

The Grand Worthington



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Chapter 1

It all started with the Worthington Emerald—beautiful yet deadly. This heart-shaped emerald is decorated with white diamonds and nestled in a band of pure titanium, making it indestructible. The ring has been handed down from generation to generation since its conception in the late-1600s when commissioned by Hugo Manchester.

There is a legend that Everett Worthington coveted the ring so much—that he tried to bargain for it. When Hugo refused—Everett hired professional thieves to steal the jewel and to exterminate the entire Manchester Family. However, one small child did escape—hidden away by his nanny.

Everett, overjoyed to finally possess the magnificent ring, then gives it to his wife Lucy. At first, Lucy questions how Everett ever persuaded Hugo to part with such a family heirloom.

“Everett darling, its magnificent! How on earth were you able to convince Hugo to sell you this treasure?” Lucy questions.

“Never mind that my pet, do you really like?” Everett retorts.

“Like it—its enchanting. But you must tell me how you got it? I had heard that there was a break-in at Manchester Manor and everyone was murdered—” Lucy stops in midsentence and gasps in shock.

“Wear it in good health my dear. The Worthington Emerald is a jewel of unimagined riches.” Everett boasts as he admires the ring on his wife’s finger.

Much against her better judgment, Lucy does indeed wear the ring. One day on a riding jaunt near Dover, Lucy strikes her head on a rock in a mysteriously tragic accident. She never regains consciousness and no one knows what actually happened to her. Other than she is found alone, clutching that ring.

Although Everett is grieved beyond words—he still adores the Manchester Emerald which is now referred to as Worthington. When his son Charles becomes of age and decides to marry, Everett decides to bestow the ring to him. Charles in turn gives it to his beautiful wife Geneva.

Geneva proudly displays the ring at every function her husband Charles takes her ignoring the murmurings of both servants and locals. However, once again the ring will not be denied its bounty. Geneva dies in childbirth, also clutching the ring in her hand. Soon after that, it is pronounced by the servants to be cursed.

“No good can ever come to the bearer of the Manchester Emerald.” States Maggie Obrien.

“Are you daff girl, it’s the Worthington Emerald.” Another servant Charlotte Cunningham corrects.

“I’m perfectly sane—that ring was wrongfully taken from the Manchesters and their spirits won’t rest until its returned.” Maggie warns.

“Fiddlesticks—get on with your work now girl.” Charlotte admonishes.

“Mind What I tell you. My mamma told me all about what happened with them Manchesters. I tell you, that thing is cursed!” Maggie insists, her voice barely rising above a whisper.

“Told you what, girl?” Now Charlotte has put aside her stirring spoon and moves much closer to Charlotte as she relays to her what has been handed down.

“It seems that Everett Worthington paid the Randolph Brothers—”

Although aware of his servants’ rumors and the tragic circumstances surrounding his wife’s demise, Charles I nevertheless refuses to believe that something so beautiful could be so deadly. Again, when the time comes, he bequeaths it to his only son, Charles II (Chester.) Then Chester surrenders it to his wife Abigail in the early 1800s.

History almost repeats itself. However, instead of Abigail dying, she suffers a massive stroke, depriving her the use of her legs. Confined to a wheelchair, she cautions her husband against giving the ring to their oldest son.

“Chester, I implore you not to give that ring to our eldest son. It can only bring misfortune—even death to his fiancée Daphne!”

“Perhaps you are right—I will speak to my father.”

After a lot of consideration, Charles I reluctantly relays to his son Chester the previous mishaps in regards to the Worthington Emerald. Telling him how his grandmother died—he also advises his son not to give it to his future male heirs.

Chester, believing the curse, refuses to give it to his son Charles (Corky) III explaining the circumstances surrounding the Worthington Emerald. Corky, following in the footsteps of his predecessor, dismisses the legend as utter nonsense— marking it down as pure coincidence and superstition. An argument erupts.

“Father, you just don’t understand. You want me to be like you! I have plans, ambitions of my own.” Corky argues.

“Don’t be a fool, son. Forget about that cursed emerald!” Chester barks.

“It’s you that’s the fool if you think I’m giving up the most important possession of the Worthington family over a stupid superstition.” Corky hurdles at his father.

“You will never respond to me in that manner again. Do you hear me? Now get ready for the party and not another word!” Chester demands. Corky hurries from the room, slamming the double doors shut behind him.

“I’m show him!” Corky whispers to himself.

During the family’s annual cotillion, Abigail takes the ring off, putting it on the mantle for just a brief moment. Corky—seizing the opportunity, steals it. Abigail orders an extensive search. After every part of the castle has been thoroughly covered, it is concluded that the emerald will never be found.

“Good ridded, that’s what I say. Wherever that cursed ring is—may it never give the owner one bit of luck.” Pronounces a descendent of Maggie Obrien.

It takes a lot of convincing, but Chester finally consents to Corky’s request of leaving the English countryside to pursue his dream of being the owner of a grand hotel and theatre. Corky has always fantasized about having a combination of the two so that guests would not only benefit from being entertained but have a wonderful place to stay as well.

“Father, haven’t you ever had a dream that you felt strongly about?” Corky questions.

“Yes but you are needed here at the estate.” Chester counters.

“I’m not like you father—I want to make it in America. I have always envisioned myself owning a fashionable hotel and putting on grand theatrical productions.” Corky whines.

“But what about Worthington Manor. You are the eldest son and rightful inheritor.” Chester reminds him.

“But father, Matthew is here and he’s the perfect English gentlemen. Besides—he’s so much like you!” Corky speaks of his younger sibling—born six months before his mother’s crippling stroke.

“Very well son, you may go but if it doesn’t work out, please return home.” Chester pleads.

“But it will work out, you will see!” Corky insists.

So, with the money he gets from his father and additional promises of backing from some New York investors, Corky establishes The Grand Worthington Hotel and Theatre. He also possesses a beautiful home built for himself and his bride Daphne.

As time passes, it is proven that Corky is not as investment savvy as he thinks. Not only does he lose almost all his money but his beautiful home as well.

After writing to both his parents—his mother persuades Chester to aid their son. Corky’s father won’t save the house, but he buys both the Hotel and Theater and give them back to Corky. However, Chester keeps the deed in his own name. Only after the death of both parents will ownership revert back to Corky. And, if Corky has no offspring—the descents of Matthew inherit with the stipulation that neither the Grand Hotel nor Theatre can ever be sold.

“On your mother’s insistence I will give you the money, Corky. However, I will not relinquish the deeds to you. I will keep both the deeds to the hotel and theatre in my name. The house—you must forfeit.” Chester explains.

“Where will I live?” Corky asks.

“In that Grand Worthington Hotel, that’s where.” Chester states.

Corky resides in the Worthington Hotel with his wife and operate the Theater with the help of Bruce, an elderly man, as the maintenance helper. Corky never knew that Bruce was once a successful performer but because of poor financial management, he lost everything.

The Hotel/Theater becomes quite successful because Corky hires extraordinary talented mostly Black actors/singers and pays them wages which were good at the time for Black performers but not compatible with what white performers make in the 1920s. So, he saves money and only occasionally uses well-known European actors.

There are a few problems with the theater such as the sticky emergency exit door but since it was rarely used—Corky doesn't think it is necessary to keep it in repair. Also, the sprinkler system was faulty. The Hotel on the other hand, exceeds standards because it also served as living quarters. Nevertheless, since the theater is only for entertainment—it suffered from lack of continued maintenance.

On the day of the fire, there are electrical problems that the inspector tells Corky needs to be attended to soon, but he prefers to install a special sewing room instead at his wife's request in the hotel. Daphne knows that if she hadn't insisted on that room; there would have been money to correct the wiring problem that leads to the death of both Yvette and Angeline.

Daphne is enchanted with the Worthington Emerald and refuses to go anywhere without the ring. When she is at the theater watching a performance of *The Little Foxes*, she takes her ring off in the restroom to wash her hands. Daphne rushes back not wanting to miss curtain call—leaving the ring on the large mirror. She doesn't think about it again until the fire.

Corky sends the sisters Angeline and Yvette back to retrieve the ring when they get stuck behind the faulty stage door. Corky is in shock, Daphne is terrified, and Bruce wants to rush back into the burning theater through the front door. Corky won't allow it and the three of them listen in horror as the two sisters burn to death. After the tragedy, the ring is never found.

Because of the circumstances surrounding the catastrophe, Daphne begins to find solace in alcohol and drugs. She complains to her husband constantly of hearing the two sisters screaming to her for help.

“I tell you Corky, those girls blame me for their death. I continuously hear their agonizing screams as they struggle to get that doors open.” Daphne laments.

“Well—it was you who insisted that I have that blasted sewing room constructed.” Corky accuses.

“So, you also think that I am to blame for those poor girls death?” Daphne begins to cry.

“I’m sorry my pet. Why don’t you take a warm bath and relax?” Corky suggests.

“Perhaps you are right.” Daphne says.

Giving Corky a kiss on his forehead, Daphne leaves to enter the private bathroom. It is luxurious—there are exotic painting and gold ornamented fixtures. It doesn’t take long before Daphne is up to her neck in warm bubbles. An eerie silence envelops the room as the water turns slowly from amber to red. Daphne looks up to see the faces of Angeline and Yvette. In utter shock she is unable to move or scream.

The next morning, Daphne Worthington is found dead in her bathtub—the ring mysteriously clutched in her hand. No one knows how Daphne came in possession of the ring or why she drowned in the tub. The water had been drained and there were only a few suds that remained at the bottom.

Corky never recovers from the death of the three women and dies from heart failure. Not too long after Corky dies, the ring disappears again. Bruce has kept a diary of the events from the 1920s and this diary was found 80 years later and donated to an antique store. It is the passage of 20 more years before the diary is rescued from the antique shop and surrendered to and read by the remaining Worthington relatives at an astronomical price. It was decided that if this journal were ever in the hands of unscrupulous people—blackmail would be the results.

Chapter 2

It is now the year 2020. Pamela (Pam) Worthington, wife of Nathan (Nate) Daniel Worthington stares blankly at the dilapidated theatre and the still stately hotel. Nate and his family are the only living heirs to the Worthington Estate. She speaks to her husband.

“What do you think of the old man’s diary. There seems to be a lot of misfortune connected with this place.”

“We don’t have any use for that theatre, but the hotel looks good considering how old it must be.” Declares Nathan ignoring his wife’s comments.

“I don’t like it, Nate—I just don’t.” Pam shakes her head and then eyes something shiny in the rubble. “Hey—what’s that?”

It resembles a ring, but it is packed down with dirt and soot. “Why it looks like a ring—you don’t think ...” Remarks Nathan, taking the filthy object from her and holding it up to the light.

“Can it be the emerald?” Cries Pamela in astonishment and fear.

“I don’t know, but I am definitely going to find out. That thing is worth a small mint.” Nathan replies, eyeing the ring speculatively.

“Nate—according to that old man’s diary, this thing has a legacy of death. Your great grandfather was old Corky’s brother. Didn’t anyone in your family ever tell you about the legend?” Pamela probes.

“No, every time I would try to broach the matter, the subject would always be changed. Constantly heard someone say—let the past stay buried.” Nathan admonishes.

“I don’t like it here, Nate. Let’s go find a hotel.” Pam looks around the ruins uneasily.

“Okay, but in the morning I am going to get the power turned back on in that hotel. Plan to have that theatre torn down, if it will make you feel any better. The hotel, however, can be expanded, and will truly be grand again. We’ll make a fortune.” Nathan proclaims, looking at the surrounding area.

“Why don’t we just sell this place and return to London?” Pam questions.

“Sell it—why should we sell it? My father and Michael have thrown everything into those damn charities of his. Good for our public image, he says. They even plan on turning Chester’s house into some blasted museum. I refuse to live penniless in London when I can be the owner of a luxury hotel.” Nathan states.

“But we aren’t penniless, my love.” Pam interjects. “Besides, they say this place is haunted.”

“Nonsense—anyhow that happened so many years ago and wasn’t it at the theatre, my Pet?” Nathan coos giving Pam a little smile.

“Yes, but what you plan on doing is going to be built right over that place. Please, Nate—I get a very bad feeling about this.” Pam implores.

“I don’t want to hear another word. That’s final!” Nathan ends the conversation impatiently and heads toward their waiting car.

The next day, Nathan meets with the contractors to ascertain how much money will be needed to renovate the hotel and tear down the theatre.

“You know, people say the place is haunted. Old Bruce lived there alone in that big place with no heat or lights. But I hear tell that somebody saw flicks of light and strange sounds.” The contractor Steve Crenshaw relays.

“Ridiculous! The old fellow probably had a couple of kerosene lanterns and used one of those fireplaces. As for the sounds, that could have been just about anything.” Nathan replies.

“I don’t know—” Steve says.

“Look Mr. Crenshaw, if you can’t do the work, I’ll just find someone else who is willing.” Nathan admonishes.

“I’m just saying—okay, I’ll have an estimate for you in the morning.” The two men shake hands and Nathan is off to the jewelers to get the emerald ring appraised.

Kowalski’s Jewelers in just a few short blocks down. It is an old established firm. Although the original proprietor—Jude Kowalski is no longer there—his grandsons do a very good job of servicing the public. Nathan walks into the establishment and shows Harry Kowalski the ring. The look he gives Nathan is one of surprise and wonder.

“Then you recognize the stone?” Nathan says.

“That’s the famous Worthington Emerald. I thought it had been lost after the demise of Corky Worthington way back in the 1920s.” Harry says eyeing the stone.

“My wife and I just found it amongst the rubble at the old theatre site.” Nathan informs Harry. “By the way, I’m Nathan Worthington.” Nathan says, extending a freshly manicured hand.

“I’m Harry Kowalski, my brother Samuel and I run this place. I never though I’d be setting eyes on that rock, nor you for that matter.” Harry states accepting Nathan’s hand and giving it a firm shake.

“You know something about my family?” Nathan questions.

“My grandfather told me all about the Worthington Emerald and how it was obtained from its original owners the Manchesters. Bad blood that is, if you don’t mind me saying.” Harry states.

“Well, I do mind you saying. All I want is for you to appraise this ring—not give me a history lesson.” Nathan snaps at Harry.

“Hey ... I’m just saying.” Harry says throwing his hands up in the air.

“That’s the second time I’ve heard that remark. What’s with you Americans—you have a limited vocabulary?” Nathan retorts annoyed and then seeing the look on Harry’s face retracts his statement.

“I’m sorry. I just wish people would stop trying to give me advise. All I want is to rebuild the Grand Worthington Hotel and get on with my life.” A frustrated Nathan laments.

“You gonna rebuild the Grand? What about the theatre?” Harry asks in astonishment.

“Yes—I’m going to rebuild the Grand.” Nathan mocks.

“And, what about the theatre?” Harry repeats.

“I’m completely demolishing that thing.” Harry informs.

“Thanks the heavens for that.” Is Harry’s reply. “I’ll have the estimate for you within an hour—when my brother returns from a business luncheon.”

“Okay, here’s where you can reach me. I’ll be at the Hilton Garden Inn.” Nathan hands Harry his business card and points to his cellphone number.

“Okay Nathan—I guess you know what you’re doing?” Its more of a question than a comment.

“Don’t worry—I know exactly what I’m doing.” Nathan smiles, tips his hat and casually walks out the door.

When Nathan arrives at his suite, he finds a note from Pamela. It reads: *Went to do some light shopping. Since I’m in New York—I may as well take advantage of it. Love Pam.*

Nathan smiles and decides to give his father a call. “Hello dad, how are you?”

“Your brother Michael and I a getting ready for a 1:00 pm meeting with the Benedict Brothers. I told them about your New York venture, and they showed a lot of interest.” Liam Worthington conveys.

“That’s great news, dad! You’ll never guess what happened yesterday.” Nathan says.

“I can’t imagine, Nate.” His father replies while rushing through some papers.

“I found the Worthington Emerald.” Nathan tells to a now very quiet receiver. “Dad—did you hear what I just said?”

“Yes, I heard you Nathan Daniel.” Whenever his father uses his son’s first and second name; it’s never good.

