be in front of the Mirage. I felt a tugging feeling pulling close to my body but I forced my arm away from it. Suddenly, I heard voices and a cool breeze rushed through me. I opened my eyes. I was standing in front of the automatic doors at the Mirage. Sophie stood by the curb watching cabs approach. I rushed over to her.

“Sophie, just get in any cab! Don’t look for mine!” I shouted next to her. She seemed preoccupied and couldn’t hear me. I rubbed my forehead and glanced around.

My cab was approaching. A smile moved across her face. “Oh please God, don’t let her get in that car,” I pleaded, as I stepped in front of her.

Her body walked right through mine as she stepped off the curb. Her aroma encircled me and I felt a rush of excitement. Wow, this woman had something I’d never felt. All of my senses were on high alert. I shook the sensation from my head and followed her. She waved at my cab with a smile. I hurried to her side and tried to pull on her wrist but nothing happened. Eddie stopped the car and hopped out. He had no jacket on and his sleeves were rolled up. Sophie stopped and her smile faded.

“Hello, miss,” he said, while opening the back door for her. “Let me take your bags.”

She held onto the suitcase and stepped back.

“Actually, no I’m waiting for someone else to pick me up,” she said, looking around.

“Good girl, Sophie. Don’t get in the car,” I said out loud, hoping she’d hear me.

Eddie flashed a big smile and held onto the suitcase handle.

“Oh, are you talking about Jesse?” he asked.

“Well, yes,” she said, looking confused.

No. What is he doing?

“Well, he had to make another stop and told me to come and pick you up. He said he’ll meet you at the airport and maybe you can talk before your plane leaves. It’s okay, I’ll help you with your bags,” he said tugging at the suitcase again.

“Oh shit, don’t let go, Sophie,” I said. Sophie nodded, her hand falling away from the suitcase. She got into the car. “No!”

Eddie shut the door and smiled. Think Jesse, think. I quickly grabbed for the door handle. My hand slipped through it. I thought about my body in the dumpster and grabbed at it again. The door opened as Eddie shut his car door. Sophie stared at her door and looked confused. Yes, Sophie, get out.

“Maybe I should wait here,” she said.

“No, no, something must be wrong with the door. Just shut it again and I’ll lock it,” he said.

She took the handle and shut the door. I heard a click and knew he had locked it. I slid inside the car through the door as Eddie drove away. I moved past Sophie and

immediately took in her scent. As she stared forward I moved in to look at her face. I wanted to look at her closely. She was beautiful. Intoxicating. Her lips were full with fresh lip gloss upon them. Her eyes were a soft blue with flecks of yellow. I moved closer and ran my lips up against her cheek. I felt something inside me warm up as I leaned in and touched her thigh with my hand. Suddenly her skin felt warm beneath my hand and she blinked hard and gasped. She glanced down at her thigh and tugged her skirt down as I backed away.

“Something wrong?” Eddie asked.

Sophie felt her cheek with her hand.

“Ah, no.”

“Which terminal?”

“Allegiant Airlines.”

“I’ve heard of that. You from a small town?” he asked.

“Yes, I--”

I quickly covered her mouth and muffled the replied. Her eyes bugged out and she quickly grabbed my hand and then let go.

“I need to get out of this car,” she said, glancing toward me.

“Why, Sophie? What’s wrong?”

“How do you know my name?” she asked, looking worried and pulling on the locked door handle.

“Jesse, told me your name,” he said.

“I think I forgot something back at the hotel. I’ll catch another cab back. Can you pull over?”

“You’re just worrying. I’m sure you didn’t forget anything.”

I watched her try the door handle again. He had obviously hit the child proof lock from the driver’s door. The car sped up and changed lanes. Eddie drove past the turn for McCarran airport.

Chapter Three

Fear Struck

“Wasn’t that the turn off?” Sophie asked.

“Yes, but I know a shortcut to your terminal,” he said, turning down a dark street.

I watched Sophie fidget with her purse strap. She slowly reached into her purse but never took her eyes off Eddie. She pulled a small spray bottle out and lunged forward.

“What the F---” Eddie shouted as Sophie sprayed mace into his face and mouth.

“This chick is awesome!” I shouted.

The car swerved from side to side as Sophie began hitting him with her purse.

“Let me out of this car you fake bullshit cabby! Where’s Jesse?”

The car skidded to a stop. I was stunned; she remembered my name and wanted to know where I was. Eddie coughed, writhing in pain as Sophie leaned forward again and grabbed the keys. She quickly unlocked her door and jumped out. I followed close behind. It was amazing watching her spring to action. I was in love. She opened the trunk, grabbed her suitcase, and threw the keys in the trunk.

“Jack ass! Don’t mess with a woman who wants to leave Vegas!” she shouted, walking toward the sidewalk. Tears began to run down her face. “What would make you think that any man would come back for you? They’re all the same,” she mumbled.

“No, no, I wanted to come back. I swear!” I said, putting my arm around her.

I gently wiped a tear from her cheek. She stopped immediately and glanced around. I watched her hand go up.

“Taxi!” she shouted. The cab pulled over and she got in dragging her suitcase with her. “McCarran Airport please.”

“Yes, ma’am,” the driver said.

I watched Sophie as her hand moved to her cheek to wipe more falling tears. Her hands were shaking. She bit down on her bottom lip. She looked heart broken. That would be two men who stood her up in one night. I moved in closer.

“Sophie, I’m here with you. It’s gonna be okay,” I whispered.

I ran my hands down her face and moved in to kiss her. She was beautiful and sexy and needed me and---

“That’ll be five-fifty.”

Sophie reached into her purse.

“Thanks a lot cabby,” I said, flipping the guy’s baseball hat off his head.

“What the hell?” he asked, glancing back at Sophie who was rustling inside her purse.

The cab driver stuck his hat on nice and snug and frowned at Sophie. I sat arms crossed with a grin on my face. I was getting good with my hands. Sophie handed him the cash and got out of the car. She looked around the airport and caught an airport attendant passing by.

“Excuse me. Which way do I go to Allegiant Airlines?”

“That way, miss,” he said, pointing farther down the airport.

“Thank you.”

She walked quickly toward the Allegiant Airlines counter. The line was long and several people were arguing with the flight attendants. Sophie narrowed her eyes and pressed her lips together. A sign sat on the counter. *Flight 23 to Grand Junction Cancelled*. Sophie’s eyes welled up again. She wiped them quickly and stormed through the line and up to the counter.

“Hey, lady! You can cut in line,” a young guy said as she past.

I tapped the back of his knee and he fell off balance. I snickered. Oops.

“What’s going on? I need to get out of here! I need to get on this flight!”

“Ma’am, the flight has been cancelled due to a severe electrical storm over the Utah desert. Now please get back in line and we’ll try and accommodate you for the night.”

“I don’t believe this! This is the worst day of my life!”

She walked back to the end of the line. The man in front of her turned around slowly.

“It can’t be as bad as mine. I just lost twenty-five thousand dollars in a poker tournament,” the man said.

A smile swept across Sophie’s face. She scoffed.

“Wow, maybe mine wasn’t so bad. I’m sorry.”

The man chuckled and shook his head.

“Oh, well,” he sighed. “You win some, you lose some.”

“Yep, with men too.”

He nodded and looked forward again. The airline gave Sophie another ticket for the next day and a coupon for a free night at the Howard Johnson motel before directing her to the shuttle waiting outside. She sighed and asked where the restroom was located. I followed close behind staring at her legs.

“You are a sick man, Jesse. The woman has had a horrible day and all you can think about is having those legs wrapped around you,” I said out loud, wondering what she looked like out of her clothes.

She stopped abruptly and looked back.

“Excuse me?”

I walked right through her. She quickly held her chest and took a deep breath. I felt an intense surge go straight to my groin. Her smell surrounded me. I stepped back and watched her closely. Did she just hear me?

“Hmph!” She said yanking her suitcase forward.

I stepped behind her again and followed. She entered the bathroom and walked toward the handicap stall. She pulled the large suitcase through the door and shut it. Hey, I was in the ladies room. Cool. I’d always wanted to see what the difference was. I looked around at all the mirrors. Women were vain. I walked the length of the stalls. No urinals. Women get all the privacy. Spoiled vain creatures, but God were they sexy. I suddenly felt a sting on the back of my head.

“Ouch!” I shouted, glancing around.

I raised an eyebrow knowing my grandfather had a part in that. I suddenly heard the faint sound of crying and then the toilet flush. I walked through Sophie’s stall door and saw her leaning up against the wall in tears. I wanted to hold her so bad. I wanted her to hear me tell her everything would be fine. I wrapped my arm around her and heard a grumble from the next stall over.

“Take your Prozac and get over it lady,” a deep voice said.

“Oh, shut up! You have no idea what I’ve been through,” Sophie blurted out and pushed through the stall door.

The door slammed against the stall next to hers as I glanced over her shoulder. Eddie stood there bloodshot eyes and a smirk on his face. Fear raced through me. Oh, shit, I couldn't protect her.

"Ah, hell, what do you want? The cab fare," she asked calmly. My mouth dropped. I wanted to scream for her. What was wrong with her? The look on Eddie's face said the same as Sophie reached into her purse. "Why are you in the ladies room anyway? You could have waited until I got outside. How did you know I was in here?" she asked pulling out a twenty.

"All women go to the bathroom before a flight," he said as a woman stepped into the bathroom. He pointed to her. "Get out!"

"Stop scaring people," she said, passing him with her suitcase and shoving the twenty into his gut.

Eddie grabbed her hair and pushed her up against the tile wall. Sophie let out a loud piercing scream. Eddie cupped her mouth and got close to her face.

"I don't want money. I want to hurt you real bad," he said.

I had had enough. I stared at my hands and felt anger surge through them. I grabbed Eddie and pulled him off of Sophie. I heard another loud scream from her as Eddie tried to catch his balance on the counter and slid to the ground. I leaned into him and punched his face. As I kicked him in the stomach, Sophie ran past me and out of the bathroom. I clenched my fists and went in for another few blows as Eddie lifted his arms and grabbed for me. I felt a pressure on my throat. I was a ghost and he was still trying to destroy me. The look on his face was of pure evil. I had no idea that so much hate could exist. He had no fear of me. I didn't think he would be able to touch me. I pulled away, holding my throat. He spun around looking like a scared cat obviously waiting for my next move.

"Who is this?" Eddie asked.

I smiled seeing my advantage. Hit, then back away. He couldn't see me so I'd kick his ass my own way.

"Freeze!"

We both looked over at a security guard holding a baton. I rolled my eyes. That was not going to hold Eddie back. Eddie sprang to his feet and bolted toward the guard.

"Freeze!" he shouted again.

Eddie pushed the guy over and ran out of the bathroom. I hurried through the door just in time to see Eddie bolt out of the airport. I ran after him and stopped at the curb. He ran for the parking structure. I glanced around and knew that Sophie was no longer there. I quickly closed my eyes trying to remember the motel she was going to.

“We’re supposed to take this shuttle to the Howard Johnson,” a woman to my left said.

I opened my eyes and watched a couple enter the shuttle in front of me. That was right. The HoJo. I snickered at the nickname and closed my eyes again. I wanted to be where Sophie was. I said it several times and opened my eyes.

“Sweetie, you lookin’ for a date?” a woman down the street asked. She was leaning into a car propositioning a potential customer.

Oh, boy, not so good of a neighborhood. I walked into the Howard Johnson and saw Sophie at the counter. She was glancing around and looked my direction as I walked through the door. The clerk handed her a key card and she quickly walked away. She rolled her suitcase right through me as she passed by.

“Sophie!” I called out as she moved even faster down the walkway.

She stuck the key card into the slot several times. Each time the card flashed red. She looked back and began to breathe heavy.

“This isn’t happening,” she said, hitting the door with her palm. “Can’t anything go right today?”

I walked through the door and concentrated on the lock. I turned the latch and the door opened. Sophie stood on the other side staring at the door. She shook her head slightly and wheeled her suitcase through the entrance, slamming the door behind her. She bolted it and threw over the safety latch. She closed the drapes and hurried through the place looking into the closet and behind the shower curtain. I stepped back and leaned against the wall as she walked toward me. She pulled her cell phone out and dialed.

“Mom,” she said and then began to cry. “No, you were right, we shouldn’t have come here. It doesn’t matter anyway. He decided he didn’t want me.” Tears fell freely as she rested her forehead, cupped into her hand. She caught her breath as I heard a muffled voice talking on the other end. “I can’t. The flight was cancelled and some cab driver is after me.”

“What?” I clearly heard through the phone.

She explained the whole ordeal to her mother as I stepped through the wall. I glanced around the property looking for Eddie. He clearly had had enough and wasn't going to come looking for her here. I walked back through the wall.

“What are the police gonna say? Yes, I have a description but I have no idea who this guy is. I don't even know why he wanted to hurt me. Besides, I maced him. I think it may be illegal here,” Sophie began to snicker. “I will, Mom. Mom, I swear I will call in the morning. Yes, I'm safe in a motel room. Love you too, bye.”

Sophie hung up the phone and pulled her sandals off. She stood up and unzipped her skirt. I had no idea what to do. I stepped back and sat down on a chair at the far corner of the room. I covered my face as she continued to undress. I wanted to see her though. I peeked through my fingers. She unhooked her bra and set it on the bed. I dropped my hands and stared at her beautiful body. Suddenly, I was on my feet again floating closer to her. I could smell her perfume and my senses went wild. She slipped her panties off, walked into the bathroom, and shut the door. I ran into it.

I put my hands up feeling the solid door. I glanced upward.

“Are you serious? Now, I can't get through the door?”

I sighed and went to the bed. I sat down and fell backward. The bed had a deep dip in the center. What a piece of crap. Grabbing the remote, I heard the shower start and flipped on the television. I crawled out of the hole and leaned up against the headboard. I flipped through channels and landed on the news.

“And in other news, the Cab Cutter has struck again. This time killing a local waitress at the Mirage who has been identified as Henrietta Mendez, and putting a cab driver into a coma. The cab driver, who has been identified as Jesse Franklin, is listed in critical condition. Any information leading to the Cab Cutter would be greatly appreciated and should be reported immediately to the Las Vegas Police Department.”

My mother would be fainting about now. I rubbed my forehead and heard the bathroom door open. Sophie peeked out and stared at the television. The door flew open and I threw the remote down.

“I didn't turn this on,” she said. “Who's here?”

She grabbed the remote and turned it off. I stared at the television. If I could get her to watch the news she might understand the link between Eddie and me. I needed to

see if she really felt me or could hear me.

“Sophie, can you hear me?”

She clung to the towel wrapped around her and walked back to the bathroom. I leaned back on the bed and stared at the ceiling. It was no use. I guess I was just supposed to make sure she got on that plane and get back to my body.

“When a man loves a woman,” I began to sing.

“Doesn’t Michael Bolton sing that?” Sophie asked from the bathroom.

“Yeah, it may have been a remake. Do you know who sang the original?”

“I believe it was Percy Sledge.”

I sat up and watched Sophie turn her head slowly in my direction. I had just had a conversation with her. She cautiously walked out the bathroom door.

“Who are you?”

I grabbed the remote and flipped on the television again. Sophie jumped back and made a short scream sound and then covered her own mouth. She sat down on the edge of the bed and pulled the towel from her hair. I scooted closer to her and watched intently for the news to repeat. After ten minutes she held the remote up to turn it off but I gently set my hand on hers and lowered her hand. I watched her swallow hard and glance from her hand back to the television. She was surprisingly calm at my presence. The news finally repeated itself recapping the Cab Cutter story, mentioning my name again. Sophie pushed the power button when it was over and scanned the room.

“Jesse, are you still here?”

Chapter Four

Ghostly Encounters

“Yes, Sophie, it’s me.”

She grabbed the towel, hurrying into the bathroom. She shut the door and locked it. I followed close behind and ran into the door again.

“Oh, come on. Why can’t I go through this door?” I shouted.

“You can’t get through this door?”

“No, it’s the only one so far.”

“I’m imagining things. I’ve lost my mind and I have gone completely insane,” she said, opening the door. “You’re not real! You have been brought on by my inner fantasies because I didn’t get married today! It’s stress and I’m tired. Yah, that’s it!”

I grabbed her face quickly and kissed her lips. Some kind of power erupted inside of me as I felt the front of my jeans strain. I wanted her bad. Her lips were soft and tasted sweet. Her breathing picked up, soft against my face as her mouth opened, inviting me in. The towel dropped as my hands moved to her back. Her arms wrapped around me. I felt so alive but I knew she couldn’t see me. I wanted her to see me like she could feel me. She pushed me back and looked into my eyes.

“Holy crap, I can see you! You are real!”

I didn’t care what she said. I lunged for her again. This time grabbing her thighs and lifting her up against the wall. I kissed her neck and pushed myself hard up against her.

“There is something about you Sophie. I need you. This isn’t for one night. I need you forever.”

“I don’t believe in forever, Jesse.” I felt a tugging on my back. I kissed her breast and felt something pull me hard. I slowly let her legs down and backed away.

“Oh, no. Jesse, I’m sorry. Don’t go,” she said reaching out for me.

I looked down at my hands fading in and out. I shook my head.

“No,” I whispered.

Suddenly a beeping sound filled my ears. Nurses rushed by me. I floated toward them. I levitated over them and looked down at myself.

“He’s flat-lining!” one nurse yelled out.

I floated down and sat on my body. I looked like shit. I was pale and my lips were blue under the oxygen mask they had over my mouth. Shouting came from all around me as I examined myself. I had no desire to enter into the pain that my body had in store for me. The bandage alone that surrounded my head was painful enough to look at.

“Clear!” a nurse shouted.

A bright light entered the room and sparkles of gold trickled down the iridescent light. It was incredible to see. A glorious song came from it making me reach out for its rays.

“Jesse!” I heard my mother scream.

I turned around and saw her come through the door.

“Ma’am, please. Wait outside!” the nurse shouted.

Other voices seemed to fill my head too.

“Jesse! I’m gonna kill Sophie,” Eddie’s voice echoed around me.

“Jesse,” Sophie’s voice said in a whisper.

I covered my ears and looked at the inviting light. I waved my hand at it. Smoke and light sucked upward like a backdraft and disappeared into the ceiling. The beep came back on the monitor. The nurses sighed as the doctor raced into the room.

“Where have you been?” my mother shouted to the doctor. “You’re lucky they know what they’re doing. I hope that you give these ladies a good Christmas bonus!”

I smiled and kissed my mother on the cheek. I was just glad she was chewing him out and not me. I closed my eyes and wanted to be back with Sophie. When I opened them I was back in the motel room. The room was dark and Sophie was in bed turned on her side. I could smell her perfume as if she had just sprayed it. I reached behind my head and pulled off my shirt. I slipped off my shoes and unbuttoned my jeans. I didn’t know if this would work but I was certainly going to try. I pulled off each sock and then my jeans. I took in a quiet breath and stepped closer to the bed.