“What’s the matter, dad?” Nathan inquires, bracing himself for the worst.

“Son, I didn’t really want you to go to America, but I was willing to let you have a go at that hotel. Now you tell me you found that accursed ring?” Liam proclaims incredulously.

“Now don’t you start, dad.” Nathan answers not at all liking the direction the conversation is taking.

“That ring has been nothing but an albatross around the neck of this family for decades.” Liam explains.

“I’ve never heard you talk this way dad. You’ve never mentioned the Emerald to me or Michael. Every time either of us would ask you about it—you practically turn blue.” Nathan states.

“Son, that should have given you an indication of how bad it is. Now you tell me you have it in your possession? Get rid of it.” Liam orders.

“I’ll do nothing of the kind.” Nathan counters.

“Son, I can get you all the backing you need for that Grand Worthington Hotel from the Benedict Brothers. What on earth do you want with that ring? Please don’t tell me you are going to give it to Pamela?” Liam is on the edge of his seat.

“And, what if I were?” Nathan says smugly.

“Are you out of your mind?” The veins are rising up in the back of Liam’s neck.

“Take it easy, dad. I couldn’t bribe Pam to take the ring. She’s terrified of it!” Nathan chuckles.

“Thanks the heavens for that. Now, if you are determined to keep that blasted thing—keep it away from the hotel. I’ve got a bad feeling about that stone.” Liam cautions.

“Dad—please” Nathan says shaking his head in disbelief.

“Just do as I say. Put it in a safe deposit box and leave it at the bank. Ship it back to London and give it to Sydney Manchester. I’m not sure he’d take it but at least it would be back into that family.” Liam suggests.

“I’m not about to let that emerald go—at least not for the present time. Go on to your meeting with the Benedict Brothers and if you think that their offer is lucrative—take it and wire me the funds. I’ll be needing it to give to these contractors. Even they are spooked about working on that hotel.” Nathan adds.

“Just be careful, Nate. I love you.” Liam replies.

“I love you, too dad.” Nathan hangs up the phone. He’s never known his father to talk that way before. He knew that his father cared for him, his brother, little sister and his mom. He just never heard him say it like that. It made him uneasy about his whole venture.

After Pamela returns from shopping and has a light dinner, she decides to take a soothing bath before retiring for the night. As she closes her eyes, she hears a small voice as if speaking from a great distance away. Pamela sits up and looks around but finds that she is still alone in the room. Shaking her head vigorously, she slides back into the tub to once again be caressed by the bubbles. Once again, she hears the same voice. As before, she sits up in the tub. However, this time she speaks.

“I am Pamela Worthington—who is there?”

“I am Daphne Worthington.” The voice replies.

“I must be dreaming, you can’t be Daphne Worthington. She died a long time ago.” A frighten Pamela replies.

“Yes, I did but I have come back to warn you.” The spirit utters.

“Warn me?” A frighten Pamela inquiries.

“Yes, you must have nothing to do with that Worthington Emerald. It has brought death and pain to the Worthington Family ever since it was acquired.” The spirit says.

“But—I don’t understand?” Pamela queries.

“Oh, I think you do. I know you want nothing to do with that emerald—a wise choice. However, your husband is captivated by it as my husband once was. As I once was.” The voice accounts sadly.

“The sisters.” Is Pamela response.

“Yes, Angeline and Yvette would never have returned to that burning theatre had it not been for my lust for that stone. The repairs would have been made had it not been for me.” The tortured spirit communicates to Pamela.

“Is this real or am I just imagining this?” Pamela enquiries more to herself than to any apparition.

“I must leave you Pamela. Remember, the Revenge of the Manchesters reaches beyond generations. They will use anyone who dies wrongfully because of that emerald. You are safe as long as you resist the evil influence of that stone. Beware of the Grand Worthington Hotel for in its walls death

is harbored.” After that, Pamela feels a very cold breeze and then all is calm again.

Pamela towels herself dry and slowly walks into the master bedroom of the luxury suite. She sits on a small stool in front of the vanity’s mirror stroking her hair with a soft brush. As she stares into the glass she sees that her reflection is not the only one. There is the silhouette of two women. When she turns around, there is no one else there.

“Angeline and Yvette!” Pamela says delicately and Nathan appears.

“Darling, let’s leave this place. There is nothing here for us.” Pamela acknowledges, rising from her seat to embrace her husband.

“What are you talking about? Pam—you’re as white as a sheet, is something wrong?” Nathan touches his wife’s cold, clammy shoulders and then rushes to retrieve her robe.

“You won’t believe me if I tell you, Nate. You’ll think I’m mad.” Pamela laments.

“Try me.” Nathan declares.

“While I was in the tub soaking, the Spirit of Daphne Worthington came to warn me about the emerald. Then just before you entered the room, I thought I saw the silhouette of two women.” Pamela tells Nathan, still visibly shaken. Nathan leaves her for a minute to fetch her a small sherry.

“Here, drink this. You probably fell asleep and had a dream. Darling—don’t give in to superstitious mumble-jumble!” Nathan chides.

“I knew you wouldn’t believe me. You’re so practical and levelheaded. But I tell you, Nathan Daniel Worthington—no good can come from this venture. Beware of the Grand Worthington Hotel for in its walls death is harbored.” The last comment was in a voice very different from Pamela’s.

“What’s going on—what’s this nonsense?” A startled Nathan responds looking at his wife as if for the first time. Then, shaking his head as if awakening from a reverie, he leads Pamela to the large bed for a soporific night’s sleep. However, it is anything but peaceful. Pamela tosses back and forth and several times during the night, she awakes either in tears or screaming. Nathan doesn’t know what to make of it. Nonetheless, he is very stubborn and refuses to harken to the pleas of his wife.

Chapter 3

The next morning, after kissing Pamela on the forehead, Nathan heads back to Kowalski's Jewelers to receive the appraisal on the emerald.

"The Worthington Emerald is appraised at 2.5 million dollars." Samuel Kowalski tells Nathan. "I have thoroughly cleaned it and nestled it within this exquisite titanium and ivory ring case. A stone of this value should be so presented."

"Thank you, Mr. Kowalski. You do my family a great service." Nathan retorts.

"Now, if you will do me one. Here is my bill. Please take that ring out of my store. My wife slept very lethargically last night. She kept waking up crying and telling me to get rid of that thing." Samuel conveys.

"My own wife had a very unnerving night. Do you really think there could be something to that curse?" Nathan interrogates.

"I do indeed. This is why I insist that you take that ring away immediately. Actually, you should have left it where you found it." Samuel decides handing the package and the bill to Nathan.

"Don't be absurd, Mr. Kowalski. I have no intention of doing anything so ridiculous. This will be put in my safe deposit box in City National Bank." Nathan declares, grabbing the package. He gives Samuel his American Express Card and impatiently waits for the transaction to be completed. Upon receiving his receipt, he bows politely and leaves the establishment.

Samuel's brother Harry comes from the back room. "You give that accursed emerald to Nathan?" He asks shaking his head as if in relief.

"Yes—I gave it to him, and I wouldn't want to be in his shoes for the price of that damn emerald." Samuel admits, looking at his brother from over his glasses. "That thing is nothing but doom."

"Well—it's out of our hands. He's been warned and if he doesn't want to listen—he'd better brace himself for what comes next." Harry walks over to the window to observe Nathan.

"It's his dear wife that I feel sorry for." Samuel comes over and stands next to Harry. "That woman is in for a very rough ride."

The two brothers watch as Nathan turns the corner and is completely out of sight. Then they look at each other, shake their heads and return to their work, each saying a silent prayer for Mrs. Nathan Worthington.

Nathan makes his way to the City National Bank and requests to speak to the President. He is greet by one of the bank officials instead.

“Good to see you as always, Mr. Worthington. Your father wired you the funds necessary to start reconstruction of your hotel. I can’t say that I totally agree—” Mr. Westley is interrupted by Nathan.

“It’s not necessary for you to see, Mr. Westley. I did ask to see Mr. Brewster.” Nathan conveys.

“Oh, I am sorry. Mr. Brewster is out of town on business. I was hoping that I could be of assistance.” Mr. Westley feels disconcerted at the condescending way Nathan is looking at him.

“Are you at least the General Manager?” Nathan interrogates.

“No, Mr. Theodore Abernathy is.” Mr. Westley informs.

“Then please—may I speak to him?” Nathan is having a hard time remaining calm.

“Of course, Mr. Worthington, right this way.” Mr. Westley replies, realizing that it is futile to attempt to be of any service to Nathan.

Mr. Westley knocks on the door twice, opens it and informs Mr. Abernathy of his guest.

“Of course, come in, come in my boy. Please—have a seat. How is your father and brother?” Mr. Abernathy inquires, ushering in Nathan and then dismissing Mr. Westley.

“They are both fine. I want to talk to you regarding this.” Nathan takes the ring case out of his pocket and hands it to Mr. Abernathy. The gentleman looks at the case and then opens it. He is rivetted to his seat as he stares at the infamous Worthington Emerald.

“By all that is holy—how on earth did you get this?” Mr. Abernathy replies not being able to take his eyes off the stone.

“My wife and I found it at the site of the theatre. It was covered in soot and debris.” Nathan informs him and then hands Mr. Abernathy the appraisal from Kowalski’s Jewelers.

“My stars—2.5 million dollars, Mr. Worthington? You honor my bank with such a treasure. You do know that there are rumors of a curse— “Before Mr. Abernathy can finish his question, Nathan erupts.

“If I hear one more person telling me of that damn curse, I am going to lose all sanity.” Nathan roars.

“I do apologize, Mr. Worthington, but there isn’t too many people in New York who don’t know about the fire at the Worthington Theatre and Mrs. Daphne being found dead in the bathtub of the Grand Worthington Hotel.” Mr. Abernathy tries to explain turning a slightly bright shade of red.

“It’s I who should apologize to you, Mr. Abernathy. I don’t know what got into me. I am normally not such a curt person.” Nathan says sheepishly.

“I understand. Now what do you wish to do with this prize? Put it in one of our safe deposit boxes? This item will need to be heavily insured.” Mr. Abernathy suggests, feeling a lot better now that Nathan has calmed down.

“Of course, Mr. Abernathy. Please make sure it is insured for its full value and secure it in your finest boxes. I will come back later to sign all the necessary forms—I’m late for an appointment with Steve Crenshaw.” Nathan is now standing up and extending his hand to Mr. Abernathy.

“I will make sure that all the necessary forms will be available for your signature, Mr. Worthington.” Mr. Abernathy takes Nathan’s hand and gives it a firm shake.

“See you later, good-bye.” Nathan says, feeling relieved that he no longer has the emerald in his possession. He hurries out the door and heads for the Grand Worthington Hotel where Steve Crenshaw is waiting.

“Ah, Mr. Worthington, I thought that you may have decided to change your mind.” Steve rejoinders.

“Not at all, Mr. Crenshaw. I had some business to transact at the bank.” Nathan informs. “Now about that estimate—”

“Yes ... well I had to do a lot of persuading. My men weren’t too happy about working on this project. However, I was able to subcontract some of the work to another company who is not as familiar with the history of this hotel as my crew is.” Steve says.

“I see.” Is Nathan’s response.

“Now here are my estimates of the labor, manhours needed and a projector of how long it will take to complete the assignments—given there are no unforeseen problems.” Steve hands Nathan several pieces of paper with charts, diagrams, and columns of figures. Nathan is extremely impressed.

“My father said that you were the best in the business.” Nathan admits looking over the figures again. “I’ll confess that it is a bit over my original budget, but it will be worth it.”

Nathan and Steve shake hands and Steve tells one of his men to start setting up boundaries for the demolition crew to finish clearing the land so that construction can commence.

As the day wears on, Bert Singer begins to wrap up the work that he is required to do for Steve. Bert walks around the area to insure that he hasn’t missed anything when he sees something glittering in a pile of rubble.

“I wonder what on earth that can be?” Bert inquires as he comes closer to the spot. “It looks like a ring of some kind—that can’t be possible because I got a lot of that stuff up.” Bert bends over and feels something like a hand on his shoulder.

“You looking for something?” The voice says but when Bert spins around there is nobody in sight.

“I must be getting a little touched in the head.” Bert chuckles as he notices that there is nothing there. However, as the sun begins to sink into the west, Bert notices what seems like two ladies heading his way. It seems as if they are floating in his direction. Without waiting for a second glance—Bert turns arounds and moves with the speed that would be the envy of a man half his age.

When Bert reaches his truck he locks his doors, starts the motor, throws the vehicle in gear and speeds away never looking back for a moment.

Chapter 4

The next day, Bert is reminiscing to everyone regarding his encounter.

“I’m telling you that I was doing my rounds for the night when I saw something that looked like a shiny green ring.” Bert begins.

“Hmm ... I heard about that ring, and it has a curse on it. But what would it be doing in a pile of rubble?” Jose Hernando asks.

“My wife Julie works at City National Bank and she told me that blasted ring is under tight lock and key there. Mr. Nathan put it there himself.” Will McGuire states.

“Alright, what’s going on here?” Steve Crenshaw has recently arrived on the location and is drawn by the crowd.

“Bert says that he saw the Worthington Emerald over there.” Jose points to the spot that was earlier vacated hurriedly by Bert.

“Is that true, Bert?” Steve asks as all eyes are now focused on Bert. Then Bert looks around and shakes his head sheepishly.

“All I’m saying boss is that I saw what looked like a green ring. And, after that—my blood was made to run cold.” Bert responds visibly shivering.

“What happened next?” Will calls out.

“I saw two women heading toward me. I know it makes me sound looney, but I tell you two women—like were floating toward me.” Bert says and by the expressions on the other workers faces, they believed him.

“What did you do next?” Steve asks and everyone listens expectantly.

“I ran like hell—that’s what I did. Jumped into my car, pointed it towards home and never looked back. It ain’t no way I am going to stay around here after sunset—not for any amount of money!” Bert declares and there are a chorus of “you got that right” echoing after him.

“It seems as if its starting again.” Steve shakes his head sadly.

“I knew I wasn’t crazy—what happened, Boss?” Bert encourages.

“I’m told that not too long after the accident, the city ordered Corky Worthington to clean up the mess. Well ... every time a crew would come

out to do the job, weird things would happen. It seemed to occur after sundown and around this same location.” Steve informs the men.

“Now, the pay is very good, and I know that every one of you could use the money. If we work until about an hour before sunset; we should be able to avoid whatever is out there.” Steve concludes.

“That sounds like a sensible plan.” Steve turns to see Nathan quickly approaching.

“So, are now you a believer?” Steve queries.

“I still think it’s a bit of utter nonsense but if it will satisfy the men and keep them happy—I’m game.” Nathan retorts.

“Fair enough, okay boys—let’s get to work.” Steve gives Nathan a weak smile and goes to his temporary shack to commence work.

Pamela is lounging around the apartment when she receives a telephone call.

“Hello?”

“Hi, my name is Charlotte Kowalski, but you can call me Charlie.”

“Hello Charlie.” Pam says.

“My husband and brother-in-law own Kowalski Jewelers. Sam was the one who appraised the stone.” Charlie informs Pam.

“Yes—I think my husband mentioned this to me.” Pam nods her head in agreement.

“I really need to speak to you—concerning the ring. Can we meet somewhere for a bite to eat?” Charlie inquires.

“Is this important, Charlie?” Pam probes, her curiosity is heighten.

“I’ve been having a series of dreams.” Charlie states.

“Lets’ meet at Boucherie Union Square in an hour.” Pam suggests.

“That sound just fine—I’m picking up the tab. See you then!” Exclaims Charlie. “And—let’s not discuss this with our husbands, agreed?”

“Agreed!” And both women hang up.

Two hours later, Charlie and Pamela meet at the restaurant.

“How did you manage to get us a table?” Pamela inquires.

“Let’s just say a couple of people owed me a favor!” Charlie smiles and Pamela knew she had found a good friend.

“I wanted to meet with you regarding Daphne Worthington.” Charlie begins. “She seems to be very fond of you.”

“Are you on speaking terms with the dead?” Pamela asks in astonishment.

“I have a very open mind and a flair for the clairvoyance.” Charlie replies in a straightforward manner.

“She came to me and warned me regarding the emerald and the Bonaparte Sisters.” Pamela informs.

“Ah yes, Angeline and Yvette!” Charlie exclaims.

“Were they French?” Pamela questions.

“Their father was—their mother was American. There quite a few “sisters” who left the United States and embraced a new way of life.” Charlie replies, remembering what she had read in an outdate journal.

“Why would they be so set on me?” inquires Pamela.

“Because your husband is so enchanted with the emerald and it is assumed that he will bestow it on you.” Charlie declares.

“I won’t take it even if he paid me. I’ve always been a diamond girl.” Pamela offers.

“Diamonds are a girls best friend.” Both Charlie and Pamela giggle.

“I’m glad we had this conversation.” Charlie adds.

“So am I. I understand now that I can’t have anything to do with that jewel, unfortunately my husband is not so easily convinced.” Pamela shakes her head.

“He will be.” Charlie says in a voice that startles both women.

The clearing of the debris is well on its way when the Foreman, Jeff Murdock is called away to answer the telephone.

“Just keep putting that rubble in those containers.” Jeff instructs the crane operator William McGuire.

“You got it, Boss.” Will calls back. Everything seems to be going fine until Will unearths a sign that must have been used with the theatre.

“Now what’s this? Bert, come take a look?” Will beckons to Bert. “There seems to be some sort of sign.”

Bert walks over to take a look when the crane starts to move toward him.

“What the hell are you doing, Will? That’s not funny.” Bert hollers as the crane comes closer to him.

“I’m not doing a damn thing, Bert. This blasted machine seems to have a mind of its on. Run!” Will yells as he tries to turn the crane off, but it is totally nonresponsive.

Men scatter in all directions as the crane continues to gain on Bert. Will jumps from the crane and in doing so breaks his right leg. Bert circles around to dodge the out-of-control piece of machinery and doubles back just in time to pull Will out of the way before he can be crushed by the wayward machinery. After about 15 minutes, the commotion finally stops.

“I don’t care how much Worthington is paying—I’m getting off this assignment.” Bert decides moving toward his gear and heading toward the makeshift office.

“Did you see that?” Will says between mourns. “That blasted piece of machinery almost killed Bert—and me too for that matter. I’m getting out of here, too.”

Both Jeff and Steve return to access the damage and question some of the men.

“An ambulance will be here in a few minutes, Will. Now will someone tell me what really happened. Cranes don’t start chasing after workers.” Steve declares shaking his head.

“Well—this one did!” Bert shouts.

“Calm down, Bert. Now what happened, Will?” Jeff questions.

“There was a poster lying on the ground and it looked like it may have been a part of the original setup. I thought that it would make a great souvenir for my son, who’s a history buff, so I asked Bert to take a look at it.” Will begins.

“Then, when I lifted that blasted sign up—the crane tried to attack me.” Bert interjects.

“Attack you?” Steve retorts in disbelief.

“Yeah, attack me. I mean it was all over the place. The men scattered and I was running like crazy.” Bert conveys.

“It was like a bucking bronco inside of that thing. I finally had to bell-out!” Will concludes. Steve motions to Jeff to take a look at the now docile crane. He calls back to Steve.

“It looks like the brake wire is loose and the pedal is stuck. That’s why the thing kept moving. There was no way to stop it and it keep going until it hit that concrete block.” Jeff replies, giving a perfectly logical explanation to the occurrence.

“I thought I told you to make sure the crane was is perfectly good working order?” Steve questions Jeff.

“I gave Will specific orders to take Crane #7 down to maintenance for a complete overhaul.” Jeff passes the responsibility on. “Well—did you?”

“Well, Boss—I was meaning to but—hey that doesn’t explain why the thing kept chasing Bert.” Will replies sheepishly.

“That’s right!” Several of the men join in chorus form.

“Simmer down, everyone. I think you’ve been spooked by the history of this place and imagining all sorts of things. Why don’t you all take the rest of the day off and I will speak to Mr. Worthington about the entire situation. Please—just remain calm and don’t spread any unnecessary rumors.” Steve reminds the men but unbeknown to him, a report for the New York Observer capture the entire incident with his smartphone.

By 6:00pm it was all over the city that a runaway crane almost cost the lives of two construction workers. To say the least, Nathan Worthington is not a happy camper. Within minutes, he is on the phone to Steve Crenshaw.

“How could you let something like this be leaked out to the press?” An irate Nathan questions Steve.

“I had no idea this would happen. I informed my crew that no one should give out anything regarding this mishap.” Steve tries to smooth ruffled feathers.

“Mishap? You call this a mishap. They are saying that the curse of the Grand Worthington Hotel has emerged. Let me quote what was said—*What has remained dormant for a century has reared its ugly head, once again endangering the lives of the citizens of this fair city.*”

“I warned you about this folly, Mr. Worthington—Nathan. But you were insistent on completing this project. Some will look at it and laugh it off while others—” Steve let his voice drift off.

“This doesn’t change anything. I want those cranes and dump trucks out there the first thing in the morning. If your men can’t handle this project—then you give me no choice. Have I made myself clear, Steve?” Nathan drives in his point.

“Very clear.”

“Good. Have a nice rest of your day.” And, with that Nathan hangs up the telephone.

This time when it rings, it’s his wife, Cynthia. “Steve, I don’t think you should be doing this project. You remember what your grandfather said about the Grand Worthington Hotel and those women who died in the fire?”

“Cynthia, that was a long time ago.” Steve tries to pacify his wife.

“It’s all over the news, Steve. That place is cursed! I don’t think you should have anything to do with it. It’s not like we’re hurting for money, darling. Please—” Cynthia pleads with her husband.

“Darling, if anything else happens, I will talk to Nathan Worthington again. He’s already offered to get somebody else because of how this story leaked out.” Steve informs his wife.

“Then, next time he says this, take him up on the offer. I know Bert and Will. They are decent men. I play bridge with their wives. It would be devastating if something were to happen to either one.” Cynthia replies.

“Honey, its getting late and all the men are gone. Let me lock up and head for home. Love you, bye!” Steve hangs up the phone.

Steve looks around the shack before grabbing his hat and goes out the door. “You should listen to your wife.” A voice says.

Steve looks around, but he doesn’t see anyone. “Damn! Am I going crazy?”

“No, you are quite sane.” Steve feels a coldness envelope itself around him. The sun is hidden behind a cloud, but it will be going down in about an hour.

“Is there anybody here? Who are you?” Steve says, feeling very uncomfortable regarding the coldness around him especially since it’s a very pleasant spring evening.

“You have been warned.” The voice says and suddenly the air has return to its normal 73 degrees.

“There is something definitely wrong with this place.” Steve says to himself as he hurries to his car. Locking the doors, he takes a deep breath and backs out of the makeshift parking lot. Out of the corner of his eye he sees what looks like a shadowy figure. Putting his foot down, he quickly blends into the traffic not looking back.

Chapter 5

The next morning Steve meets with his crew to inform them of what happened yesterday.

“Now, do you believe me?” Bert asks smugly.

“I never thought I would say this but yes.” Steve lowers his head and then looks up again.

“I know this job means a lot to all of us but there are forces here that we can’t deal with. I’ve had an offer for another project upstate. It doesn’t pay nearly as much as this but there are no unexplained occurrences there. No moving cranes or wandering spirits. If I can get out of this contract, that’s exactly where I’m going. To hell with this project.” Steve declares and every one of his men are in complete agreement. Bob Morton, the subcontractor is not so agreeable.

“Just wait a minute, Steve. There is good money to be had on this project. I can’t see just walking away just because of a few mishaps.” Bob complains.

“Like I said, my men and I are walking. If you want to stay—I will recommend that your company be given full control over the project. That way—you won’t be losing a dime.” Steve offers.

“That sounds like a plan.” Bob shakes hands with Steve and offers to go with him to see Nathan. However, Nathan is already there and has overheard everything.

“I can’t believe you’d be spooked over this nonsense.” Nathan retorts.

“I know what I heard last night. I know what I felt last night. And, if its all the same to you—I want to nullify our agreement.” Steve answers.

“Well, it’s not alright with me. My father told me that you were the best in the business and I’ve always gotten the best. If you walk away from this contract—I will blackball you to future investors.” Nathan threatens.

“I can’t believe you would be so callous, Nathan.” Steve states in utter shock. “You’ve threaten several times to replace me with another firm—now is your opportunity.”

“I knew then that you would stick to the project. Tell you what—let your subcontractor do all the clearing and eliminating. Then, when the area is ready, your crew can return to start the extension to the hotel. That will give your men a chance to calm down and everything.” Nathan offers, reluctantly Steve accepts. He doesn’t have an option.

“Alright Nathan.” Then Steve turns to Bob, “You and your men have the responsibility of getting this place ready for my crew to take over. I will not be responsible for anything that happens here. Whatever problems you have—report them directly to Mr. Nathan Worthington. I hope I make myself clear on that?” Steve questions with no hint of a smile.

“You got it!” Bob relays. All three men shake hands. Nathan and his crew prepare to leave while Bob sets up shop in the makeshift office.

As soon as Steve and his men leave, Bob gets on the phone to an old friend of his.

“Cassandra, do you know if The Black Widow still lives down on Mulberry Bend, on the east side of Columbus Park?” Bob inquires.

“What do you want with her?” Cassandra Parkinson asks jealously.

“Never mind—just tell her that I want to see her, pronto.” Bob doesn’t like women who asks too many questions.

“Sure, Bob—you owe me a dinner for this.” Cassandra informs Bob and he agrees. About an hour later, Abbie Wilkinson is standing in the doorway.

“I hear you want to see me?” Abbie is not your typical widow. Thick jet-black hair, bright green eyes, long trim legs, ample bosoms, and a deep throaty laugh.

“Why are you still in that part of town—you could live anywhere you want with your looks.” Bob says admiring the view.

“Did you call me all the way up here to ask me that?” Abbie turns to leave when Bob rises from his desk.

“No, I am in need of some of your special charms.” Bob says and Abbie finds herself a seat on the sofa.

“You are going to need a mighty powerful one—if you plan on keeping the Bonaparte Sisters away.” Abbie smiles.

“How did you know?” Bob asks in admiration.

“I read—besides everybody knows the damn place is haunted.” Abbie throws at him.

“So—can you do it?” Bob enquires.

“Yeah, I can do it but it’s going to cost you plenty. The ingredients are from a special blend I got from Louisiana. Badass juju!” Both laugh as Bob reaches into his wallet and counts off several hundred-dollar bills into Abbie’s hands.

“Where did you get a whopper like that.” Abbie stares in bewilderment.

“You got your sources—I got mine.” Bob gives Abbie a knowing wink.

The following weeks, the crew of Bob Morton work diligently without any problems. They wear around their necks, tucked under their shirts, the special pouches made for them by Abbie. In fact, the men are finished ahead of schedule.

“I am extremely impressed with the speed in which you handled the clearing of the land.” Nathan tells Bob as he presents him with a handsome check plus a little extra.

“That’s just the difference from hiring a boy and hiring a man to do the job.” Bob brags.

“Well, Bob Morton—I will be letting all my investors know how instrumental you’ve been in the progress of my project.” Nathan replies, shaking hands with Bob and walking him to the door.

“I have one man who will be left at the site till about 8:30 pm. He’ll be making sure that everything is ready for Steve and his boys in the morning.” Bob lets him know.

“You’re not nervous about the rumors regarding the Bonaparte Sisters.” Nathan asks in surprise.

“I’ve not seen them—actually, I must confess—this will be the first time that anyone has been left alone at the site after sundown.” Bob admits unconsciously rubbing his chest where the pouch rest.

“I don’t 100% believe in the rumors—but I would feel better if you leave an extra man there as well.” Nathan cautions.

“Sure, I’ll have Frank Murdock stay with Percy Webster. There’s no need for alarm but—” Bob lets his voice trail off.

Both Percy and Frank are left to finish up the last of the cleanup when they hear a weird sound as if a slow boiling tea pot is whistling.

“Do you hear that?” Frank asks.

“Yeah, and I don’t like it. Let’s get this finished before things really start to get intense.” Percy warns.

“Hey, what’s that over there?” Frank inquires, slowing backing up toward the truck.

“It looks like a cloud—or something.” Percy is rivetted to the spot, unable to move. The temperature drops suddenly, and the essence of the cloud seems to be coming closer.

“I don’t like this. I thought these pouches were suppose to combat evil spirits?” Frank replies, almost at the waiting truck. “What’s wrong with you, Percy. Move it!”

“I can’t. My legs just won’t go. You better hightail it out of here. Don’t worry about me.” Percy signals to Frank and the apparition is almost upon him. Percy pulls out his pouch and holds it in front of himself.

“Foolish man, that trinket has no control over me.” The voice says.

“Who, who, who are you?” Percy says in complete fear while Frank stands at the truck, ready to jump in at a moment’s notice.

“Someone who’s here to stop this construction. The Worthington Hotel should never be completed. My desire to possess that accursed ring caused the death of two women.” The voice says.

“Show yourself!” Percy demands. As soon as Daphne is completely revealed to him, he slumps to the ground. Seeing that, Frank immediately jumps into the truck and after both securing the doors and starting the motor; he races down the street, mumbling something about not ever wanting to return to that place again.

Chapter 6

The next morning when Steve and his crew return to the site, they find the body of Percy Webster. A look of horror is permanently frozen on his face and an object is in his hand. It looks like a ring.

“What is that ring doing here?” Steve stares at the corpse and refuses to touch the object in his hand. Then he looks at his men. “I’m calling Nathan Worthington right now. But when Steve turns around again—the ring is gone.

“What the hell!” Steve exclaims in utter shock. Looking all around the body and on the ground—the ring is not to be seen.

“What’s the matter, Boss?” Bert inquires.

“The ring is gone. It was there a minute ago—in Percy Webster’s hand. I saw it. And now it’s gone.” Steve replies.

“I don’t know what you are talking about, Boss. I never saw anything but poor old Percy here. Whatever he saw it must have scared him to death.” Bert offers.

“Call for an ambulance, Will. Also get Bob on the phone. I want to talk to him about who was here last night. I want to know if Percy was alone and why the hell would he have him here after dark in the first place.” Steve angrily retorts.

Moments later, Bob Morton is on the phone feeling utterly devastated.

“Is it true? Is Percy really dead?” Bob questions in shock.

“Oh, he’s dead alright and YOU are to blame!” Steve accuses hot temperedly.

“How do you figure that?” Bob’s defenses are now in place.

“I told you about this place and especially after dark and you go and let that man be there alone.” Steve bellows.

“Frank Murdock was with him. Where is Frank?” Bob enquires.

“I don’t know. We just found the body of Percy when we got here. That ring was in his hand.” Steve explains.

“Ring? What are you talking about?” Bob is completely confused.

“Nathan Worthington’s ring that’s supposed to be in the bank vault, that’s what ring.” Steve replies.

‘Do you still have it, now?’ Bob questions.

“No—it disappeared.” Steve confesses.

“Disappeared. Talk sense, man. First you say the ring was there. Now you say the ring ain’t there. Are you sure you’re alright, Steve? I’m sure finding Percy dead was a bit of a shock—” Before Bob can finish, Steve interrupts.

“Shock—are you out of your mind? What will it take to convince you that this is a project of the doomed?” Steve is aspirated.

“It’s your project now—good buddy. I’ve finished my work and have gotten paid. I will notify Percy’s family of the accident. Let’s hope the press don’t get wind of this.” Bob adds.

“I know that’s right. By the way, Bob, how did you manage to work during the daylight hours?” Steve is curious.

“I got The Black Widow to hook me up.” Bob confesses.

“That was a smart move.” Steve is impressed. “Bet that set you back a pretty penny.”

“It did—and until now, it worked just fine.” Bob says.

“I think Percy was scared to death.” Steve answers.

“It must have been something really bad. Something that was not really evil, but not necessarily good either?” Bob shakes his head.

“I need to speak to my lawyer. There has to be some way for me to get out of this agreement.’ Steve laments.