I lifted up the covers at her feet and began to kiss her toes. She had beautiful soft legs. I continued to kiss up each leg slowly moving upward. Suddenly, she moved and

let out a quiet sigh. She rolled into the dip of the bed toward me revealing that she had gone to bed nude.

“This bed sucks,” she said. I snickered at her remark. I pressed my lips together and swallowed at the sight of her. She was a masterpiece of a woman. I leaned down to kiss her hip as she separated her legs. She had to know I was there. I didn’t know whether to kiss her mouth or lower my face down into heaven. I took in a deep breath and smelled her body. “Jesse, you came back,” she whispered.

“Oh yeah,” I said. “Any smart man would.”

“Why don’t you come up here and kiss me first.”

“Let me just take in the view for a second,” I said, sliding my thumb down in between her legs.

She was ready for me and I had just started touching her.

“Oh, Jesse, this is a dream, right?” she asked quietly.

“I don’t think so,” I said, replacing my fingers with my tongue.

Her sweetness drove me crazy and I longed to be inside of her. This was the woman I wanted for good. There *was* a forever thing and I wanted only her.

“Oh, Jesse, this can’t be happening. You’re not real. You’re a ghost. You’re, you’re---”

She finally stopped talking and grabbed my hair. I growled as she clenched it tight. Several minutes passed as my anticipation to please her grew. She wrapped her legs around my back and slowly let go of my hair. She ran her hands down my face.

“You’re gorgeous and I can’t stop,” she said, moaning loudly as her legs began to quiver.

She took a deep breath and straightened her legs.

“Come here, Jesse,” she said still breathing heavily. I wiped my mouth on the sheet and kissed her navel. I smelled her skin, running my nose up to her breasts. I held them in my hands suckling each one gently. She was incredible all over. She threw back the covers. “I can’t see you. Let me see the man who just invaded my bed.”

I wanted her to see me.

“There you are,” she said, leaning up on her elbows slowly to get close to my face. “I knew you were cute, but didn’t realize how handsome you were. You look Irish with that dark hair and light eyes. What color are your eyes?”

“They’re green,” I whispered, staring at her lips.

She kissed my lips softly and pulled me closer to her. Her hands slipped down my sides and under the waist band of my boxers. She slid them down my thighs.

“I don’t understand all this, but I’m willing to make it work.”

“I’m here to protect you,” I said, leaning into her body slowly. I felt the warmth of her body surround every inch of me. “I don’t want to go back. I need to stay here with you.” I could hardly breathe, she felt so good. I moved slowly over her savoring each stroke of pleasure. After all it could be my last time with a woman.

“You can stay with me as long as you want, Jesse. Stay with me,” she said in a long drawn out exhale.

There was something about my encounter with Sophie that night that I’ll never forget. It was beyond perfect. Every move, every touch, every taste - nothing before had ever been like that. The problem was, now I was attached. Hooked on Sophie. How could a ghost become attached? I watched as Sophie slept. Her skin was flawless and her features perfect. I wondered if I’d ever see her again after she got on that plane. I wondered what kind of a jackass would let her go. Her ex-boyfriend was insane. I suddenly had a tremendous urge to have a cigarette. The urges and habits of life had stayed with me even being separated from my body. It was like I was living a half-life. Like I was allowed to become tangible as long as my body stayed alive.

“Having fun?” a voice asked.

I sat up quickly as my grandfather appeared sitting on the chair across the room.

“God, you scared me?” I felt a slap to the back of my head. He was now at my side. “Ouch, shit. I forgot okay. What the hell are you doing here? You didn’t see anything did you?” I whispered.

My grandfather snickered and walked back to the chair and sat down.

“No, we don’t need to impose on such encounters. I’m here because your time is running out.”

“I know I need to save Sophie by getting her on that plane.”

“You don’t get it do you, son? Your time is running out. You must fall in love with Sophie and convince her to stay. She’s the reason you’re alive.”

“I thought I was supposed to be saving Sophie from Eddie and that’s why I was allowed to stay.”

My grandfather stood up and produced a smile.

“Well, God has many purposes for you. However, he is impatient when it comes to his plan. So get moving. Innocent people are being stalked as we speak and you’re here well---”

“Committing sin?” another voice asked.

Sophie rolled over and slipped her arm around my waist. My grandfather and I glanced toward the voice. The devil stared at me with a smirk.

“He’ll be forgiven,” my grandfather said.

“He’s weak. Look at him. In bed with a woman, craving cigarettes. When he’s supposed to be capturing Eddie.”

“I’m not weak.”

“Oh really? We’ll see just how strong you are when it’s your turn to kill or to save a life for that matter. I’d like to see what you sacrifice.”

“I’d never kill anyone.”

“Well, we’ll see,” he said fading to a blue flame and disappearing.

My grandfather walked toward me and stood by the bedside.

“Don’t listen to him. He can’t predict the future. Only God knows the final outcome. He’s just mad that Sophie isn’t dead. He’s worked very hard on Eddie. You really should get up now. You’re about to have a visitor.” he said stepping back.

“What? Oh no!” I whispered glancing at Sophie. “Does he still have the gun?” I turned back looking over my shoulder. My grandfather was gone. “Damn, I hate this disappearing thing.” I turned back to Sophie and stroked the side of her face. “Sophie, wake up. Sophie.”

There was a knock on the door. I jumped out of the bed and pulled on my boxers and jeans. I panicked. Sophie had no gun, no weapons, and no car to get the hell out of there. I pulled my shirt over my head. The knock went to a pound. I faded as Sophie sat up. I didn’t want her to see me. I stepped through the wall. A man, who was not Eddie, was leaning on the door pounding his fist on it.

“Sophie! Answer the door! It’s me Richard!”

I was confused. Who was Richard? I stepped back through the wall and Sophie was scurrying around the room picking up her clothes. I sat down quickly putting my socks and shoes on. She hurried to the door and opened it as far as the latch bolt would

allow.

“Rich! What are you doing here?” she whispered through the two inch space.

“I’m here to take ya back to my hotel rum!” he shouted slurring his words.

“What the hell is wrong with you? Are you wasted? Quiet down. It’s like two in the morning.”

“I am drunk, but your mom sent me here to collect you. So open up!”

“Collect me?”

“Yes, Madam Sophie. Now please open this door.”

Sophie opened the door. Richard scooped her up in his arms and fell with her onto the bed. He began to laugh and kiss her neck. There was a burning in my throat and a sinking feeling in my chest. Sophie smiled, but it quickly faded

“What do you think you’re doing? Get off of me!”

“Oh come on! You know you love my lovin’. Let’s screw for a while and go back to our suite and screw some more.”

Sophie pushed Richard off of her and socked him in the chest.

“You bastard! I have had the worst night because of you and now you want to have sex with me? Get the hell outta here! I’m not going anywhere with you!”

“I love when you’re feisty. It’s so damn sexy,” he said, lunging for her.

He kissed her lips and I couldn’t watch anymore. Watching her be groped by the man that was supposed to be her husband was like some kind of torture. I was obviously in the way of them getting back together and she’d probably forgive him. I walked through the wall and down the path toward a bench. He could keep her safe and part of me wanted her to go with him. At least he was alive. At least he could get her to the airport. A tangible man that Eddie would be able to see and it might scare him off. I sat down on the bench setting my head in my palms. I wanted to be back at the hospital. I was ready to enter the beautiful warmth of the light.

“Are you telling me that you’re going to seriously give up now?” my grandfather asked.

I glanced up.

“I’m not supposed to be here! I should have died and that’s where I should be, in the morgue by now.”

I felt a slap on the back of my head.

“What’s wrong with you, boy?”

“Ow, I didn’t even say God’s name.”

He pointed at me as if to warn me not to.

“You want the devil to be right? Get your butt back there and fight for her.”

“I’m a ghost! What am I going to offer her? A life of spiritual sexual encounters?” My grandfather’s eyebrows narrowed. He shrugged and then nodded.

“What, are you serious? How long will I be in a coma?”

“I have no idea, but get over yourself and go back to her. She still needs you.”

“No she doesn’t,” I said, glancing down at my hands. “She’s got everything she needs right there in that hotel room.”

Just then I heard a penetrating scream. I looked toward my grandfather but he was gone.

Chapter Five

Hide-outs are for Twisted Minds

I raced toward her room and saw a shadow in the distance. I entered the room to find Richard slumped over the bed, blood dripping onto the white sheets.

“Sophie! Where are you?”

I glanced around and ran to the bathroom. She was gone. I hurried to the front door to go after Sophie just as an older woman cautiously peeked in the room. I stepped back.

“Oh heavens,” she said hurrying off.

“You’re just going to leave me there like that?” a voice asked from behind me.

I turned around quickly. Richard stood by the bed staring at me.

“What?” I asked, looking at him and then at his lifeless body on the bed.

“Am I dead?”

“I don’t really know, but I need to go for after Sophie.”

“Sophie,” he said sighing. “Oh, I really screwed up with her. What an asshole I was.”

“Yeah, well, it doesn’t matter now.”

I went toward the door again.

“Wait, can’t you just see if you can help me?”

I ran my hands through my hair and took a deep breath. I didn’t want to help him. I wanted to run for Sophie. I made my way to the bed and turned him over. His eyes were closed and he reeked of booze. I couldn’t see where the blood was coming from. I glanced down to his shirt. A bullet had gone into his chest. I turned him back over and saw the bullet hole through the back of his shirt.

“Dude, he shot you clean through. You feel dead?”

“Are you?” he asked.

“No, I’m in a coma.”

“Well, feel my heart.”

I quickly put my hand on his chest. No beating and no breathing.

“Nothing.”

“Can’t you give me CPR or something?”

“I’m a ghost!”

“You just turned me over.”

“Yeah, well it takes practice.”

“Well, do something! I don’t want to die!”

“You selfish prick,” I said turning his body over. I ripped his shirt open and felt for his heart. “I swear, if the time I’m using for you, hurts Sophie I’ll haunt you for the rest of your days. However long that is.” A bright light began to trickle down above us. The golden rays sparkled in magnificent wonder. I began to pump his heart only because he asked me to. “Gee, I think your ride is here.”

“What? No,” he said looking panicked.

“You don’t want to go toward the light? Thirteen, fourteen, fifteen,” I said out loud and went for his mouth. I swallowed and shuddered. “I’ll stop immediately if you laugh, Dick.”

“My name is Richard.”

“Whatever,” I said taking in a full deep breath. I blew into his lungs twice and went back to the heart pumps. “You still with me?”

“Yes.”

“Agh! How did she kiss you? You *are* the bottle of gin,” I said, wiping my lips with the back of my hand. “Why don’t you just go to the light? I’ve heard it’s a nice place.”

“Then how come you don’t go?”

I stopped and looked at him.

“Because I’m here to save Sophie. What’s your purpose? To make her miserable?”

“No, I just got cold feet. Don’t tell me you’ve never made any mistakes.”

“Cold feet? With Sophie? You’re an idiot!”

“Which is why I want you to keep pumping my heart. I need to tell her what a fool I was and that I’ll marry her when I wake up.”

I leaned over his body and felt a sting inside my own heart. My purpose there kept

getting more complicated. I placed my hand on his chest. His heart was beating. I heard fast footsteps approaching. The paramedics rushed into the room.

“There, I did my part,” I said, backing away.

I looked around and Richard was gone. The light above the bed crawled back into the ceiling and dissipated.

“There’s a heartbeat. Start an IV,” the paramedic said to his team.

I ran out of the motel room in the direction of the shadow I had seen after Sophie’s scream. I ran down the pathway leading to the street. Nothing. All the cars in the parking lot were dark and empty. The front of the motel had the one paramedic van in front and more sirens could be heard in the distance.

I closed my eyes and wanted to be close to her. I had no idea where Eddie had taken her. I tried to concentrate.

“Let me be near her. I want to be with Sophie.”

I heard a chuckle and opened my eyes. Richard stood in front of me.

“How do you know her anyway?”

I rolled my eyes.

“I thought you died. Actually, I thought I saved you. Go-to-the-light,” I said, slower as I got closer to his face.

His lips tightened as he pushed me backward. I opened my eyes wide.

“Who taught you how to do that?”

“I did,” my grandfather said.

I grabbed his arm and pulled him aside.

“What the hell ya doin, Gramps?” I asked out of the corner of my mouth. “He’s the bad guy.”

My grandfather produced a wide grin.

“No, son, Eddie’s the bad guy. Richard loves Sophie, too.”

“I thought I was supposed to make her love me,” I whispered. “How am I going to do that with Dick in the way?”

“Richard.”

“Whatever.”

“Go find Sophie, Jesse. Take all the help you can get. Sophie will choose which man she wants in the end.”

I glanced at Dickface, who smirked back at me.

“Wanna tell me how you know Sophie?” Richard asked.

“I was her cab driver when you dumped her at the Bellagio. She gave me a note asking me to come back to take her to the airport.”

“She did not!”

My grandfather nodded to Richard.

“So who is this lunatic that’s after her?”

“He’s the Cab Cutter. A killer. He shot me and took Sophie’s note. Stole my cab and went back for her.”

“Wait, so this is all your fault? He went after her because of you?”

“What? No! If you had married her she’d be asleep in your arms right now. Safe and sound. This is your fault!” I shouted.

Richard came toward me and gripped my shirt. I threw a right hook and connected with his chin. My knuckles burned. Richard tackled me and we slid across the pavement.

“Are you two serious?”

I heard an outburst of laughter. I glanced up to see the devil. He had his arms folded and was doubled over. Richard grabbed both of my shoulders and hid behind me, using me as a shield. I turned around and fought from his grip. He held me tight and stared at the devil. His hands began to shake.

“What the hell? Let me go,” I said.

Richard shook his head.

“No, way. I’ve seen him before.”

I glanced back at the devil. He didn’t *look* scary, even though he made me shiver.

“How do you know him?” I asked Richard.

“Let’s just say I had a stealing problem as a kid and he promised me a lot.”

“Yikes!”

“Yah.”

“The more time you waste, the more my plan proceeds. Hey, Richard, I heard there’s a bank robbery on Marilyn Parkway. No one will see your fingerprints on this one.” the devil taunted with an evil snicker.

The grip on my shoulders tightened.

“I told you I would never steal again. I told you to leave me alone.” Richard said quietly.

Suddenly the devil was at our side. Richard jumped back and put his hand up for the devil to stay back.

“There’s a million dollars there. You could take it and hide it somewhere. When you get out of the hospital you could pick it up. The thieves will get caught but you won’t.”

“No! Stay away from me!” he shouted.

“Enough! Where is she?” I hollered over the devil’s voice.

My grandfather grabbed my arm.

“Richard, come on.” Gramps said.

“Let me know if you change your mind, Richard.” the devil said, echoing a monstrous laugh that left me cold.

Fire shot up from the ground and sucked him down. Within seconds the pavement was left smoking. We began walking down the street.

“He really plays with your weaknesses, doesn’t he?”

“Yes,” Richard said.

“Why did we walk away? The devil knows where Sophie is.”

“Do you really think he’s gonna tell us? He’s a liar. He’ll lead you on some wild goose chase until she’s dead and then laugh behind our backs the whole way.”

“Yeah, don’t you know anything?” Richard piped in.

I stopped walking and lifted an eyebrow.

“You want me to continue to kick your ass? I thought you died back there.”

“I think I did. I coded on the way to the ambulance. Whatever that means,” Richard said sighing.

“Richard, you’re not dead. While Jesse was saving your life I ran after Eddie and Sophie. I know exactly where they are. Could you two hurry it up?”

I trotted quickly to my grandfather’s side.

“If he’s not dead, then why is he still here?” I asked.

“I have no idea. Maybe he’s supposed to see what he missed out on. You never know God’s intentions. I’ve learned to just go with it. Things seem to work out in the end no matter how bizarre they seem to be in the beginning.”

Richard hurried up from behind. He was the closest to the curb of the busy street that entered the airport. I glanced at my grandfather, who looked intently ahead of us. Suddenly, I pushed Richard off the curb and into the street just as a taxi drove by.

“Ah!” he shouted out as the taxi drove through him.

I doubled over in laughter. I just couldn’t pass it up. He was such a dick and he deserved it.

“You’re a ghost, you fool. The cars can’t hurt you!”

Richard stood up and dusted I don’t know what off of himself and gave me a smirk.

“I knew that,” he said, watching the next taxi head his way.

He jumped up on the curb to avoid another embarrassment and strutted toward us. I rolled my eyes and heard a low snicker from my grandfather.

“Just like your mother. Feisty as hell. Can we move on now? We’re wasting time.”

“Yes. How much farther?” I asked.

“Just around this corner. Seems he has some dump of a hide-out where he takes some of his victims.”

I gave an involuntary shudder thinking of what may have gone on there.

“Don’t think about it, son. You don’t want to go there. The guy is a killer. Twisted and demented. Come on, it’s this way,” he said, beginning to run. Richard and I followed him up a dark alley. An old boarded up house sat deserted at the end of the quiet street. The front door was chained and bolted and graffiti decorated the entire house. “This way.” He ran up to the back door that looked as if the boards had been chopped down with an axe. Splintered wood littered the surrounding area. I studied the opening and spotted a swipe of blood from a handprint just at the level of my waist. My heart skipped a beat. I hoped it wasn’t fresh and prayed it wasn’t Sophie’s.

“Oh, God,” Richard said behind me.

I quickly glanced at Gramps. He walked inside and didn’t look back. I opened my mouth in disgust.

“Why didn’t he get slapped?” I whispered.

“I don’t slap strangers.”

“What?” Richard asked.

“Never mind,” I said shaking my head.

Chapter Six

Risky Business

We all walked along the dark hallway. A dim light glowed around the edges of a closed door at the end.

“Sophie!” I shouted, grabbing the door handle.

“Oh, Jesse! Don’t open the door! Just walk through it! It’s wired with a bomb! He’s not here,” she said, sounding panicked.

I went to walk through the door, but felt a hand on my shoulder. I looked back.

“How can she hear you?” Richard asked.

I glanced at Gramps who gave Richard a slight grin.

“Some spirits are connected. She just can,” Gramps explained.

I walked through the door and felt sick inside. In the corner of the room sat my beautiful Sophie tied to a chair with a ticking bomb taped to her chest. A wire ran from the chair to the doorknob. Knives, a baseball bat, and a few gun shells were scattered throughout the room. A small lamp without a shade sat on the floor, the light revealing old pools of dried blood.

“If I was alive I’d probably throw up,” I whispered.

Sophie began to cry.

“I’m trapped Jesse. Even if someone finds me they’ll open the door and I’ll die anyway. Did you see what he did to Richard? Oh, I hate him but I never wished for him to die.”

Richard hurried over to her and leaned down by her side.

“Sophie, baby, I’m right here. I’m okay.”