“Let me get you in touch with my lawyer. Just between me and you, ok?” Bob offers.

“I’d appreciate that, Bob.” Steve says. “And listen—take care of yourself. Neither of us are out of the woods until this entire project is laid to rest.”

“You got that right!” Bob chimes in and both men hang up.

Steve decides to meet with the lawyer before facing Nathan Worthington. He calls both Bert and Will into his office. The two men look none the worse for wear.

“How are you holding up, Bert.” Steve asks putting his hand on his shoulder.

“I was only a casual acquaintance of Percy, but I never thought he would end up like this.” Bert says shaking his head.

“Same here, Steve. It was a dirty rotten shame. We never should have taken on this project.” Will concludes.

“I feel the same way, but it doesn’t help our present situation.” Steve reminds.

He then advises the two men to tread carefully and if circumstances become life threatening, leave immediately.

“Will, you are in charge until I return. Make sure you keep a keen eye on things. Bert will serve as your backup. I need you more out there than in here answering the telephone. If anybody needs me bad enough, they call reach me by cellphone.” Steve retorts.

“And, where will you be, Boss?” Bert questions.

“I’m going to make a business call.” Is all the information that Steve gives the two men.

Steve finds himself within the Lawyer Offices of Adler and Abernathy. Feeling a bit uncomfortable in such a ritzy place in his construction apparel, he squirms in his chair looking at the others waiting in business attire. One woman gives him a once over and then returns to her magazine.

“Mr. Crenshaw, Mr. Abernathy will see you now.” A gentile receptionist tells him. “Please, follow me.”

Steve rises and follows the receptionist down the hall. All eyes are observing him—wondering how this common workman should be receiving such priority service.

Steve enters the impressive looking office. It houses a large mahogany desk, finely stained oak-grained cabinets and soft leather chairs. On the wall is an impressive collection of law books and on the credenza are objects of fine

china and porcelain. It is quite obvious that this lawyer is doing extremely well. Mr. Abernathy rises to greet Steve.

“Ah, Steve Crenshaw, come in and have a seat. Thank you, Dolores and please hold all my calls.” Mr. Abernathy says.

“Yes, sir.” As the receptionist quietly closes the door, Mr. Abernathy waits until he is sure that the woman has returned to her desk before he begins.

“Bob Morton told me a little about what’s going on at the Worthington Site and I believe that infamous rock is being stationed at my brother’s bank. You do know Theodore Abernathy?” Clinton looks at him curiously.

“Quite well, Mr. Abernathy. He has been a banker of mine for many years. I knew he had a brother that’s a lawyer, but I didn’t realize it was you!” Steve explains.

“I’m Clinton but please, call me Clint. Mr. Abernathy sounds so formal, although if you become my client—well, let’s just leave it as Clint.”

“Ok Clint, and why not call me Steve.” Steve offers.

“Now that we’ve gotten the formalities out of the way Steve, let’s get down to business.” Retorts Clint.

“Right— about the Worthington Project. There has been a lot of injuries involve with this and now a death. I want to get out of the contract with Nathan Worthington, but he won’t have it. What can I do?” Steve entreaties.

“Not to worry, Steve. I believe we can cite Mr. Worthington with Article 15 of the New York Penal Law—Culpability. The statute states:

“Criminal negligence.” A person acts with criminal negligence with respect to a result or to a circumstance described by a statute defining an offense when he fails to perceive a substantial and unjustifiable risk that such result will occur or that such circumstance exists. The risk must be of such nature and degree that the failure to perceive it constitutes a gross deviation from the standard of care that a reasonable person would observe in the situation.

You have been working for him and various incidents have transpired which have put others in jeopardy and have costed the loss of life.

Therefore, there is legitimate reason to believe that it is unsafe to work at that site and you have every right to wish to nullify the agreement. Talk it over with Mr. Worthington and if he refuses to allow you to be released from the contract—come back and see me.” Clint ends smiling.

“Thank you so much, Clint. Bob said you were the best.” Steve shakes his hands vigorously.

“No problem. Say hello to your lovely wife for me.” Clint says as he shows Steve to the door.

After Steve leaves Clint Abernathy’s office, he heads straight to see Nathan Worthington. By the look on Steve’s face, Nathan knows that this is not a social call.

Steve has a stern talk with Nathan, making him fully aware of how he feels.

“In good faith I took on this job. I made you completely aware of the circumstances surrounding this project. However, you insisted to continue. One of my men was badly injured and several things transpired that were out of the ordinary, but you still pursued this passion of yours. And, now a man is dead. I have had enough, Nathan. I’ve been to see a lawyer to get a clear understanding of my rights and I feel that you have endangered the lives of both my men and me. And furthermore, one man has suffered a broken leg, and another is dead. According to Article 15 of the New York Penal Law—you are guilty of Culpability. I therefore **demand** that you release me from my obligations to you.” Steve finished passionately.

“Demand—those are indeed some mighty strong words, Steve!” Nathan exclaims, not being used to such language.

“I can’t continue this madness, Nathan. Surely, you are a man of reason?” Steve implores.

“I’m sorry it has to end this way, Steve. I have no other recourse but to comply.” Nathan reluctantly agrees to free him from his obligations.

“So do I, Nathan. But you do understand my predicament. I have a family to consider. Not only mine but my men’s as well. I don’t want any more problems. I hear that Frank Murdock has taken an extended leave of absence.” Steve says.

“Yes—Bob made me aware of that fact. Poor fellow—he must be in a terrible state about now.” Nathan shakes his head. “And, what will you do now, Steve?”

“There is a new apartment complex that will be in construction in a couple of weeks. I’ve been given the ok to submit my bid.” Steve confines.

“Don’t worry—I’ll give you an excellent recommendation. Under other circumstances, I know you would have created a fantastic edifice for me.” Nathan replies.

“That I would have. So, what will you do Nathan?” Steve questions.

“Follow my father’s advice and return the emerald to the remaining Manchester Family Members. I’ll get in touch with my dad to make all the arrangements.” Nathan answers with a bit of a sigh.

“And what of the Grand Worthington Hotel?” Steve further probes.

“That, Steve Crenshaw, will still proceed as planned!”

Chapter 7

Nathan has left the site of the Grand Worthington Hotel to return to his suite. There, he finds a note from Pamela. It appears that she has left him and decided to return to England.

My Dear Nate,

I can no longer deal with this obsession you have with the Worthington Emerald and that cursed Grand Worthington Hotel. I am returning to my father's estate in Westchester and you will soon be hearing from my solicitor. Although I am still quite fond of you—I no longer have neither the respect nor admiration needed to remain your wife. Please understand—

Fondest Regards,

Pamela

Nathan allows the note to drift from his hand and land on the floor. He looks at it in utter amazement and slowly walks over to a chair by the window. He watches the crowds as they hurriedly go about their own personal affairs—totally oblivious to his silent pain.

“Pamela, if only you could have hung on just a while longer.” He says to the air surrounding him. “It would have worked out.”

Pride will not allow Nathan to cry, so he sits back in his chair looking around the room. He notices that all Pamela's things are gone except for a ring he had purchased for her shortly after they arrived in America. There is also a note left under it.

Nate,

I have no desire to keep anything connected with America. Perhaps you will find someone who can appreciate its beauty and not link it to the past—Pamela

Nathan picks up the 1.5k diamond and slides it into his vest pocket. Then he speaks again.

“Dear Pamela, you must have forgotten our prenuptial agreement my father insisted we sign. At the time, I felt it was a waste, but I suppose he knew this or something like it would happen. Thanks, dad.”

Nathan has a talk with his father and resolves to finally return the emerald. The money he procured from the Benedict Brothers is still at the bank along with the emerald. However, he decides to stay in New York and build a new life for himself. He hasn't given up the dream of reviving the Grand Worthington Hotel but will just have to wait.

“Hello, father—well, Pamela is gone.” Nathan replies with a small catch in his throat.

“Are you alright son? I knew that Pamela Westchester wasn't the girl for you. I'll admit, she wasn't too bad to look at but there was just something about her—she didn't have staying power.” Liam Worthington tells his son.

“It was just a bit of a shock that she left me like she did. I only found this note a moment ago. She took everything but a ring that I bought for her here.” Nathan laments.

“Don't worry son—when you hear from her solicitor, the two of them will be in for a great surprise as well as disappoint. Pamela will receive nothing from you—or our estate. I have had that agreement in a safe deposit box since the day after you wedded and it's our trump card.” Liam says triumphantly.

“Thanks again, dad. Oh, can you contact Clark Manchester for me? Let him know that I will be shipping that emerald to him. I've no use for it here. It's definitely an evil omen.” Nathan tells his father.

“A very wise choice, son. I will make the proper arrangements. I'll even talk to City National Bank's President Conrad Brewster. I'll give him the okay to set things in motion so that all you'll have to do is sign the paperwork.” Liam says.

“Dad, I love you!” Nathan replies in earnest.

“And I love you too, Nate.” Liam answers, feeling a sudden gush of pride on what his son has just revealed. “What's your next move?”

“I'll be staying here to establish myself in financial circles. By the way, what about the money I got from the Benedict Brothers?”

“Don’t even worry about that. Just consider it a gift to get you settled. Charlie Benedict owes me a favor or two—” Liam is interrupted by his son.

“Are you sure it’s alright, dad?” Nathan questions.

“Perfectly alright, Nate. Just let me contact a few people on Wall Street and a couple of Japanese traders that I know.” Liam responds.

“No wonder you’re a billionaire businessman, dad!” Now it was time for Nathan to feel pride.

“Son, Michael and I have learned a thing or two about people. I’ll admit that your mother and I have sheltered you from a lot of things. I was really worried when you found that emerald and told Marjorie so. But you know your mother—she told me to give you time to figure things out and you’d make the right decision.” Liam shakes his head thinking about his wife.

“I hope I find someone as beautiful and talented a woman as you found in mother.” Nathan replies.

“American women are different. They are not afraid of hard work, nor do they object to being pampered by a good man. Your mother came from a fine New England home. She had a way about herself that I found both fascinating and disturbing at the same time. Hell, actually she asked me!” Liam chuckles remembering that night in Manhattan.

*“Well, are you going to ask me to marry you or should I ask you?”
Marjorie had said after they had been dating for two and a half years.*

“Dad, I think I am going to find me a house in the suburbs. What do you think?” Nathan asks his father.

“Well son, there is Upper Montclair. Also Kensington and Ridgewood come to mind.” Lam offers.

“I’ll look into them. I’m going to take that ring of Pamela’s to Kowalski’s Jewelers to be cleaned. Then, I’ll put it in a new safe deposit box. I don’t even want it in proximity to that emerald.” Nathan says laughing.

“It’s good to hear you laugh, son. You had me worried there for a minute.” Liam replies.

“Dad—you know me. I don’t stay down for very long.”

“What do you plan to do about the Hotel, Nate?” Liam decides to tackle the subject.

“The land where the theatre was has been cleared. It is still my plan to rebuild the Grand Worthington Hotel but this time from the ground up. With that emerald back with its rightful owner, I shouldn’t have too much trouble this time.” Nathan states.

“Old legends die hard, son.” Liam reminds his son.

“I know dad, but this one needs to be put to rest. I’ll give it a couple of years, then I will try again. In the meantime, I’ll hire a security service to keep an eye on the place and I’ll set up an escrow account to handle the taxes.” Nathan says—all types of positive thoughts swirling through his mind.

“Now you’re talking like a real Worthington!” Liam states.

Chapter 8

A lot of things have happened in five years.

Nathan has been married for three years now. He met a beautiful American socialite named Ava “Buffy” Harrington. Her father is international trader William Henry Harrington II and they are living on the outskirts of Kensington.

“Buffy, I’m meeting with Steve Crenshaw today.” Nathan replies, giving his wife a kiss on her neck.

“Are you going to talk to him regarding the Grand Worthington Hotel?” Buffy replies, stroking her husband’s chin.

“Yes.”

“Well—good luck with that. I would have thought that after that fiasco five years ago, Steve would be the last person you’d want to see.” Buffy counters.

“Actually, it was his idea. He said he wanted to discuss some things with me.” Nathan says.

“I see. I can’t imagine what Steve would want to say to you. Maybe he has information regarding the hotel?” Buffy asks.

“Regardless, I want to hear what he has to say. I trust Steve and he’s always been straight with me.” Nathan retorts.

“Steve is a good man. I hope your conversation is fruitful.” Buffy says rising from her seat to walk Nathan to the door. “Good luck, love you!”

“Always.” Nathan says and closes the door behind him.

It is close to 1:00 pm when Steve and Nathan finally meet.

“Hello Nathan, how have you been?” Steve extends his hand and Nathan grasps it firmly.

“I’m doing very well, Steve. How about you?” Nathan inquires.

“I’m doing good, too. The reason I asked you to meet with me today is about the Grand Worthington Hotel. Are you still interested in pursuing this project?” Steve questions, looking Nathan straight in the eyes.

“Yes.” Nathan replies, returning his gaze.

“Then, I have a proposition for you. I’ve heard that you have sent that emerald back to England, is that right?” Steve probes.

“Yes, Steve—that’s been about five years ago. What’s your point?” Nathan becomes a bit defensive.

“Hold on, Nathan. I just want to say that I believe that the cause of all that calamity was due in fact to that cursed ring. Don’t you agree?” Steve offers, understanding Nathan’s tone.

“Yes I do, and—” Nathan is intrigued.

“I want to offer my services on the new construction of the Grand Worthington Hotel. I’ve discussed it with both Bert Singer and William . They agree.” Steve replies trying to gauge Nathan’s reaction to this bit of news.

“I see—what about Article 15 of the New York Penal Law—Culpability?” Nathan is thrilled that Steve wants to be back on the project but wary of the statute.

“I’ve talked with my lawyer and he says that if you can find another location for the hotel then there should be no problem.” Steve says.

“That sounds great Steve, but Chester Worthington put a stipulation that neither the theatre nor hotel could ever be sold.” Nathan tells him.

“What if the hotel can perhaps be physically preserved as a historical building then it can be donated to the Historical Society. It would be up to the city to maintain it through tourism and you are free to build the New Grand Worthington Hotel somewhere else.” Steve concludes and both men smile.

“Why didn’t I think of that? I’m surprised you’ve done such a thorough job investigating this?” Nathan marvels.

“I wish I could take responsibility for it but it’s your father-in-law William Henry (Bill) who deserves all the credit.” Steve admits.

“Bill never said anything to me about this?” Nathan is still stunned.

“He didn’t want to either. He wanted me to approach you with this plan. On the chance that something went wrong—he didn’t want you mad at him.” Steve confesses.

“That’s just like Bill, too. Well—all we have to do is find an appropriate site and we’re back in business.” This time Nathan extends his hand first and the two men shake vigorously.

“I have an architect friend who just may know of a place. I’ll get back to you in a few days.” Steve says and both men smile as they depart.

Nathan can’t wait to get home to tell Buffy what has transpired during his meeting with Steve.

“Buffy darling, you’ll never guess what happened.” Nathan says as Buffy meets him at the door, and he twirls her around in the air.

“You’ve won the Irish Sweepstakes and we’re off on another trip around the world.” Buffy teases him.

“I never knew you wanted to travel around the world again, darling. I don’t have to win a sweepstake to do that little thing for you.” Nathan replies, enjoying the bantering with his wife.

“We did a grand time on our honeymoon, remember?” Buffy reminisces, knowing there was no way that he could have forgotten. Then Nathan embraces her tenderly.

“How could I possibly forget the best thing that has ever happened to me?” Nathan responds. “I never knew it could be this wonderful!”

“That’s what I love most about you, Nathan. It’s so rare to meet a man who isn’t afraid of showing his emotions or let his wife know how much she means to him.” Buffy states in complete sincerity.

“Alright, before you make me forget everything—the talk with Steve Crenshaw was a real eye-opener.” Nathan begins.

“In what way, darling?” Buffy is completely intrigued.

“He suggests that I donate the original Grand Worthington Hotel to the Historical Society as a landmark. This will free me to build the New Grand Worthington Hotel in another location—free from the stigma of the past. It

can be a sweet tax write-off as well.” Nathan finishes, extremely happy with the look on Buffy’s face.