Sophie didn’t respond. I made myself visible to her and she immediately looked up. Richard’s eyes narrowed and his lips tightened.

“Sophie, Richard isn’t dead.”

“He’s not?”

“No, he was shot in the chest. He’s still alive.”

“You sure about that?” Richard asked.

“Yep,” Gramps said.

“Sophie, can you hear me?” Richard asked.

She didn’t respond. I walked closer and Richard shook his head. I leaned down by her side.

“Look Sophie, Rich is right here. He’s in between worlds right now, like me.”

“What?” she asked, glancing around the room.

“I don’t understand it either but he is here and---” I paused and looked at Rich.

“Tell her I’m sorry for everything. Tell her I love her and I’ll marry her as soon as I’m on my feet again. Tell her that we’re gonna get through this.”

I sighed and repeated what he said to her. She looked down as I spoke and tears flowed freely down her cheeks. I leaned forward and wiped them away as she simply nodded at what I said. Richard suddenly glanced at his hands. They began to fade.

“What’s happening?” he asked.

“We need to go back, Rich,” my grandfather said. He stepped closer to us both. “It’s okay I’ll take you.”

“No, I can’t leave Sophie!” he said.

He grabbed at her leg but his hand passed through her. My grandfather put his hand on Richard’s shoulder.

“It’s time, Rich.”

“You take care of her. You hear me?” he said, standing up.

I watched my grandfather and Rich walk through the wall and disappear.

“He’s gone now.”

“Rich?” Sophie asked.

“Yes.”

“Where did he go?”

“I’m guessing back to his body. He’s going to be okay, I think.”

“I don’t want him anymore, Jesse. What am I going to do?”

“I guess you’ll have to tell him that.”

Sophie stared at my lips.

“Kiss me, Jesse.”

“When is Eddie coming back?” I asked looking at the contraption he had rigged

up to her. She continued to stare at me. “I really don’t know how to get you out of this without blowing you to bits. Shit!”

“Jesse, it’s okay. It must be my time to go. Just think, we’ll be together, right?”

“Yes, I mean, I hope so,” I said, still studying the wires.

“Jesse, please, just kiss me. Make me feel safe before I die.”

I glanced up looking deeply into her eyes and realized that she had already accepted that she would probably die. Loving me was something she was looking forward to even if she had to have me on the other side.

“Sophie, you’re not supposed to die. I’ve got to get you out of this.”

“No, Jesse, just make me comfortable before I go.”

I struggled with her lack of drive to fight. I glanced at the clock ticking down the time. One hour and ten minutes to go. I rubbed my forehead. I scanned her body. Her hands were tied behind the chair she sat in, her feet tied at the ankles. Both had wires running around them. The bomb was duct taped around her midsection with her breasts resting on top of it.

“You’re not wearing a bra?”

Sophie smiled.

“No, Jesse, that fucker pulled me out of bed, remember?”

I nodded and sighed.

“I don’t have any panties on either.”

My eyes traveled up her bare legs to the torn skirt at her thighs. I went down on my knees and set my hands on her thighs.

“Jesse, make me feel good one last time,” she whispered.

My jeans tightened at the zipper. I wanted her bad, but what a weird situation to think about ravishing someone. I leaned forward careful not to touch any wires and pressed my lips to hers. Slowly I ran my hands up her skirt and massaged her thighs.

“I’m going to get you out of this,” I whispered, kissing her perfumed neckline.

“You are gorgeous. I can’t get enough of you. I love the way you taste.”

I slipped my tongue in her mouth and ran my hands in between her thighs. A small whimper escaped her lips. Suddenly, I didn’t care what the challenge was, or if there would be any possible interruptions. All I cared about was pleasing Sophie. She teased my tongue with hers and gently nibbled my bottom lip. I reached up with my left

hand and cupped her breast through her top. With my right I carefully slid two fingers up inside of her. She sighed against my lips. Her kisses went down my neck as I rubbed the wetness back and forth over her clitoris. I tipped my head listening to her moan against my neck.

“Oh, Jesse!” she moaned.

My body sprang to life as I felt myself get rock hard. There was no way I could get inside of her, but this wasn't about me - it was about her. I reached down and freed my erection from my jeans. I grabbed the back of her neck and kissed her again. Massaging the wetness in time with her moans against my lips. As the rhythmic pitch went higher, I knew I was getting her close. She began to rock slightly back and forth against my hand.

“That's it Sophie, feel the pleasure. Think of me getting you back to a safe warm bed where I can lick you and kiss you and---“

“Ooohhh,” she let out a moan that rocked my spirit.

I watched the pleasure on her face with every breath she gasped out as the warmth of her pussy gripped my fingers. When her legs stopped shivering I pulled my fingers back and sucked on them.

“Oh, Sophie, you are so sweet,” I said, standing up.

Her eyes were still closed and a smile played across her mouth. She opened her eyes and looked down at my cock. She stuck out her tongue and licked her top lip.

“Come here, Jesse,” she said. I shook my head. Bondage just wasn't my thing, but she wasn't even complaining. Tied up, she was ready to suck me. Sophie was amazing. I leaned one hand up against the wall. My cock throbbed; pointing right at her I tried to think of something else as my breathing came down. “Jesse, let me have you.”

I swiveled my body to my right and felt her mouth consume me. I looked up at the ceiling and let out a growl. I couldn't help myself. I straddled her and held her face. I could feel her tongue sliding from the base of my shaft to the tip of my cock. I gently moved her hair back and held it up. Slowly I moved back and forth entering her mouth. She was better than I could've ever imagined. My body ached in pleasure as the juices peaked ready for escape. I pulled back, watching my cum spurt out across the floor.

“Ahhh,” I sighed in relief as I continued to stroke myself.

“Jesse, I don't want to die,” she said, staring wide-eyed at me while I came down

from ecstasy. "I want to do a lot more of that."

"I won't let you," I replied. I wanted her again. I wanted to keep her. I didn't want to die either. She was the best everything I'd ever had. I leaned down and kissed her lips.

"That was pretty good for a quickie under pressure," I said.

She nodded, staring at my cock.

"That's not all I can do, you know? With my fingers," I said chuckling.

I returned my parts to the safety of my jeans and knelt down next to her. She gave me a crooked grin with an eyebrow raised.

"I can't wait to find out."

Suddenly, my head spun and I heard a faint noise. I held my temples and shook my head.

"What's wrong, Jesse?" she asked.

"I don't know. I hear something." I began to hear an awful high-pitched scream. The sound pierced my soul. It was getting louder. "Someone is coming."

"Jesse, please don't let them open the door," she said, looking frantic.

I headed for the door and walked through it. It was Eddie. He had a woman tied up and was carrying her over his shoulder. Her high-pitched scream was coming through the duct tape he had stuck over her mouth. She had a mini skirt on and wore a pair of clear heels. It looked like he had snagged a prostitute off the strip. Eddie laughed over her screams and slapped her ass a few times.

"Quiet! You'll get what's coming to you!" he said.

I held the door shut and peeked through it. I didn't realize how big Eddie was until that moment. He was a monster. I squinted my eyes getting ready to hold the door closed. Eddie tried the knob and pushed on the door. He gritted his teeth and swung his leg up kicking the door down right through me. I ran toward Sophie, wrapping my arms around her, thinking the bomb would explode any second. When it didn't, I opened my eyes in time to see him pull the woman off his shoulders and throw her across the room. A loud thud echoed in the room as she hit the floor. The woman moaned in pain.

"So, how is my Sophie?" he asked, walking toward her.

"Jesse!" she shouted.

"Still calling the ghost? Well, if he's here then my plan worked, huh?" he asked,

grabbing the wires connected to the timer.

Sophie closed her eyes tightly as if to be ready to die. I wrapped my hand around his so he couldn't pull them out.

"You fool!" he said, forcing my hand upward as he pulled hard on the wires. "If I had left her here with you then you would have set her free. I couldn't have that so I planted a fake bomb and tricked you with phony wires!"

He yanked hard under my hand and ripped the wires clean out. The timer stopped. No explosion. Sophie opened her eyes wide and looked down at her chest. She took a deep breath.

"Your ghost friend doesn't know bombs. Better find a new hero next time."

Chapter Seven

Visitors

With all my might I pushed Eddie away from Sophie. He slid across the floor. I quickly began to untie Sophie's hands when I heard a familiar sound – the metallic squeak of the silencer being screwed onto the gun. I turned around to see Eddie pointing the gun at Sophie.

"Ghost, you know I'm in control," he whispered. The woman on the floor struggled and screamed under the duct tape. "Shut up, woman, you're next!"

"Jesse, just let him shoot me. It will be quick and I'm so tired," Sophie said, letting her head fall forward.

She looked exhausted. Her clothes were torn and dirty. She had no shoes on.

"Don't you get it, Miss Sophie? I never wanted you. I just want Jesse dead. And he's not dead, so you and I are gonna make sure he dies."

I watched Eddie's every move. Trying to figure out if I could take the bullet for her if I made myself tangible.

"I will never help you kill my Jesse!" she shouted. "Go to Hell!"

Eddie turned around to the woman on the floor. He leaned down and smoothed her hair back.

"Are you ready to die?" he asked her.

She shook her head, her eyes welling up with tears. Eddie sprang to his feet and I lunged for him. I tackled him to the floor. I began to pound his head against the floor, fighting him for the gun. He held it tight and away from me. He pulled himself up and shot at the wall next to Sophie. I shoved Eddie back and spun around, afraid of what I might see. "Sophie!"

Eddie stood up breathing heavily. He wiped the sweat from his forehead on the back of his hand. He immediately turned toward the woman on the floor and the gun went off again. Sophie came to life.