“Why that’s an excellent idea! I’m shocked that you didn’t think of it before. It’s impressive that Steve Crenshaw did.” Buffy shakes her head.

“Actually, it was all your father’s idea.” Nathan admits.

“Go on—” Buffy can hardly believe her ears. “Imagine that. How he was able to keep that little tidbit secret from mom is a wonder.” Buffy chuckles.

“He knew that she would have told you straight off. I love your mom dearly, but she couldn’t keep a secret in a trunk.” Now, both Buffy and Nathan are laughing.

“Knowing my dad—he has already got the ball rolling. Do you know where you’ll be building this hotel?” Buffy asks.

“Steve has a friend who is an architect. He knows of some prime real estate that will house the place.” Nathan answers.

“It must be somewhere outside of NYC because I can’t imagine an inch of available property. That is unless it’s one of those older building that needs renovating.” Buffy tries to picture available space.

“Well, wherever it is, I’m sure it will be prime real estate. Steve Crenshaw is quality and he knows what I like.” Nathan admits.

“Ok, we’ll see. What do you think about going to Ridgewood to pay my parents a visit? Then dad can give you more information on what he has in mind.” Buffy suggests, knowing full well that she received a call earlier from her mother, inviting them to dinner.

“That would be great. What time are we to be there?” Nathan smiles, already knowing what’s going on.

“About 6:30 pm.” Buffy smiles back at him.

Chapter 9

Buffy and Nathan pull up into the driveway of the beautiful home of William Henry and Stephanie Harrington. It is a beautiful gray two-story home with plenty of parking with a double and single garage. Stephanie is standing at the to meet them.

“Buffy, Nate—it’s so good to see the two of you. Bill is in the garden with the dogs but come in and get settled.” Stephanie replies.

Nathan follows Buffy into the house and it’s just like entering a showcase home. Stephanie is an interior designer and she spared no expense in making her home one of the best in the area. *Suburban Homes Beautiful* and *Living Immaculately Magazine* both features this home as one of the top 25 homes in the country. Stephanie also assists her daughter in decorating her abode.

William Henry (Bill) comes into the room with a grin as big as Texas on his face.

“I guess Steve Crenshaw told you about my plan?” Bill asks Nathan.

“Yes he did, dad and I think it’s a winner.” Nathan replies, giving his father-in-law a hardy shake of the hand.

“I hope you don’t mind my butting in, Nate.” Bill questions, knowing that his son-in-law is delighted.

“Dad, you’ve solved a problem that has been puzzling me for some time now. I can’t wait to get started with the construction.” Nathan states.

“I’ve talked to both Steve and his architect friend, and there is a prime piece of real estate in the Plaza District and there is a lot available in Manhattan County.” Bill says.

“I would prefer to construct the hotel on a lot rather than to tear down a structure and then do a remodeling job.” Nathan replies.

“I kind of thought you would. It just so happens that I have procured a nice stretch of land that would be perfect for erecting a hotel. It even has an ocean view.” Bill offers.

“Dad, what can I say? How much are you willing to sell this piece of land for?” Nathan is bubbling over with enthusiasm.

“To you—I am willing to let you have it for \$1. Then it will be your job to hire Steve Crenshaw and his crew to develop it into a magnificent structure. Of course, I’d like to be in on the profits once it’s done.” Bill says.

Before he can go any further, Buffy jumps out of her seat and throws her arms around her father.

“Oh dad—how can we ever thank you!” Buffy acknowledges. “You are making a dream of Nathan’s into a reality.”

“I don’t know what to say!” Nathan exclaims. “Buffy has summed it all up. I’ve always heard that Americans can be extremely generous but this—”

“Nate, you have made my little jewel, Buffy very happy. I couldn’t ask for a better son-in-law. Actually, you’re more like a son to me. Buffy is our only child—I’ll admit that we have indulged her shamelessly but that’s what parents do.” Bill beams.

“I’ll admit my Buffy is spoiled—but in the most wonderful way. She doesn’t possess a selfish bone in her body. She is always encouraging me to do my best and well, she means everything to me.” Nathan confesses and both Buffy and her mother have tears in their eyes.

“We’re going to be drowning soon—let’s get this meal done and then we can strategize how you’ll begin construction.” Bill decides.

The dinner is superb. The cook, François makes a tantalizing meal. For appetizers they have Salmon Rillettes and Blue Cheese Gouges. The soup course is Crème of Artichoke. The main entrée and sides are: Boeuf Bourguignon, French Onion Marmalade, and San Francisco Style Sour Dough Bread. For dessert: Coffee and Armagnac Parfait. Nathan is so impressed that he tells Bill.

“Where did you acquire this magnificent chef! I have never tasted anything like this since Buffy and I visited Paris last June!”

“François is indeed one of a kind. You would be definitely hard press to duplicate him. Why don’t you send Jenny over sometimes and I am sure he wouldn’t mind sharing his recipes?” Stephanie offers.

“That would be great, mom!” Buffy replies happily. Jenny is a great cook and has been with the Worthington Family ever since their marriage.

“You women adjourn to the Lounge while Nate and I discuss the Worthington Project.” Bill suggests.

“That’s a great idea, Bill.” Stephanie replies. Taking her daughter by the hand, she leads her into a beautifully decorated room where they can discuss interior designs and cooking recipes.

After having another Café Mocha, the men head for Bill’s Man Cave that has always been off-limits to the females of the household. There he pulls out a few preliminary blueprints he acquire when he first decided to investigate the likelihood of venturing with Nathan on the New Grand Worthington Hotel.

“These are just a few sketches I had done when I was toying with the idea of revising your project.” Bill starts the conversation. “Please don’t think I am trying to take over your idea—I was just fascinated with the prospect.”

“I can understand that. My father is as well. I just want this undertaking to be as free as possible from the drama of five years ago.” Nathan adds.

“I know what you mean. Now look at this—” Bill begins to show Nathan the idea of incorporating built-in computers in the client’s room to entice more businessmen and wide screen monitors that can also double as TVs.

While the lobby of the original Grand Worthington Hotel will house the paintings and sculptures from the 1920s edifice—the New Grand Worthington Hotel will have pictures of the current owners including Matthew Worthington, the brother of Corky and who is a descendant.

It is late when he and Buffy return to their home and Nathan excuses himself to check the private line in his Worthington Library. There is a message waiting on the telephone.

“Mr. Worthington, you don’t know me, but I am referred as the Black Widow. I need to speak with you at your earliest convenience. I got your phone number from Bob Morton. He didn’t want to divulge the information, but I told him that it is imperative I speak to you. Meet me at—” The phone goes dead.

Nathan looks around frantically for Bob Morton's telephone number. When he finds it—he apologizes for the lateness of the hour.

"I'm sorry Bob, but I need the Black Widow's address." Nathan says, "Oh, by the way, this is Nathan Worthington."

"That's fine. Did she contact you? She said it was urgent. I hope you don't mind that I gave her your telephone number." Bob whispers.

"Well—if it's as important as she sounds on the answering machine, that's fine. It cut off before I could hear her address." Nathan replies.

"Nathan, are you coming to bed?" Buffy chimes.

"In a minute dear, I'm on the phone with Bob Morton." Nathan answers.

"Bob Morton? What's going on Nathan?" Buffy inquires.

"I'll tell you later—go back to bed." Nathan orders and returns to his call. Bob is surprised.

"You're going to tell your wife Buffy about this?" He questions.

"Our marriage is strong because we don't keep secrets so yes, I am" Nathan explains.

"Suit yourself." Bob says as he give Nathan directions to the Black Widow.

"Thanks, Bob ... have a pleasant night." Nathan says.

"Good luck, Nathan." Bob says and both men hang up.

Nathan goes down the hall to their bedroom and explains to Buffy regarding the answering machine message and the conversation with Bob Morton. Buffy responds.

"Do you want me to go with you, darling?" Buffy asks sleepily.

"No, I'm talking one of the dogs along with my favorite peacemaker." Nathan smiles, opening the closet door and reaching for his favorite—a Smith and Wesson 500.

Nathan gives Buffy a kiss and a squeeze—then he's off with their Doberman, Hunter.

The streets have an eerie calmness about them, but it doesn't take long before Nathan reaches the Black Widow's abode down on Mulberry Bend, on the east side of Columbus Park. He gingerly knocks on the door looking around on both sides of the neighborhood. A moment later, Abbie Wilkinson is standing in the doorway looking at him.

"Black Widow?" Nathan inquires in surprise.

"Actually, my name is Abbie Wilkinson, but you may call me Abbie if I may call you Nathan." Abbie replies.

"Of course, please do. Your reputation exceeds you, but I never thought you'd look like—this." Nathan smiles embarrassingly.

"It's a common mistake. Only those that deal in deep dark magic become ugly as they are overtaken by the spirits." Abbie offers in the way of an explanation.

"Oh ... I see." Nathan is still unnerved. "You wanted to speak to me Mrs. Wilkinson—err Abbie."

"Yes, I do. I have seen that you plan to rebuild the Grand Worthington Hotel in another location—this is good. But still, I foresee problems ahead." Abbie begins.

"I sent the Worthington Emerald back to its original owners. There shouldn't be any problems." Nathan states somewhat confused.

"This is not from the supernatural world but from the natural one. There are people who do not want you to complete the hotel, Nathan." Abbie says mysteriously.

"Abbie, can you tell me who it is—can you identify the culprit?" Nathan says anxiously.

"At this moment, I am not at liberty to tell." Abbie answers.

"Why? I need to be prepared. You must tell me!" Nathan insists.

"There is an element of uncertainty at this particular time. The minds of the perpetrators are not easily read. There could be only one person, or several people involved. Things will have to unfold gradually to see what happens." Abbie admonishes Nathan.

“Like playing poker with strangers. You watch the mannerisms and looks on everyone’s face to tell what you should do next.” Nathan replies.

“Nathan, I was told that you were smart—but they underestimated you. You are brilliant! That is exactly what I am talking about.” This comment brings a smile to both Abbie’s and Nathan’s faces.

“Thank you.”

“I see you brought your dog, Hunter with you. He’s a very loyal companion and would rip the face off any would be adversary. A good friend to have in a jam.” Abbie notes.

“You truly are a psychic. I always thought that Spiritualism was a bit of mumbo-jumbo but you’re the real deal.” Nathan replies in admiration.

“We’re a dying breed, Nathan. There are a lot of con artist who disguise themselves as seers but are only after the money. I only require recompensating when I have to create a talisman to ward off evil spirits. The ingredients are quite expensive and come from out-of-state.” Abbie explains.

“Louisiana?” Nathan guesses.

“How’d you guess?” Abbie teases.

“Everyone knows about the bayou and voodoo—even in England!”

“Really? However, in your case, a talisman would be of little use.” Abbie concludes.

“Because we are dealing with the natural world and—”

“And, because the people involved are in a state of indecision. It could go either way but most likely at least one person is determined to disrupt your plans. Just be careful.” Abbie finishes.

“I can understand why Bob Morton thinks so highly of you, Abbie. You’re an alright lady.” Nathan extends his hand and she shakes it. Abbie holds his hand for a moment—then speaks.

“You did the right thing in letting Pamela go. She was never right for you. Buffy is just your style. Smooths out some of those stuff English habits.” They both laugh hardily.

“You are so right, Abbie. Why don’t you come visit us sometimes—I’d like you to meet Buffy.” Nathan offers.

“No, this is where I need to be. I have a wonderful life here with friends that would give their right arm if need be for me. There is no phoniness here in this part of Columbus Park.” Abbie smiles.

“I understand. Look, I’d like you to keep me posted on what’s happening. I’d gladly put you on payroll as an outside consultant.” Nathan states.

“I don’t pay taxes because all transactions are done on a cash basis. I don’t need the government dipping in the trough.” Abbie answers.

“Okay, cash it is. Let me give you a little something this morning to cement our agreement.” Nathan opens his wallet and pulls out three crisp hundred-dollar bills. Abbie’s eyes widen as he puts them into her hand.

“I wasn’t expecting any enumeration.” She smiles and Nathan is shocked at her use of the word. “I went to college—I have a MS degree in Psychology.”

“Wow—that’s impressive. I knew that you didn’t talk like the locals around here. I’m shocked that you are satisfied with hanging around here with all that talent!” Nathan notes.

“Well—there’s not too much you can do with just a master’s in psychology. Besides—I didn’t want to go any further and I didn’t like working in stuffy old offices downtown.” Abbie explains.

“Abbie, whenever you are tired of being down here just let me know. Between my father and my father-in-law, we can set you up really good.” Nathan replies as he heads out of the door.

“I’ll keep that in mind—not promising anything. Take care.” Nathan is secure in his Porsche, heading for home. He gives Hunter a gentle rub on the ears.

“I think this time young fellow—we’re going to be prepared.”

Chapter 10

It is later the next day when Nathan finally arises from slumber. When he looks at the time—the chastises Buffy for not getting him up sooner.

“You just let me stay in bed until 11:30 am?” Nathan admonishes Buffy.

“Hey, you looked like you could use the extra hours. Mr. Abernathy called from the bank. Said that Mr. Brewster would be ready to finalize your transactions with father at 2:30 pm. I would have gotten you up in plenty of time. You need to be fresh when you meet with those men—not yawning.” Buffy defends.

“You are right as always, honey!” Nathan replies, giving his wife a swift kiss.

“Now, tell me what happened with your meeting last night?”

Nathan begins in detail to Buffy what transpired with Abbie Wilkinson aka Black Widow. Buffy listens carefully as he explains about the forthcoming threats and the need for caution. He also makes her aware that it is of natural origin.

“I wonder who would gain more from the hotel not being constructed.” Buffy says, feeling the detective rising up in her. She has always been enchanted by the novels of Agatha Christie and especially the main character Hercule Poirot. For no other writer in history would pen a character like Christie and no other detective to solve a case like Poirot.

“What are you thinking my pet?” Nathan inquires—identifying his wife’s familiar gaze. “Putting on your detective cap again?”

“Just wondering, love. There has to be a distinct mystery in order for it to be investigated.” Buffy laughs.

“My word—you and that *Friends of Christie Book Club*. If there isn’t something going on, you will invent it.” Nathan laughs.

“You’ll see. Now, I’ll get Stella to prepare your bath. Let’s find the most impressive business attire for you.” Buffy grabs her husband by the arm, and they enter his walk-in closet. Nathan possesses many striking suits however, the two-piece brown Giorgio Armani ensemble with a Brioni Men’s Printed Silk tie are at the top of the charts.

“Now, this is guaranteed to make a positive statement.” Buffy remarks. “I remember when dad gave it to you on your last birthday.”

“It is smart and definitely perfect for the occasion. Buffy, you have impeccable taste and style.” Nathan tells his wife, giving her an affectionate hug.

“Nathan, the things you desire in life mirror my own. I have enjoyed being married to you and I just want you to know it!” Buffy says misty-eyed.

“I have never met a woman as passionate, intelligent and beautiful as you! It makes everything prior seem like a wasteful dream.” Nathan returns.

“Ah—better get some brunch into you so that your stomach won’t be louder than the meeting.” Buffy retorts and the two of them head for the kitchen to see what Jenny has prepared.

At precisely 2:30 pm, Bank President Conrad Brewster, Historian Dr. Connie Alexander, Entrepreneur William Henry Harrington, Japanese Businessman Yamada Akio, and Nathan meet in the City National Bank’s Conference Room. The air is ignited with excitement. Conrad speaks—

“The first order of business is to sign the paperwork regarding the transfer of ownership of the original Grand Worthington Hotel from Nathan Worthington to the National Historical Society of New York President, Dr. Connie Alexander.”

“Let me say that it is an honor to obtain such an edifice. The history behind this hotel will definitely make it a tourist attraction. And, Mr. Worthington—we will definite recommend the New Grand Worthington Hotel as the place to reside—free from the antics of its predecessor.” Connie states, shaking hands with Nathan.

“Thank you Dr. Alexander. My family will be pleased to know that the hotel will be in the capable hands of an individual such as yourself.” Nathan states and he can’t help noticing how Connie is admiring his suit as the paperwork is being finalized.