"Stop! Don't kill her!"

The woman's eyes were wide as she stared at the ceiling. Hideous moans came from under the duct tape. I was seriously frozen. I didn't know which way to go.

"You gonna help me?" Eddie asked Sophie.

"No, Sophie! Don't go with him!" I shouted.

"Three seconds!" he said pointing the gun back toward the woman. "One, two--"

"Yes, let's help her, too!"

Eddie came at Sophie and untied her hands.

"Better get that tape off her mouth, Jesse, so she can breathe!" Eddie shouted.

"No, Miss Sophie, Jesse is gonna help that woman. You're gonna help me!" I ran toward the woman and slowly peeled the tape away from her lips. She took in a raspy breath and let out a small whimper while staring at the ceiling. I glanced back at Eddie and went for him again. He held the gun to Sophie's head. I wasn't quick enough. "You take care of the woman, Jesse, and Sophie gets to live."

I growled at the top of my lungs and picked up the chair that Sophie sat on. I threw it across the room. The wood shattered against the far wall. Eddie let out a hearty chuckle and yanked Sophie toward the door.

"I love you, Jesse," she whispered, as I watched her leave.

I rushed toward the woman on the floor. I leaned down next to her scanning her body to see where the wound was. Eddie had shot her just above her right breast.

"I can't breathe," she struggled to say.

"I don't know much, but it sounds like a punctured lung."

Hey, I watch Grey's Anatomy.

"Are you an angel?" she asked me.

"No, far from that," I said, wondering how the hell I would get her help.

"I can see you now. Does that mean I'm dead?"

"No, not necessarily. Sophie can see me," I said, smoothing her hair away from her forehead.

"I'm a bad person. I'm a sinner. Do I have time to confess my sins to you?"

I gave the woman a crooked grin and chuckled.

"Like I said I'm no angel and no priest. Trust me I've sinned many times."

"I can't breathe, help me," she said in a low voice and shook her head.

I took in a deep breath and held her face. I exhaled all that I had into her lungs.

Her lungs rose and fell with my breath and she began to cough. Blood trickled out of her mouth. I held my head and glanced toward the ceiling.

“What do you want from me? I can’t save Sophie unless you help me!” I shouted.

“Stop shouting! You think God hasn’t helped you?” I heard from behind me.

I turned around and the walls were lined with spirits. I backed up and stood.

“Who are you all?” I asked.

“Victims,” one man said.

“Of Eddie,” another woman said.

“He must be stopped, Jesse. And you must stop him so we can move on,” a young woman said.

I nodded then laughter came from the doorway.

“No one can stop him!” the devil said. “He’s my best client,” he said, rubbing his hands together. “I mean, look around the room, Jesse. Look how many he’s killed. And they’re stuck. In limbo. They can’t move on. Lost souls, caught between worlds in turmoil. Just the way I like it.”

I turned toward the devil grabbing his shoulders. My fingers burned and smoke sizzled off my hands.

“I told you not to do that again,” he said, with an evil grin.

Fire engulfed in between us as I stubbornly hung on.

“I won’t let go! I want you to take Eddie with you! Now!” I hollered at him.

My hands felt like they were melting as he began to snicker. Then a bright light beamed from behind me lighting up the room. The devil stopped laughing and looked over my right shoulder. The fire disappeared and fear swept over the devil’s face. I had no idea what was behind me but if the devil was afraid I certainly wasn’t going to turn around and look at it. I didn’t want to turn to dust anytime soon. The devil nodded and disappeared beneath my hands. I looked at my burning palms and then shook the pain away, still afraid to turn around. The light faded and I slowly looked back. All the spirits were gone and light sparkled upward toward the ceiling.

I moved toward the woman on the floor.

“What’s your name?” I asked, untying her hands.

“Madison,” she replied quietly.

“Okay, Madison, let’s get you out of here.”

I untied her feet and lifted her up. She let out a low moan and gasped for air. I leaned down and gave her another breath hoping that would help. I also hoped she hadn’t gotten paid for anything that night that required the use of her mouth. I hurried out of the abandoned house and looked around. It was still night and the broken out street lights made the alley even darker.

“I’ve been with one hundred-ninety-three men.”

“Uh, okay. You count them?” I asked, trying to hide the disgust in my voice.

“Yes. I’ve stolen fifty-five wallets,” she whispered, as I struggled to hold her.

I was headed for the main street hoping to find a miracle.

“That’s a lot of money.”

“Been with two women,” she said, gripping my shoulder to hold on.

“Really?” I said, actually wondering how that went. I glanced down the dark street and saw no one. “How was that?”

“Not for me,” she said.

“You don’t have to continue the confession,” I said out of breath.

Her body went completely limp in my arms. I looked down. She had either passed out or died.

“Ah shit!”

As I moved faster down the street, I heard footsteps and then a voice behind me.

“Yes, I do. I need to confess to someone because I think I just died.”

I stopped and looked back at the spirit of the woman in my arms.

“Damn it!” I shouted, running down the street.

She followed me, still confessing everything she could think of.

“Okay, so three hundred blow jobs. I beat up a guy in high school. I stole from the basket at church as they passed it around, God forgive me.”

God forgive *me*, because I was about to toss her ass on the ground and run. I reached the busy street and pulled over was an *American Ambulance* parked on the side of the road.

“You are so lucky,” I said, scoffing.

“I haven’t got lucky all night,” she said.

Thank God for that. When the traffic past, I bolted for the ambulance. I set her

body down on the side walk toward the back of the vehicle.

“I cheated on my taxes twice,” she continued.

I covered her mouth with my palm.

“Hold that thought,” I said, walking up to the passenger side window.

The two men inside were asleep, most likely waiting for a call. I made a fist and hit the side of the door. They both woke up and glanced around. The driver pointed to the side mirror. The passenger jumped out and raced toward Madison’s body. The driver got on his radio and reported the incident. He then ran around the vehicle and opened the back of the ambulance. They both began working on her immediately. I let out a sigh of relief.

“Can I continue now?” she asked, hopping into the back of the ambulance.

I followed her in and sat down next to her.

“She’s dead, man,” the driver of the ambulance said.

“No, she’s not. She still has a pulse. Get the gurney!”

A few minutes later, the ambulance raced down the street as the EMT connected tubes to Madison.

“I showed my boobs to a priest once on a dare. I hit a cat with my car once and didn’t report it. I gave the President a lap dance---”

“Enough! I get the point! You’re a thief and a whore and you ran over a cat.”

“I bounced ten checks,” she said quickly and folded her hands in her lap.

I rolled my eyes and watched the EMT as he held the oxygen mask over her face. I stared down at her body lying in front of us.

“Sorry about the whore comment,” I said, glancing her way.

Her spirit had disappeared, but Madison’s body on the gurney had started to cough and moan. The ambulance stopped and the back doors opened. A whole team of people were there to rush Madison into the emergency room.

“I hope the confession works, Madison.”

I jumped out of the ambulance. I sighed heavily and looked around. The sun was rising and I had no idea where to start looking for Sophie or Eddie. Closing my eyes, I went with the tugging feeling that I’d fought back so far. I opened my eyes and I was in my hospital room. Sophie stood next to me with her hands over mine. I rushed to her side. Eddie was nowhere in sight.

“Sophie, I’m here!”

She didn’t respond. I put my hand on her shoulder but she didn’t even look up. She leaned down and kissed my cheek. Her lips lingered next to my ear. I leaned into my body to listen.

“Eddie is in the bathroom with a knife to your mother’s neck, Jesse. I’m supposed to pull out these plugs behind you or she dies. The staff thinks I’m your fiancé and Eddie is my brother. That’s how we got in.”

She stood back up and the bathroom door opened.

“Hurry up, this old broad is loopy!” Eddie whispered sounding frustrated.

I walked through the bathroom door and saw my mother. Eddie held a huge knife against her throat.

“I knew my son would see you last night. Who is that woman with you? Is she an accomplice? How many people have you killed? Where is your mother?” her voice was stern even with the knife to her throat.

“Shut up, lady! I work alone. That woman is banging your son and I’ll gonna kill her after she pulls the plugs.”

“Well, good for him. At least she isn’t gay. You know the last woman he had left him for a woman.”

I rolled my eyes and carefully slipped the gun out of his pocket.

“Keep talking, mama,” I said, putting the gun in the back of my jeans.

“Sorry,” my mama said.

“For what?” Eddie asked.

A putrid smell filled the air. I covered my mouth and gagged. I went to walk back through the door but the gun stopped me. I held my breath and stood next to them in the tiny bathroom.

“I ate cabbage for lunch,” she said. “Can we get out of here now?”

“Holy shit, you stink woman. I should shoot you right now for that,” he said and opened the door wider. “Sophie, do it now! Or the old bag dies. One, two---”

Sophie reached for the cords behind my bed and yanked them out. She stood there for a second, went pale, and fainted. I rushed past Eddie and my mother and caught Sophie on her way down, gently laying her head on the floor. A beeping sound filled the room and there was a shout in the hallway. “Code blue!” Eddie wedged a chair against

the door as the nurses tried to get inside. He pointed the knife at my mother again and stared at my monitors.

“Die Jesse! Die!” he shouted.

“You are a sick man!” my mom yelled. “I didn’t give birth to Jesse just so I could watch him die at a psycho bastard’s hands.”

She swung her leg up and caught him in the balls. His eyes got wide and he staggered backwards. He threw the knife at her heart. I stepped in front of her and put my hand up. The knife sunk deep into my hand. My mother stepped back, her hands over her mouth, staring at what appeared to be a knife hanging in mid-air.