“Now—if you gentlemen will excuse me, I am going to take a few of the board members over to the hotel to ascertain what we need to do to have it ready for a grand opening.” Connie replies.

“I think it would be a great idea if it coincides with the opening of the New Grand Worthington Hotel.” Bill suggests.

“That would be a great idea. Bill, why don’t you coordinate that with me as soon as things near completion.” Connie suggests.

“I’ll do just that Connie!” All the men rise as Dr. Alexander leaves the room.

“And now to the next bit of business, the signing of the construction site for the new hotel from William Henry Harrington to Nathan Daniel Worthington.” Conrad states.

The two men sign the necessary forms and a dollar bill is exchanged between Bill and Nathan. They each smile and shake one another’s hand. Nathan looks proudly at the forms and then retire them to his briefcase.

“Our final piece of business is to set up a Board of Directors for the newly formed Grand Worthington Corporation. Nathan Worthington is of course CEO. The Corporate Directors are William Harrington, Yamada Akio and yours truly, Conrad Brewster. The charter will be created by members of City National Bank’s Legal Team and we will meet again to finalize the corporation. In the meantime, you have the okay to begin the preliminary designs for the New Grand Worthington Hotel. Our business meeting is at an end.” As the men leave the conference room, Dr. Alexander is heading toward a waiting car to proceed to the original hotel site.

“That was a very satisfying undertaking.” Bill tells both Nathan and Mr. Yamada Akio.

“I completely agree.” Nathan retorts.

“I also share an interest in the original hotel. I would like to have a meeting with Dr. Connie Alexander, if that can be arranged , Bill” Mr. Yamada requests.

“Hold on a minute—let me see if I can stop her before she enters the limo.” Swiftly Bill moves toward the waiting car just in time to stop the driver before he pulls away from the curb.

“Hey, is there a problem Bill?” Connie asks.

“No.” Bills replies slightly winded.

“Yamada Akio is interested in speaking with you regarding the renovation of the original hotel. He is very interested in putting his hands in both projects.” Bill tells Connie.

“I would very much like to hear what Mr. Akio has to say.” Connie replies.

“That’s Mr. Yamada or just Akio. Surnames are used first and the given name second in Japan.” Bill corrects.

“That’s good to know. Let me finish this bit of business and we can then set up a time for Mr. Yamada to meet with us. Nathan won’t have to be in on this because he’s going to be very busy with the new construction.” Connie adds smiling.

“This is so true. Besides—I definitely believe he’s relieved to be rid of this business. According to the will, the hotel can never be sold but it doesn’t say anything about giving it away. I don’t think Chester Worthington foresaw that event ever happening.” Bill relays.

“And it’s the National Historical Society of New York’s good fortune that he did not. I hate to say this—but that thing about the curse both past and present is going to really draw crowds and donations.” Connie acknowledges.

“Just try to keep everything in perspective, Connie.” Bill reminds her.

“Of course, you know me Bill.” Connie retorts.

“That’s why I said it. See you later.” Bill nods and the limo begins to merge into traffic.

Chapter 11

Mr. Yamada Akio decides to stay in town indefinitely and is a welcomed guest in the home of Bill Harrington. He is given an upstairs bedroom with adjacent bath. Bill knocks gently on the bedroom door—Akio opens it.

“You have a very lovely home here, Bill.” Akio acknowledges.

“Thanks, Akio. I hope you had a restful night.” Bill replies.

“I did.” Akio replies.

“First, our chef will be preparing breakfast. Next, I’ll take you down to see Dr. Alexander. Mr. Brewster will be there as well since he’s on the Board of Directors for the Historical Society.” Bill informs Akio.

“It will be an early meeting then?” Akio inquires.

“In fact, a very early meeting. Connie has asked the security guard at City National Bank to give us special entrance into the building. She has a very tight schedule today, but she is really excited about meeting with you. Mr. Brewster, of course, will be there as well.” Bill states.

“Ah yes, he is also on both boards, isn’t he?” Akio mentions.

“It’s always good business to have the president of the most prestigious bank in town as a party to any financial endeavor.” Both Akio and Bill laugh hardily as they journey down the stairs toward the dining room. Stephanie is there to greet them.

“Mr. Yamada, good morning to you!” Stephanie acknowledges with enthusiasm.

“Mrs. Harrington, thank you for having me in your beautiful home.” Akio replies bowing slightly.

“Please dispense with the formalities. My husband speaks of you so much—call me Stephanie.”

“Alright Stephanie—only if you call me Akio!”

“Okay you two, we’ve got an early consultation with Connie today and I don’t want to be late. She’s got a full schedule.” Bill replies, helping himself to piping hot raspberry crepes and sausages.

“Yes, I know. She’s very active in our auxiliary groups as well. I’m having lunch with her later today, along with a couple of our members: Melody Harris and Emma Keys.” Stephanie tells Bill.

“You do not work outside the home, Stephanie?” Akio questions before stuffing his mouth with blueberry muffins.

“The various auxiliaries that I am a member of take up most of my days. I am a certified Interior Designer, though. Only occasionally do I work in that field. I have the wonderful advantage of choosing when I practice my trade and when I indulge in my civic duties.” Stephanie brags.

“I would love you to meet my wife, Miyuki. You share such similar interests.” Akio informs while sipping his latte.

“The next time I am in your wonderful city—I will make every effort to include Stephanie. We’ll have to coordinate our schedules.” Bill smiles. After finishing a hardy breakfast and a firm kiss is planted on Stephanie’s lips, Bill and Akio leave for the City National Bank Building, where a special conference room is reserved for their meeting.

When all parties are present, the meeting begins.

Sunrise Preliminary Planning ...

Nathan is also up early. He is excited about the prospects of starting preliminary construction. When he arrives at the site—Steve Crenshaw is already there with another individual.

“Nathan Worthington, I’d like you to meet Joshua “Speed” Taylor. He’s the architect I was telling you about. Speed, meet Nathan Worthington.” Steve says.

“Why do they call you Speed?” Nathan inquires.

“Because I am also a video race car enthusiast.” Speed replies smiling.

“That’s interesting.” Nathan says. “I’d like to look at the blueprints you’ve got. I know my father-in-law has some, but I understand yours are more up-to-date.” Nathan waste no time getting to business.

The men go over to Speed’s truck where he has the blueprints spread out. It shows plans for the offices, foyer, and storage areas. There are also several other rooms strategically situated on each floor which he will explain later.

The parking lots will be in the back so as not to spoil the pastoral beauty of the front.

Speed plans to create the atmosphere in the front of the building as a small park—businessmen will be encouraged to take their laptops or tablets out there and work in peaceful surroundings. He also has some photos of how the building will look when completed.

“I’ve done one other building in this design. It’s in Sacramento. Yours will be very similar. However, since I will be making some minor changes in the structure of the Sacramento complex—yours will also be completely unique.” Speed replies.

“It looks worlds different from the original Grand Worthington Hotel. I’m wondering when we can get started?” Nathan inquires.

“We’re getting the necessary permits in about a couple of hours. That father-in-law of yours has some serious connections. I’m looking at Monday to begin work.” Steve replies.

“That is fast. Today is Thursday. The location is great. It’s almost like being in the suburbs yet not too far from the freeway. Once everything is complete, this is going to be a prodigious hotel.” Nathan heralds.

“There are hotels in the center of town and near the airport. This one is not only for businessmen but if they want to relax with their families and combine work with leisure—it will be perfect!” Speed informs Nathan.

“That’s what I like about it. Even the conference rooms will be conducive to creating an air of 21st century professionalism.” Nathan replies eyeing the plans thoroughly.

“I told Speed that it needs to be as different from the original as night and day. Speed’s office designs are for the modern workspaces that reduce stress and improve job performances. So, making hotels for businessmen and their families is just an extension of that concept.” Steve explains.

The three men walk around the area. There is a pleasant breeze and no sounds of noisy traffic or planes passing overhead. The atmosphere is very congenial and quite different from the usual business-oriented hotels.

“I’m a little concerned about families with young children. Won’t they be a distraction for the businessmen?” Nathan wonders.

“This particular businessman’s hotel caters to families with older children. There will be three rooms of various floors that will be housed with the latest video gaming equipment for their playing enjoyment. PlayStation, Nintendo, Xbox— you name it and your new hotel will have it. We’ll keep that adolescent or teen busy for hours. In fact, they will beg dad/mom to go on more business trips to New York.” Speed laughs and the other men join in.

“My nephew is going to just love this.” Steve adds and is as excited as the other men are at the prospects of the New Grand Worthington Hotel.

“Truly, this is going to be a grand hotel!” Nathan states enthusiastically— both Steve and Speed agree.

Beginning Construction ...

It’s early Monday morning when Steve, Speed, Nathan and Bill meet at the construction site. There is also newscaster John P Kelley and his camera crew.

“I bet you’re excited about the groundbreaking of your new hotel site?” John asks Nathan.

“Yes John, I am.” Nathan quips.

“I also heard that you have donated the original Grand Worthington Hotel to the Historical Society of New York.” John is seeking confirmation.

“That is also right. That edifice was erected in the 1920s. Remarkably, it is still in very good shape and will need just minor renovations.” Nathan adds.

“What about the rumors of the supernatural that are tied to this building? The Bonaparte Sisters died in a tragic fire, right?” John queries.

“That happened at the theatre and it has been demolished.” Nathan is trying very hard to maintain his composure. Bill noting this, intervenes.

“We are here to celebrate the construction of a fabulous new hotel, not resurrect old rumors, John. I feel that my son-in-law has experienced enough heartaches from that incident.” Bill states giving John a look that says volumes. After all, he is the main stockholder in Ralston Enterprises— parent company of Station WXYM.

“I apologize. Now, can you give us some information on this new building. It’s in a rather unique location for a hotel isn’t it.” John uncomfortably changes the subject.

“That is the beauty of the New Grand Worthington Hotel. We want to cater to a certain class of businessperson. Our clients are interested in blending a workplace environment with a resort. Here, at the New Grand Worthington, the patron will be able to function in an atmosphere of modern technology and pastoral genius.” Nathan takes a sip of water while his father-in-law takes over.

“You see John, while the entrepreneur is having conferences inside our holographic suites—his wife and children will be entertained in our exclusive game rooms or chatting centers.” Bill proudly states.

“What exactly is a chatting center, Bill?” All attention is now reverted from Nathan to Bill.

“Well, a chatting center is a room filled with wide screen TVs, and available stations for desktop/laptop computers. There will be occasional fashion show presentations, wine tasting, and recliners for total relaxation. Or she can just meet with the girls and talk about the latest episode of her favorite program. This hotel is more for upper middle-class women with a variety of interest.” Bill concludes.

“So, this hotel will be both work and family oriented. Encouraging the more progressive businesspersons to bring their family along. No small children, right?” John surmises.

“Right, John. The New Grand Worthington Hotel is the ideal place for the successful businessman and woman who want to work in a more stress-free environment. Also, keeping the family as the core concern.” Nathan says, happy that Bill stepped in when he did.

“It’s time to get the ceremony started, Nate.” Bill tells him.

Chapter 12

The mayor, governor and a couple of congressman have arrived for the festivities. A golden shovel has been presented along with a large blue ribbon being stretched from one pole to another. Buffy and Stephanie have made it along with Nathan's parents and brother Michael. Michael's wife is unable to make the trip to America, having undergone surgery, but she sends her love and best wishes.

Abbie Wilkinson is introduced as a consultant and only Bill along with Buffy know who she really is. Once Bob Morton makes his appearance, he doesn't recognize her. Without the black veil that she wears that only reveal her eyes—it is impossible to know her identity.

The actual ribbon cutting takes only a moment with every member of the New Worthington Board present, along with Dr. Connie Alexander. Men in white blazers are rushing about putting chairs and tables in place. A local trio—Non-Turbulence provides beautiful chamber music. Everyone seems to be having a good time. There is a man circulating among the crowd that strikes Nathan's interest.

“Who is that fellow over there talking to Mark Summerfield?” Nathan asks Connie.

“Oh, that's Jacolby Webster—Percy's brother. You remember, the man that was found dead at the site five years ago?” Connie whispers to Nathan.

“Why would he be interested in coming to the groundbreaking ceremony?” Nathan queries.

“I'd keep an eye on that one, if I were you. I heard that he took his brother's death pretty hard.” Connie warns. Nathan glances over at Abbie and she gives him a knowing nod.

“That I will.” Nathan replies and when he looks up, he notices Jacolby staring at him in a very strange way. Then he moves on as if being caught with his hand in the cookie jar.

“Did you see that man scurry away like a frighten rabbit when he saw you noticing him.” Buffy says, once again donning her Hercule Poirot cap.

“I wouldn’t call it a scared rabbit, Buffy. I’d say more like someone who has been caught in the act of some mischief.” Connie retorts.

“You two need to find a computer and setup the plot.” Nathan jokes but he is a bit uneasy himself.

It is nearly noon when the crowd disburse, and everything begins to settle down. Nathan tells Buffy that he’s going to have a word with Abbie before she leaves and to ask his family to meet him at their home.

“You going to ask her about Jacolby, aren’t you?” Buffy inquires.

“Yes, love. I don’t think it was just by chance that he is here. I want to know what she thinks about everything.” Nathan whispers back to her.

“Don’t be too long, darling. Your family came all the way over from the Worthington Estate in England. Try not to let this thing with the Grand Worthington Hotel dominate. I’m not Pamela—I just don’t want to see you unduly distracted.” Buffy puts her hand on his arm and brushes her lips against his.

“What would I do without your lovely presence in my life?” Nathan smiles and heads toward Abbie. She is aware that he wants to consult her, so she hesitates until he appears.

“Let us move over to where my car is—away from prying eyes. I’m glad your wife is aware of our connections. There can be no false rumors to spread regarding our business relationship.” Abbie states smiling.

“I firmly believe in a wife being privy to what is going on with her husband. Especially, when everything is above board.” Nathan says following her to the car. Both turn in time to see Jacolby talking with someone—then he stops when he sees them staring.

“That man is definitely up to something.” Nathan supposes.

“Yes, and I believe it will involve the original Grand Worthington as opposed to this one.” Abbie declares.

“How so?” Nathan inquires.

“There is a past filled with misfortune that shrouds the old Grand Worthington. It would be easy for mishaps to happen and spread rumors that the spirits have returned.” Abbie explains.

“But they are gone—aren’t they?” Nathan is in need of confirmation here.

“Yes, Nathan. They are gone. Once you returned that emerald ring to its original owners—the curse was dispelled.” Abbie reassures him.

“Do you think I need to warn Connie?” Nathan inquires.

“Until something actually happens that is noteworthy—it would not be believed. Bide your time, something will happen.” Abbie then gets into her car and is off toward Mulberry Bend, on the east side of Columbus Park.

It’s about 6 am when Nathan receives an urgent phone call from his father-in-law Bill.

“Nate get down to County General Hospital pronto!” bill urges.

“Why, what’s the problem?” Nathan inquires sitting straight up in bed.

“It’s Abbie Wilkinson.” Bill informs.

“What happened to Abbie?” Nathan retorts aloud. Upon hearing this bit of information—Buffy sits straight up in bed as well.

“Something has happened to Abbie?” Buffy whispers to Nathan and he nods, putting the phone on speaker.

“Dad, I’ve got you on speaker.” Nathan informs Bill.

“What’s going on, dad. What’s happened to Abbie?” Buffy asks.

“One of the security guards found her at the Grand Worthington Hotel. She was lying unconscious on the ground. Her head was bleeding. Officer Hollingsworth thinks she hit her head on a rock during some type of confrontation. All the windows on the first floor has been shattered.” Bill informs Nathan.

“What on earth was Abbie doing at the hotel—and alone.” Nathan inquires.

“She must have had a premonition and well, if you know Abbie—she reacts first!” Bill pauses.

“Which was very foolish on her part. She should have called me or even you, dad. Why did she just go alone? It just doesn’t make any sense.” Nathan shakes his head.

“Unless she felt she could reason with whoever it was that was at the hotel. I wonder if Jacolby Webster had anything to do with this. Remember how you said he was watching you all during the ceremony.” Buffy advises.

“You may have a point there, Buffy.” Nathan recalls the incident.

“You can’t go jumping to any conclusions no matter where the assumption points.” Bill reproaches.

“Dad, we are not jumping to any conclusions—we are just putting two and two together. Jacolby kept watching me at the groundbreaking ceremony. He saw Abbie and me having a personal conversation. She went to confront him about it, and he tried to kill her.” Nathan surmises.

“I don’t think he wanted to kill her, Nathan. I think he wanted to silence her from making any more predictions. She has never been wrong.” Buffy deduces.

“I agree with Buffy—sort of.” Bill replies.

“What do you mean, sort of?” Nathan asks.

“Whoever it was that attacked Abbie, I don’t think it was to kill her otherwise she would be dead. I think they wanted to get her temporarily out of the picture so s/he could do whatever.” Bill says.

“You think it might be a woman?” Nathan asks incredulously.

“Let’s just say that I am not ruling out that possibility. Right now, Jacolby is a prime suspect and I will let Inspector Riley know about this.” Bill says.

“Okay, Buffy and I will be on our way to County General. Stay there. How is Connie taking this?” Nathan questions.

“Better than I expected. She’s really upset but because your consultant was hurt more than the fact that the building was vandalized.” Bill informs Nathan.

“That’s Connie alright. Talk to you later, dad.” Nathan says as he hangs up the phone. “Let’s get ready, Buffy. I want you to bring your Poirot skills into play. We’ve got a mystery on our hands.”

Buffy claps her hands in glee. This is what she’s been waiting to do. Finally, to investigate something that’s not fictional.

“I wonder if Abbie saw who it was?” Buffy queries.

“Hopefully, she will be able to tell us something—it will depend on the extent of her injuries.” Nathan warns. “Let’s get there.”

Before the trio can see Abbie, Dr. Theodore Sian and Inspector Riley are waiting to see them. Dr. Sian speaks first.

“I need to let you know that it seems that some of Abbie’s clairvoyance ability could be hindered because of the injury to her head. She was hit very hard from the back. It’s a miracle that her skill wasn’t fractured.” Dr. Sian states.

“Oh no!” Buffy laments.

“It’s going to take a lot of time and rehabilitating, but she should be fine. I don’t know however, about her special abilities. I’m afraid that’s not my expertise.” Dr. Sian confesses.

“When she’s ready to be discharged, I would love to have her recovery handled at our home.” Buffy tells Nathan. “If the doctor is correct—then there may be someone out there who would prefer that she not regain her gift.” Buffy inputs.

“You are absolutely right, Mrs. Worthington. I am hoping to coordinate with County General regarding just that. At the present, we’ve got an officer stationed outside of Abbie’s room.” Inspector Riley begins.

“Abbie has been instrumental in helping us solve many cases. It would be a great loss—besides she’s a pretty great lady.” Riley concludes and everyone nods their heads in agreement.

“So, please understand if she’s a bit hazy on what happened to her. She was hit from behind.” Dr. Sian replies.

“But I thought there were sights of some kind of struggle?” Nathan states not understanding what he’s hearing.

“I believe that there may have been more than one person at the hotel. It’s really becoming more of a conspiracy.” Riley says.

“This is ridiculous—why would there be a conspiracy against the Grand Worthington?” Nathan asks.

“There have been a lot of people hurt as a result of your wanting to reopen the hotel. For five years, everything has been quiet. Now, it looks like the hotel will be opening even if it’s as a tourist attraction.” Riley says.

“And somebody doesn’t like it!” Buffy concludes.

At that moment, Connie Alexander makes her appearance.

“I don’t like the fact that the hotel is being targeted by miscreants but hurting people—Jeremy Arthur Riley, what are you doing about this?” Connie begins.

“Now just a minute Connie, there’s no cause in using my full name. I am going to be on top of this. Not only did one of my favorite contacts get nailed—a historical landmark has been vandalized. This is major.” Riley finishes.

“I’m going to have Steve Crenshaw and Bob Morton coordinate their construction schedules to incorporate both the original and the new Grand Worthington.” Nathan offers.

“I’m going to have a meeting with the city administration—there may be moneys they can appropriate for some of the repairs.” Connie offers.

“I plan to concentrate my efforts on Jacolby Webster. His brother died on location. He would have good reason to want to see the hotel fail.” Buffy proposes.

“Now you be careful, Buffy. I know I said I wanted your input, but this may be more than we bargained for.” Nathan cautions.

“He’s right, Mrs. Worthington. We may be playing with some serious characters. I can’t protect you if you tip outside of the law. Nor if someone decides to—” Buffy interrupts.

“Please, give me credit for having some type of sense. I am not about to put my head on the chopping block—so to speak. I understand what’s at risk and I don’t plan on doing this alone.” Buffy rebukes.

“So, who is your accomplice?” Bill asks his daughter. Buffy only smiles while Connie gives her a secret nod.

“Let’s go see Abbie.” Nathan concludes looking first at his wife then noticing Connie’s smile.

Chapter 13

The door opens to find Abbie unconscious in bed. One wall is covered with hospital equipment, informational charts, and wires. The others are bleached white. Nothing really noteworthy about it. Except that Abbie looks very peaceful lying there.

“Maybe we shouldn’t disturb her.” Buffy utters. “That had to be a very traumatic experience.”

“I believe it was. This is why Abbie has been so heavily sedated. That and the extent of her injuries. However, this was done earlier in the day. Just be aware of her condition and don’t unduly stress her.” Dr. Sian counsels.

As if on cue, Abbie opens her eyes.

“What am I doing here?” She enquires groggily looking around the room. She tries to rise out of bed but flops back into a stack of soft pillows.

“Oh, my head!” She laments.

“The security guard found you lying on the ground in front of the original Grand Worthington Hotel about 1:30 am. Do you remember what happened? Can you tell us anything?” Bill probes.

“I’ll try. I remember receiving a telephone call from an older woman asking me to meet her at the Grand Worthington Hotel.” Abbie answers.

“An older woman—then what happened?” Buffy queries.

“I don’t know. I woke up here—a nurse gave me something and I went back to sleep. I have no idea how I got here or what happened just before then.” Abbie relates to the surprise of everyone present.

“You don’t remember anything? You were hit on the back of the head with a rock. You say that you got a phone call this morning?” Inspector Riley interrogates.

“It was probably more like late last night! I can’t remember who the woman was—she sounded desperate. That I do know. Other than that things are really hazy. It’s like part of my memory has been altered or just rearranged.” Abbie informs in dismay.

“I think that’s enough for now. The mind is still a mystery to us. It has ways of protecting us from extremely unpleasant circumstances. I want to do some x-rays and a CT scan. I need to know if there’s anything further going on.” Dr. Sian replies. “My wife is a special duty nurse—she is assigned to Mrs. Wilkinson.”

Everyone leaves the room with the exception of Dr. and Nurse Sian. They make Abbie comfortable and she returns to her slumber.

“That was very strange. Abbie doesn’t remember anything after she arrived at the hotel.” Nathan begins the conversation.

“I think whoever hit her on the head knew exactly what he or she was doing. That means the villain may be in the medical profession.” Buffy deduces.

“Or someone who understands the workings of the brain.” Connie adds.

“This line of thought is really getting out of hand. First, you think it is Jacolby Webster. Now, you think it may be somebody in the medical profession. Why don’t you just leave it up to the police to investigate this caper.” Inspector Riley suggests.

“Well—do you have any suspicions, Inspector?” Buffy asks sarcastically.

“None that I wish to share with you.” Inspector Riley returns her cynicism.

“Translation— I don’t have any idea.” Connie mocks smiling.

“Alright you two.” Bill reprimands the ladies.

“We are not getting anywhere here. I think we need to return to the scene of the crime.” Buffy recommends.

“A couple of my men are already there. I don’t want you getting in their way, Mrs. Worthington. Please, just go home and let us handle this.” Inspector Riley insists.

“Alright, sure.” Buffy utters, rapidly heading toward the entrance to the hospital with Connie struggling to catch up.

“I didn’t think she’d cooperate so easily.” Inspector Riley replies satisfied. Nathan looks at Bill and both shake their heads. Nathan knows that his wife is not about to give in so easily. Bill knows this as well. Those women have something up their sleeves and neither Nathan nor Bill will expose this fact.

“I’m going to have a talk with Steve Crenshaw. Maybe he can get a few of his crew members over to the hotel.” Nathan tells Bill.

“Better let Steve go over there alone—then he can just tell the men what needs to be done.” Bill suggests.

“Okay, maybe Bob Morton can accompany him. He’s got a good eye as well.” Nathan mentions.

“Fine. Just make sure if either man discovers anything, he will let me know. I don’t want valuable evidence getting disturbed.” Inspector Riley advises. Nathan looks at Bill and he nods in agreement.

“See you later, Inspector.” Bill says and Nathan follows him through the corridor of City General to the nearest exist. Both men know that sleuths Buffy and Connie will probably unearth something long before Steve Crenshaw or Inspector Riley’s men do.

“It will be Buffy or Connie who discovers something.” Nathan reminds Bill.

“I know—it’s fine as long as they know when to let up.” Bill retorts. “But knowing my daughter—” Both men smile and head to their waiting cars.

With Connie at the wheel, it doesn’t take long before they are arriving at the Grand Worthington Hotel. Of course, the police have already set up barriers and a couple of men are wandering around the premises, heading toward the back of the building.

Buffy notices something wedged in a crack in the sidewalk. It looks like the heel of a shoe.

“The officer was right, Connie. Look at that.” Buffy says pointing to the heel wedged in the sidewalk.

“I don’t think those officers have seen this yet. Go look in your car. Maybe you have a screwdriver or nail file in your glove box.” Buffy orders feeling very excited. Connie heads for her car. She knows never to question Detective Buffy when she’s hot on a clue. Six minutes later, Connie returns with a butter knife.

“This will have to do, Buffy. Now, hurry up—those policemen will be back any minute. I don’t want to give this to them.” Connie instructs as Buffy

gently loosens the heel from its prison and jams it into her pocket. Just as she stands up, Officer Cunningham walks over to the two women.

It seems as if Buffy and Connie have their hands caught in the cookie jar.

“Just what do you think you are doing here?” Office Cunningham retorts angrily as he quickly closes the distance between himself and the two women. Both Buffy and Connie smile at him ruefully. Buffy’s hands are thrust deep inside her pockets. When Officer Cunningham comes within range, he instantly recognizes the women and his voice mellows a bit.

“Oh, hello Dr. Alexander. Mrs. Worthington, what’s going on here?” Officer Darrin Cunningham inquires. “This is a crime scene and neither of you girls are allowed to be here.”

“Hello Officer Cunningham, have you found anything yet?” Buffy asks innocently.

“Now you know I can’t discuss official police business with civilians.” Office Cunningham chastises.

“Come on Darrin—just an itty-bitty clue. We won’t tell that you said a word. Your wife Marilyn is a member of our *Friends of Christie Book Club* and we all know how much you just love a good mystery.” Connie quietly coos.

“This is strictly off the record, Connie. I could get into serious trouble if Inspector Riley knew that I told you.” Officer Cunningham whispers with restraint.

“Don’t worry, Officer Cunningham.” Buffy reassures.

“By the fingerprints on the rock, it was a man who produced the blow to the head.” Officer Cunningham whispers.

“How could you possibly know that?” Connie asks.

“That’s a nice size rock—the smutty handprint completely wraps around it.” Officer Cunningham says.

“Interesting!” Connie replies and gets an annoying look from both Officer Cunningham and Buffy.

“Sorry!” Connie exclaims sheepishly.

“Continue please, Officer Cunningham.” Buffy retorts.

“Also, there are two sets of footprints. One looks like a man’s size 10 and the other a woman’s size 8. Marilyn has been reading some of those Agatha Christie mysteries to me and we’ve been testing out our theories on that new series *A Crime Detective’s Chronicles*.” Officer Cunningham explains proudly.

“Good work, Super Sleuth Cunningham. If you were a member—I’d make you an officer in the book club. I won’t tell a soul what you’ve shared.” Connie declares smiling.

“I think we need to consider having Darrin Cunningham as a consultant in our little group. It’s obvious that his presence would prove invaluable, Connie.” Buffy adds, very happy with the information she’s just received. Officer Cunningham beams with joy at the prospects of being included in the group.

“We could really use somebody on the inside helping us—what do you say, Officer Cunningham?” Connie says, then seeing the other policeman approaching waves her hand in dismissal.

“Talk to you later, Officer Cunningham. Have a great day!” Connie swiftly moves away from the scene with Buffy in tow.

“I’ll call him the first chance I get, or you can.” Connie expresses.

“Deal! Now we know that the possessor of this heel wears a size 8 shoe. And, from the looks of this, it’s a very expensive one. It’s a shame that she’ll have to throw away such an obviously beautiful red leather pump.” Buffy states.

“I wonder, if we could really get lucky and find it in one of those trash cans over there?” Connie points toward three large receptacles.

Looking both ways, the ladies scurry over to the cans. There is a lot of rubble in the first one. The second one has a foul smell to it, so the ladies avoid it entirely. However, the third one reveals the prize. One red patent-leather pump—minus the heel!

“Bingo! Give me a tissue from your back pocket.” Buffy retorts as she carefully moves the cartons and plastic bottles surrounding the ill-fated

shoe. Then after receiving the tissue, she lifts the shoe and places it into an empty bag hanging from the side of the first trash can.

“Let’s get out of here before those policemen start getting suspicious.” Connie states and both women head toward her car.

“How are we going to find out who this shoe belongs to?” Buffy wonders.

“Maybe we can check for fingerprints. Since you didn’t touch it with your bare hands—it’s bound to have the marks of its owner.” Connie offers.

“Right! That’s where our trusty new accomplice comes in. Let’s give him a call.” Buffy states and sits next to Connie in the car. She dials Darrin’s number.

“Hell-o!”

“Darrin, see if you can get away from your partner for a moment, we’ve found something.” Buffy voices.

“What is it?” Officer Cunningham whispers with his back to the other policeman.

“A shoe.” Buffy responds.

“A shoe?” Office Cunningham says it so loud that his partner turns around.

“What was that you said?” Mike Murphy queries.

“I said ah-chew!” Officer Cunningham repeats. Then he turns back to his cell phone.

“Look, meet me a couple of blocks from hear. I’ll make up an excuse to get away from Mike Murphy. You know that you’ll have to turn it over to me, don’t you?”

“Of course, but as the old saying goes—one hand washes the other!” Buffy explicates.

“I’ll find out if we can trace the fingerprints and let you know what I discover. Having that shoe is going to be a real feather in my cap.” Officer Cunningham brags.

“Just don’t forget who privately gave it to you, Sitting Bull.” Buffy reproaches and then hangs up.

“Let’s go.” Connie says.

Twenty minutes later Officer Cunningham pulls up behind Connie’s car and gets out. He walks over to the passenger side and gets into the back seat.

“Okay Buffy—I told Mike that I was going to pick up some donuts and he need to stay at the hotel until I return. Let’s see what you’ve got.” Officer Cunningham says. Buffy hands him the bag with the shoe inside. Before looking at the item, he pulls a pair of plastic gloves he’d stuffed into his back pocket.

“Damn!” Officer Cunningham exclaims.

“What is it?” Both Buffy and Connie speak simultaneously.

“This looks just like the shoe that Charlotte Webster wore to Percy’s funeral.” Officer Cunningham states in amazement.

“Are you sure, Darrin?” Buffy inquires.

“Positive! Marilyn remarked what a contrast those red shoes were when everything else she had on was black. Apparently, Charlotte Webster has a fondness for red shoes.” Officer Cunningham informs.

“This is much too easy. There is something wrong.” Buffy states. Both Connie and Darrin agree. Officer Cunningham puts the shoe back into the bag and heads for his patrol car with it.

Chapter 14

Nathan arrives at the newly erected prefab construction shack and Steve meets him at the door.

“I heard all about the Black Widow.” Steve begins after shaking Nathan’s hand.

“News travels fast.” Nathan replies.