Banging and calls from outside the room brought back my attention. Eddie opened the window and jumped out. Too bad two stories weren’t enough to kill him. My mother ran to the cords, plugged them back in, and pulled the chair away from the door. I pulled the knife out of my hand and saw the wound heal before my eyes. I felt pain but it stopped immediately.

The door flew open. Nurses, doctors, and security raced inside.

“He jumped out the window!” my mother yelled out, leaning down to help Sophie.

Nurses and doctors began CPR on my body and Sophie sat up. My mother helped Sophie to her feet. Sophie stared at my body as they worked on me.

I stared at my hands as they faded in and out. Light trickled down from the ceiling, this time more inviting than the last. The monitors on the screen showed a flat line. It was time for me to go home. I reached up and touched the light. It was warm and made my fingertips tingle.

“Jesse, don’t you dare leave me,” Sophie’s voice said softly.

She stood on the other side of the room staring straight at me. I walked right up to her.

“Sophie, someday we’ll be together.”

She shook her head.

“No, now!”

“But I need to go. I just died.”

“Your love for me can keep you here. Do you want it now or later?” she asked.

I glanced back at the lingering light.

“I want it now, but will they let me?”

“Push it away, Jesse.”

I waved my hand for it to leave and watched the light be sucked up into the ceiling. I watched my hand fade and a strong jerk pulled my spirit.

“Jesse!” Sophie screamed out.

Chapter Eight

Last Chance

My head pounded as I opened my eyes. My left eye was a little blurry. I stared at the ceiling listening to a beeping sound. I swallowed but my throat felt dry and sore. I tried to clear my throat.

“Anybody here with me?” I struggled to say with a raspy voice.

“Oh, son. I’m here,” my mother said and came into my view.

“Mom, you were right. The Cab Cutter was out last night,” I whispered.

“I know that, sweetie. You’re just lucky to be alive.”

She picked up my hand and kissed the back of it.

“I’m so tired, mom.”

“Get some rest. You’re gonna be fine, Jesse” she said. Her voice faded as my eyelids grew heavy and closed again.

I felt lips on mine and a sweet aroma flowed into my nostrils. It was familiar and sexy and I wanted to taste it. I breathed deeply taking in the scent. Someone reached down in between my thighs and felt the front of me. A warm hand continued to massage my hot rod and I hoped it wasn’t a male nurse trying for a catheter.

“Ummm, that feels good,” I said trying to open my eyes.

“You want to wake up so we can get outta here soon,” a woman’s voice said.

I struggled to sit up and found myself looking at a beautiful woman. A smile moved across her face as she gently pulled her hand back. I held my head and slowly laid back.

“You shouldn’t have tried to get up.”

“Am I dreaming?”

She shook her head.

“Who are you?”

She lifted a perfectly shaped eyebrow and pressed her lips together.

“You don’t know me?”

“I don’t think so. Am I supposed to? Were you just touching my Johnson?”

She shook her head and showed me both of her hands and set them slowly in her lap.

“You should know me.”

“You’d think I’d remember such a beautiful face. My head is killing me.”

“Let me get a nurse,” she said and left the room.

Two women and a man all in white coats stepped in the room.

“Good afternoon, Mr. Franklin. I’m Dr. Philips,” the man said.

The two women began checking my vitals and the monitors.

My mother walked into the room and stood by the beautiful blonde woman. I stared at the blonde and didn’t hear what the doctor had asked.

“Jesse,” the doctor said.

I looked up at the doctor.

“Yes,” I said focusing on him.

“Can you hear me okay?”

“Yes.”

“Can you see me okay?”

“My left eye is blurry,” I said.

“Jesse, do you know what happened to you last night?”

I looked up at the ceiling. Flashes of the night before entered my mind.

“I was in my cab and some man pulled a gun on me. He shot my head. Then he stole my cab. I can’t remember anything after that.”

“Well, Jesse, you’ve been in a coma. The bullet entered the back of your skull and is affecting your eyesight. We removed the bullet. It missed your brain by one centimeter. You’re lucky to be alive. I’m shocked that you came out of the coma so soon.” The doctor removed his glasses and looked at my mom. “He’s just so lucky. We’ve done an MRI and we don’t see any problems. However, somehow the optic nerve may be damaged, but there’s no apparent reason for it, Jesse. It may heal on its own or we may have to operate but either way there is no guarantee your vision will ever be the same in that eye.”

I nodded. I was alive and that was all that mattered. The doctor flipped through my chart.

“Okay, well the nurses are going keep you comfortable. If you have any pain, just let them know. We’re going to keep you here for a few days for observation and then you can go.”

“Okay. Wait, what about the man who shot me?” I asked.

The doctor glanced up at my mother.

“He escaped last night. Apparently, he came back to finish the job but your mother scared him off. Get a good night’s sleep, okay?”

I nodded again and watched the doctor and nurses leave. My mother approached the bedside.

“I’m going down to the cafeteria and leave you two alone for awhile. Do you want anything?”

“No thanks,” I said, watching her walk away.

The woman sat on a chair and scooted it closer. I knew exactly who she was. I just didn’t want her to know I knew.

“You don’t remember me at all do you?” she asked.

I slightly shook my head.

“Well, you picked me up in your cab before you picked Eddie up.”

“Eddie?”

“The killer.”

“What’s your name?”

“Sophie,” she replied.

I closed my eyes and whispered her name to myself. Pains shot through my head.

“I can’t concentrate,” I admitted.

She stood up and leaned over me.

“Are you in pain?”

“Yes,” I said, holding my head.

“I’ll call the nurse,” she said, pressing a button by the bed.

“Nurses Station,” a woman’s voice answered.

“Jesse is in pain,” Sophie said.

“Be right there.”

Her breast skimmed my forearm and I caught a glimpse of it down her top. She leaned over me and pressed her lips on mine. She held my face and slowly sucked on my

bottom lip. That wasn't a kiss from a friend. That was a kiss from a lover.

"All right you two love birds," the nurse said. "Let me give him some meds."

Sophie backed up and winked at me. She tasted sweet and I wondered if I'd ever be in her bed again. I watched her lean on the wall and look out the window. She was gorgeous. Each strand of her long straight hair was in perfect place. I wanted to run my hand down her hips and pull her close to me. I sighed as I felt the pain in my head subside. The drugs worked quickly.

"Why are you telling Sophie you don't know her?" a male voice asked me.

I sat up and saw Gramps sitting on the edge of my bed.

"Is this a dream?"

"Yes, now answer my question."

"Because if she leaves then she'll be safe. I want her to go home. I know Eddie is coming back!"

"And you think sending Sophie away will keep him from her?"

"Yes."

"What if she goes back home and marries Richard."

"I didn't think about him."

"Better go over your plan again."

"Yes, sir," I said, sighing and laid back."

"Jesse, Jesse," a voice said while shaking my arm.

I opened my eyes to my mother.

"Sorry to wake you but some Las Vegas police officers are here to see you. They have some questions for you."

I nodded and tried to wake up. A uniformed man entered my room and flashed his badge at me.

"Mr. Franklin, I'm Officer Hendricks. I've come to get a statement from you and some other information."

I nodded as my mother moved the back of the bed upward. I looked around the room. Sophie was gone.

"Mother, where is Sophie?"

"She's gone home, Jesse," she whispered.

"What?"

“She said if you didn’t remember her maybe she should just go. She said that she had to check in at home and she had nowhere to stay here. I said to give you some time and that she could stay at my house, but she said she didn’t feel safe here and didn’t want to impose. She’s a lovely girl. I think you should definitely go after that one.”

“Mom! Why did you let her leave?”

“I tried to keep her here. I can’t tie her to a chair!”

I lifted an eyebrow which sent a pain through my head. Suddenly, I remembered her tied to the chair. Oh boy, I had to get her back.

“Mr. Franklin?” the officer asked.

“Yes.”

“Are you up to some questions?”

“Oh yes,” I said, turning to my mother.

“When can I leave this place?”

“I don’t know. I’ll go and ask,” she said, hurrying out of the room.

“Why aren’t you going after Sophie?” I asked the officer.

“I already got her statement,” he replied.

“Yes, but you should be protecting her!”

“She’s gone back to the motel to collect her things. That place is crawling with detectives. She’ll be fine there. After that I don’t know her plan.”

I held my head and took in a deep breath. I explained all the parts of story that the officer would believe. Then I remembered the hide-out.

“You won’t believe this but I saw his hide-out.”

“How did you see his hide-out if you went from the dumpster to here?” he asked, writing down on a tablet of paper.

I stared at him. Finally his pen stopped and he glanced at me.

“I followed him when he took Sophie.”

“How is that possible?” he asked.

“Look, do you want to know where the hide-out is or what? He told me where it was before he shot me. He did think I was gonna die, right?” I said, lying through my teeth.

I wasn’t about to tell him I was a ghost chasing after a potential lover and have him send in the loony bin squad.

“Okay, where’s the location?”

I explained where it was. He scribbled more on the pad of paper. I wanted to tell him everything just for the sake and safety of Sophie but knew he just wouldn’t believe me. I needed to get out of bed and try to find her. Eddie could already be on her tail again.

“Okay, well if I need more info I’ll be back. I’ll send a squad car over to the hide-out location.”

“Better send a swat team. That guy is crazy.”

The officer raised his eyebrows and nodded in agreement.

“Sure is. Get well soon. Thanks, Mr. Franklin.”

“Go catch that bastard.”

The officer gave me a quick nod and walked out of the room. My mom entered with Doctor Philips.

“Your mother says you want to be released?”

“Yes, right now,” I said sitting up.

“Whoa,” the doctor said, grabbing my shoulder.

“I need to get Sophie. She’s not safe out there with that lunatic free.”

“Did you ask the officer if they can put her under some kind of police protection? We do have an officer outside your door.”

“You do?”

“Yes,” my mother replied.

“Where did Sophie go?” the doctor asked my mother.

“She told me she was going home to Colorado, to rest. I offered her my home, but she said no thank you, hugged me, and left.”

“That’s it! I’m going to Colorado. I have to find her.”

I stood up and my head spun. I grabbed the sheets and leaned over the bed.

The doctor hurried to the other side of the bed where I stood and held me up under my arm.

“You aren’t ready to go anywhere.”

“You don’t get it, do you? This guy tried to kill us both. He will be back. I need to protect her. I need to save her!”

“Don’t you have a number to call her?” my mom asked.

“No,” I said and felt my head spin again.

“You look pale, son. Just sit down.”

“Is there a guy at this hospital named Richard? He came into the hospital last night with a gunshot wound to the chest. Find him for me. She might be with him.”

“I’ll see what I can do,” Dr. Philips said.

Bubbles danced behind my left eye and then it went black. I looked up at my mother.

“What’s wrong, Jesse?”

I held my head and punched the sheets with my right fist.

“This isn’t happening!”

“What’s wrong?” Dr. Philips asked.

I looked up at the doctor.

“My left eye just went black. Did I just go blind in that eye, doc?”

Chapter Nine

What You Do For Love

Dr. Philips held up a small flashlight and scanned both my eyes. My left eye felt closed.

“Jesse you need surgery. Get back into bed,” he said.

“But---”

“You could lose your vision permanently, Jesse, if you don’t,” he said sternly, helping me back into bed.

My mother covered her mouth and tears welled up in her eyes as the doctor left the room in a hurry.

“Mom, I’ll be fine. Go find that Richard guy. He’s got to be here!”

She nodded and leaned over me. She kissed my forehead and squeezed my hand.

“I’ll find him. You just get better, okay?”

I nodded as she left the room. Why had I pretended not to know Sophie? What an idiot I was. She had to have known I wasn’t myself. She had to have known I would never forget having sex with her. I mean you just don’t do that kind of stuff with just anyone.

Ten minutes later two nurses came into my room. One put a shot through my IV the other put the bars up on my bed and told me to relax.

“You’re being prepped for surgery,” one nurse said.

The room shifted and my eyelids felt unbelievably heavy. That was the last thing I remembered until I heard a voice.

“Mr. Franklin. Try and open your right eye and tell me what you see,” a man’s voice said to me.

I forced my eye open, but it was completely blurry. I reached up and felt my face. A bandage covered my left eye and a greasy ointment saturated my right.

“I can’t see anything with this stuff all over my eye.”

“Dr. Philips said that surgery went well and you should be able to see fine in a

few weeks.”

“Oh, that’s good,” I struggled to say. My throat was horse and scratchy. “Did anyone find Richard or Sophie?”

“Not yet. Where is she from? Maybe we can call information and find her in the telephone book.”

“She said Grand Junction, Colorado.”

“Excellent. I’ve always wanted to visit there.”

“Where is Doctor Philips?” I asked.

“He went home to sleep. It’s about three am now. The hospital is quiet and everyone is asleep. Even the officer outside the door.”

“That’s not good. Did they find Eddie?”

“No, they never caught him. But they found four bodies buried under the hide-out house and the place is crawling with detectives now. In fact, you’re the only taxi driver that survived the Cab Cutter.”

“That’s a good thing. Now, I have to get out of here and find Sophie.”

“He never wanted Sophie.”

My heart beat picked up and I could hear it on the monitor behind me. I had no idea who I was talking to. I assumed it was a doctor. I slowly brought the sheet up to my good eye and rubbed it.

I heard the familiar squeak of the silencer being screwed onto the gun. I swallowed hard and wished I had gone to the light when it was offered to me.

I opened my right eye hoping I was wrong. Eddie stood over me in a white doctor coat. He had a surgery cap on and a badge hung from the coat. God only knew who he had stolen the badge from. Poor bastard. He held up a silver stick in his hand. He flipped it around and the tip of switchblade shot out.

“Boo!” he said. Adrenaline rushed through me and my stomach felt sick. He held his pointer finger to his lips. “Don’t say a word or I’ll slit your throat.”

I nodded.

“What’s Sophie’s last name?” he asked.

“I thought you didn’t want Sophie?”

“I changed my mind. And this time when you’re fully dead maybe I can get the job done. I’ll enjoy being the Grand Junction Slicer,” he snickered.

I saw something move out of my peripheral vision. Someone was coming from the bathroom. I stared up at Eddie and didn't move. He grabbed the front of my hospital gown and shook me.

"What's her last name? Tell me or I'll torture her as well. You're gonna die anyway!" he whispered forcefully.

His spit hit my cheek and his brown eyes dilated. A vein popped up in his forehead as he stared at me with anticipation. Like he saw my fear and it excited him. I shook my head.

"I'll never tell you. You'll never find her. You'll never have the pleasure of her company like I did."

He gritted his teeth and let out a growl. His arm shot up. The knife pointing to my heart. I took in one last deep breath.

"It's Morrison!" a woman shouted.

Eddie turned in mid-motion with the knife high and three muffled shots rang out. His body jerked back with each shot as he fell backward into the monitors. I glanced up and saw Sophie holding out Eddie's gun. Eddie's limp body slid down the wall as he let out a deep exhale.

"That's for tying me to a chair! Now go to hell where you belong!" Sophie yelled out.

The officer ran into the room followed by several nurses. Screaming and shouting erupted as the officer grabbed the gun from Sophie. She stepped back with her hands up. The officer ran to Eddie's body and pulled the surgery cap off.

"It's Eddie! The Cab Cutter!" Sophie shouted.

The officer nodded. He got on his radio and put out a report, then waved at Sophie to put her hands down. She ran to my side and laid over top of me. I held her tight.

"Sophie, you came back!"

"Jesse, you remember me?"

"I didn't forget you. I thought maybe you'd be safer if you thought I didn't remember and you just went home, but that's not what I wanted." I moved her hair out of the way and kissed her neck. "I remember everything that happened."

"Everything?" she asked.

“Everything,” I replied as she kissed my lips.

The commotion was so loud that the nurses moved me into another room. My mother had left for the night thinking that the officer would protect me. Boy, would she be pissed when she found out he had fallen asleep. The nurse shut the light off and Sophie lay down next to me. She ran her hand over my cheek.

“You need a shave,” she said.

“I need cleaned up.”

“Maybe a sponge bath is in your future.”

“Maybe a ring is in yours.”

A smile moved across her lips as she rubbed her feet on mine.

“Warm feet. That’s a plus.”

“They are never cold. In fact there are other parts of me that are on fire about now,” I said.

“Really?” she asked reaching down under the covers.

“Luckily, these gowns are accessible.”

I let out a low moan at the stroke of her touch.

“Wait. What about Richard?”

“What about him?”

“He said he wanted to be with you.”

“He’s fine and he’s going home alone.”

“Where did you go when you left?”

She continued to run her hand down my hips and thighs. She licked her bottom lip and stared at mine.

“I went back to the Howard Johnson and picked up all my stuff. Then I checked back into the Mirage. I figured that it might take you a while to remember me but I wanted to give us a chance. I came back here and visited Richard. I saw that he was doing fine, said goodbye to him and his parents, and went to the ICU waiting room. I fell asleep for awhile and then I heard someone whisper to me. The voice said ‘Go tell Jesse, Gramps said hi.’ Does that mean anything to you?”

I nodded and reached down for both her hands. I kissed the soft skin on her fingers.

“How did you get that gun? When I was a spirit I pulled it out of Eddie’s pocket.

When my spirit was jerked back to my body, I put it under the covers in between my legs. So if he came back I'd be armed."

"I know, because when I ran my hands down in between your thighs I felt it. Before they took you to surgery I came back for it. I knew they'd find it and take it from you. I had to remove the silencer part so it would fit in my skirt. When I came up here to tell you what your Gramps said, I saw Eddie slip past the nurses' station in disguise and walk right by the officer. He was so focused on you he didn't even see me sneak into the bathroom. That's when I put the silencer tip on and blew his ass away."

"You're amazing. You know that?"

"I have some talents."

"And you can cook."

"Damn straight, I can."

"I really don't know much about you though."

"Well, we have great sex and I can cook. You drive a cab in Vegas and I'm a kindergarten teacher in Grand Junction."

"Ms. Morrison?" I chuckled. "Wow, those kids have a sexy teacher."

"Want me to teach you some stuff?"

I nodded as she disappeared under the covers.

"Wait, what else can you tell me about yourself?"

I was trying to be a gentleman. I wanted to get to know her before we had sex again.

"Can't we talk in our suite at the Mirage?" she asked as I felt her tongue go down past my navel.

My heart beat picked up on the monitor again and my legs trembled with anticipation.

"I was just trying to be polite," I said clenching the sheets to my sides.

"You like cowboy ranches, steak, and chocolate?" she asked stroking me and then sucking on the tip.

"Oh yeah," I replied.

"We'll get along fine. But I will be requiring paybacks at the suite."

"Anything you want, Sophie."

Who said relationships based on tragedies wouldn't last? This was just the beginning. I

had thought all along that I was supposed to save Sophie but in the end she saved me.