“It does when you consider who’s involved. I can’t imagine anyone wanting to harm her. I’ll admit she’s a little eccentric at times but—” Steve is interrupted by Nathan.

“It’s a possibility that it goes beyond just wanting to silence, Abbie.” Nathan begins.

“Abbie?” Steve looks at Nathan strangely.

“Didn’t you know the real name of the Black Widow?” Nathan asks in amazement.

“I never heard anyone use it before. You really do have a relationship with her, don’t you?” Steve ripostes lifting up one eyebrow.

“No, nothing like that at all. C’mon Steve. I am totally committed to Buffy and you know it.” Nathan reproaches him.

“Buffy is a far cry from Pamela, ain’t she.” Steve is smiling, thinking about the differences.

“Hey, don’t start thinking about my wife in that tone of voice.” Nathan advises and then both men laugh. Nathan then proceeds to the business at hand.

“Steve, I need you and Bob Morton to assess the damage done to the Grand Worthington. It’s insured so there shouldn’t be any problems with repairs. Report back to me regarding any information you may find—especially if it could possibly lead to whoever did the vandalism.” Nathan commands.

“You’re really interested in this caper, aren’t you?” Steve replies admirably.

“You bet your tailpipe I am. Five years ago it was the supernatural. Now, it could be someone set on revenge.” Nathan updates Steve.

“That makes a lot of sense, in a morbid sort of way.” Steve responds. “Let me give some directions to Speed along with Bert and Will. I want to get things going here.”

“Okay, Steve. I’ll come with you. Those are some good men and I don’t want them left in the dark—nor do I want this bit of information getting out to the media. It could jeopardize the investigation.” Nathan cautions. Steve agrees.

The two men meander over to where Speed is busy doodling on a piece of paper. Nathan looks over his shoulder.

“Pretty good!” Nathan says.

“I’m just waiting for orders, that’s all.” Speed defends.

“Hey, no problem—just saying.” Nathan counters as Bert along with Will join them.

“ Heard about the ruckus with the Black Widow. Never thought anybody would catch her off guard. That’s one smart female.” Bert begins the conversation.

“It seems she was lured to the hotel then bashed upside the head.” Informs Nathan.

“Ouch!” Will states. “Is she alright?”

“She’s got some memory loss. Now here is what you guys need to do. Tell them, Steve.” Nathan says turning the conversation to him.

Buffy and Connie decide they will go to Percy Webster’s home and confront Charlotte with their findings.

“Do you think we’re doing the right thing?” Connie is having second thoughts regarding the encounter.

“The best way to do this is to catch her off guard. I don’t think she would be looking for a couple of civilians to storm troop her home demanding information. After all, you have a vested interest in the Grand Worthington Hotel.” Buffy reminds her.

As they pull up into the driveway, Buffy notices something odd about the garage. It looks as if it has been jarred off the hinges. She mentions this to Connie.

“There is something strange about this. It seems that someone was in a hurry to get that garage door closed by it being jammed.” Buffy states.

“I see what you mean—I wonder if there’s a way we can jimmy it open.” Connie states.

“And we just happen to know someone who’s good at doing just that. He’s a writer friend of mine who always likes to try things out before putting it into his stories.” Buffy says.

“Mark Elliott!” The ladies recite in unison.

Buffy immediately gets him on the phone and explains the situation to him.

“I’ve always had permission to do things like that, Buffy. Suppose somebody sees us?” Mark cautions.

“Then I’ll just tell them to blame me. Don’t worry. I put you up to this and I am willing to take the fall. All Inspector Riley will do is give me a severe reprimand and maybe take a way a few of my toys.” Buffy retorts flippantly.

“Alright Buffy, see you in a few minutes.” Mark replies.

Twenty minutes later, Mark pulls up into the driveway, gets out of the car and walks over to the garage with his bag of tools. He examines the frame and smiles broadly.

“Piece of cake.” Mark declares. Within a few minutes, he has the door lifted and the three of them walk into the premises.

The next thing they see shock them beyond words. There is Charlotte Webster, lying in her car with a bullet wound to the head.

“Better contact Inspector Riley—we’ve got a lot of explaining to do.” Connie surmises.

“I’m just glad I wore my gloves. My fingerprints won’t be on anything.” Mark shakes his head in disbelief.

“What the hell are you people doing here?” Jacolby utters in surprise, then looks over at his sister-in-law’s body lying on the front seat. “What have you people done.”

It was lucky that Officer Cunningham always follows up on his hunches. Because minutes later, he also pulls into the driveway and jumps out of the car.

“Nobody move—I knew you ladies wouldn’t miss on an opportunity to try to investigate—holy cow! Is that Mrs. Webster lying there?” Officer Cunningham says.

“Yes officer, and I want these people arrested.” Jacolby demands.

“For what—breaking and entering?” Officer Cunningham asks sarcastically.

“No dunce, for murder!” Jacolby trumpets while pointing at the body.

“For one thing, I could take you downtown for that insult. For another, this woman has been dead for hours. Even an inexperienced person could see that. Look at the caked-up blood around the point of entry.” Officer Cunningham leans over to touch the body.

“I’ll bet she’s stone cold and there seems to be something written inside the margin of that magazine.” Mark observes.

“You’re right. I don’t want anybody leaving this crime scene. Mr. Webster, just why were you here? I unfortunately know why Mrs. Worthington and Dr. Alexander are present. And you are?” Officer Cunningham looks at Mark.

“I’m Mark Elliott, I’m a—” Before Mark can continue, Officer Cunningham interrupts.

“You’re a mystery writer. My wife Marilyn and I read all your books. I know that you go to any lengths to create the right atmosphere but murder?” Officer Cunningham relays, then looks at Jacolby.

“You and Mrs. Webster didn’t get along very well, did you?”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Jacolby asks nervously.

“For now, nothing. I just don’t think you need to be planning any unexpected trips out of town.” Officer Cunningham warns.

“What about these people?” Jacolby sputters, pointing at Buffy in particular.

“They aren’t going anyway either, are you?” Officer Cunningham replies smiling at the trio. They shake their heads in agreement while Buffy secretly eyes the writing on the magazine residing in Charlotte’s cold dead lap. Before she can do anything, Officer Cunningham grabs the magazine and reads the note aloud. It says: “*Must warn the Black Widow.*”

All vehicles are left at the Webster’s place while everyone loads up in two additional squad cars, heading for the police station. Buffy and Connie ride along with Officer Cunningham while Jacolby and Mark ride with Officer Mike Murphy. The third officer waits for the ambulance to take Charlotte to the City Morgue.

Officer Cunningham speaks ...

“Why didn’t you girls just go home and stay there?”

“Because we wanted to talk to Charlotte about her shoe. How did we know that she would be dead? This is becoming more like something from *A Crime Detective’s Chronicles*..” Buffy offers.

“Well, I’ll tell you one thing—Inspector Riley won’t be none too happy to see us. Specially, after this turn of events.” Connie laments.

“I’m afraid you’re right. And, to add the icing on the cake—my behind is in hot water also.” Officer Cunningham speeds toward the 10th Precinct. When he gets there he is told to report directly to Inspector Riley.

Inspector Riley is sitting at his desk listening attentively while Officer Cunningham unfolds everything that has happened thus far; including the girls giving him the red shoe, his deciding to go to Charlotte Webster’s home and what he finds there. Inspector Riley is quiet for minutes; then he looks at each individual.

“Mark, you can go on home. I’m only letting your ass off the hook because of that new baby in the family and my sister needs you at home. But think carefully before you participate in anymore hair-brain schemes, okay?” Inspector Riley advises.

“I’m sorry, J. A.” Mark apologizes and hurries out of the Police Station before his brother-in-law changes his mind. It wouldn’t look good for a best-selling author to have a police record.

“As for you Officer Cunningham—you’re too good a man to be let go and I understand that your motives were good but like I said to Mark, stop following these two chowder heads.” Inspector Riley roars.

Then diverting his attention to Buffy and Connie.

“Now I get to you two ladies. I’d just love to lock you both up and throw away the key. However, your butting in has been instrumental in helping us narrow down the suspects. I see that the only way I’m going to keep tabs on you is by unofficially allowing you on the case.” Inspector Riley notices the sigh of relieve on both women’s faces.

“However, this doesn’t take you off the hook. You will be under the direct guidance of Darrin Cunningham. You are not to even breathe unless he knows about it. Do I make myself clear?”

“Yes, sir.” Buffy and Connie chime in unison.

“Please have a seat, Mr. Webster. I have a few questions for you.” Inspector Riley instructs Jacolby to take the seat directly in front of his desk. “Is it true that you were in love with your brother’s wife and that the two of you were having an affair?”

“Yes, how did—” Jacolby is interrupted by the Inspector.

“We have our sources. And, your wife was very much interested in the Grand Worthington Hotel, is that not also true?” Inspector Riley interrogates.

“So, what you and Charlotte Webster had in mind was a little revenge, is that correct?” Jacolby turns around to look at Buffy and Connie who both are lifting eyebrows in interest.

“Yes, but we only wanted to make people believe that the place was still haunted. I was to meet Charlotte at the hotel to pay the thugs she hired to trash the place. But when I got there—Charlotte was gone, and the Black Widow was sprawled out on the pavement.” Jacolby confesses.

“Are you trying to tell me that you didn’t clunk Abbie Wilkinson on the head to keep her from talking?” Inspector Riley queries incredulously.

“Who’s Abbie Wilkinson?” Jacolby enquires in surprise.

“Dammit, was the Black Widow’s identity a secret to everyone?” Inspector Riley is slowly beginning to lose it.

“The Black Widow?” Jacolby shakes his head in astonishment.

“Yes, Abbie Wilkinson is the Black Widow. Now answer my question. Are you telling me that you didn’t hit her over the head after she discovered what you and Charlotte were up to?” Inspector Riley probes.

“That’s exactly what I’m saying. I found her on the ground. I heard the security guard coming so I took off. He didn’t see me, but I wasn’t going to stick around and try to explain myself.” By this time Jacolby is sweating profusely.

“I believe him.” Buffy speaks up.

“So do I.” Connie adds.

“I didn’t ask you two ladies for your opinion. As of yet, we haven’t been able to identify the fingerprints on that rock. I’d advise you not to leave town, Mr. Webster. As for the death of Charlotte Webster—I’m not so sure about that. A jealous lover—” Before the Inspector can finish his assumptions, Jacolby jumps up angrily.

“We were planning to get married after—” Jacolby stops then replies. “I’m not saying anymore unless my lawyer is present.”

“Alright Mr. Webster. I know you are hiding something. Whether it has anything to do with either the incapacitation of Abbie Wilkinson or the murder of Charlotte Webster, I intend to find out. You’re free to go—for now.” Jacolby slowly gets up from his seat and leaves the room.

“Officer Cunningham, what do you think? I trust your judgment.” Inspector Riley states.

“I also think he’s telling the truth. You should have heard the way he carried on when he saw Charlotte lying dead in her car. Apparently, she was on her way somewhere when she was murdered. Either that or on her way back

because there was a note scribbled in the margin of a magazine regarding the new Grand Worthington Hotel in her lap.”

“Let me see that magazine.” Inspector Riley takes the evidence from Officer Cunningham and looks at it. He reads the notation and he studies the article.

“It does mention that Abbie Wilkinson was Nathan Worthington’s consultant.” The Inspector points out.

“And apparently, Charlotte knew that Abbie Wilkinson is the real name of the Black Widow. But Jacolby didn’t know this.” Buffy points out.

“That’s right!” Connie exclaims.

“This jigsaw puzzle has a lot of missing pieces.” Officer Cunningham replies.

“And, it’s up to the three of you to find out where they are.” Inspector Riley decides. “For once, will you listen to Darrin Cunningham and follow his advice. Or, so help me I am going to tell your husbands how I almost locked you both up for obstruction of justice. That will not set too kindly with Brian Alexander, will it Connie?”

“No, it wouldn’t.” Connie confesses with her head low.

“And your husband will not like it either, will he Mrs. Worthington.” Inspector Riley now turns his attention to Buffy.

“No sir, he would hate it. Not to mention my father.” Buffy is close to tears.

“Then, I would advise you to listen to the voice of reason for once in your lives. My wife Catherine is part of that *Friends of Agatha Christie Book Club* of yours. I know that you ladies can get carried away when faced with a mystery, but this is real life, dammit!”

Inspector Riley feels the need to force the issue through.

“I know they will behave.” Officer Cunningham tries to soften the blow. “It’s easy to get overzealous when you’ve got a red-hot mystery like this one.”

“That’s no excuse. We are dealing with a murderer and he could very well be the one who attacked Abbie. I am going to make sure her hospital room is secure until she is safely in your house, Buffy. If she gets here memory

back—it could bust this case wide open. Well—what are you three just standing there for. Get out of here. You’ve got a mystery to solve.” Inspector Riley shouts and Officer Cunningham beats both Connie and Buffy out the door.

Chapter 15

Jacolby has been waiting for them to leave Inspector Riley's office. "I need to talk to you, guys."

"What is it?" Connie snaps. She is still upset to know that he is indirectly responsible for her building being vandalized.

"First, I want to apologize for the damage to your building Mrs. Worthington."

"My husband gave the building to Mrs. Alexander, Mr. Webster." Buffy corrects.

"Yes ... err—sorry about that. Next, I appreciate the fact that you believe me. I would never hurt Charlotte, less known kill her." Jacolby responds on the verge of tears. "I love that woman."

"Did she have any enemies that you know of, Mr. Webster." Officer Cunningham queries.

"No, but I have." Jacolby confesses. "Is there somewhere we can talk in privacy. Maybe if I had spoken up long ago Charlotte would still be alive."

"There is an interrogation room that I believe is vacant. It's at the end of the hall and is seldom used because it doesn't have any two-way mirrors. This will insure our privacy and you can give us any information that can help us lead to the killer." Officer Cunningham states.

Jacolby follows him down the long corridor with Buffy and Connie trailing close behind. When everyone is secure in the obscure room, Jacolby begins to talk.

"Before getting that accounting job at City National—I got into a bit of trouble overseas. I was working at one of the International Currency Exchange organizations when there started a series of discrepancies in my department. My supervisor and a few others were indicted but I was never implicated. Nevertheless, it wouldn't look good on the old resume that I had been affiliated with the big shakedown." Jacolby pauses, accepting a bottle water from Buffy. Then he continues.

"Russell Armstrong was at that time a correspondent for Transglobal News. He covered the affair and threatened to tell General Manager Theodore

Abernathy if I didn't pay up. I have a good job at City National and I just panicked. Charlotte said that I needed to talk to Nathan Worthington about it."

"You were going to talk to my husband after trying to wreck his hotel?" Buffy inquires in disbelief.

"Yeah, even though I was going to meet with Charlotte at the hotel. We were thinking about ditching the revenge tactic and just put our cards on the table. When I got there, I saw that the damage had already been done and Charlotte was nowhere in sight. Then, there was the Black Widow on the ground and security coming—" Jacolby puts his head in his hands.

"Oh Charlotte, I'm so sorry I got you into this mess." Jacolby laments. Connie puts her hand on Jacolby's shoulder.

"Don't worry—we'll find this Russell Armstrong. I believe he's behind all this." Connie sympathizes.

"It certainly points in that direction." Officer Cunningham surmises.

"You stay here with Jacolby, Buffy. Connie we can go together. Do you have any idea where Russell Armstrong lives?" Officer Cunningham questions.

"No, but he hangs around a place call the Mint Julep Tavern. It's a new dive near Pier One. I'd advise you not to go in your uniform. It's a good idea to take the lady with you, less cause for suspicion." Jacolby advises.

"Give me a description of the man." While Officer Cunningham gets the particulars regarding Russell Armstrong—Connie takes Buffy over to the side.

"I am going to give you a signal if we need backup. I don't trust this Russell Armstrong." Connie retorts.

"Good idea. Remember that tracking device we found when we were snooping around on that Brunswick Case?" Buffy queries.

"Sure do. I just so happen to have that little jewel in my pocket. You get the rest of the equipment. If things get hot, I'll press the button and you come running with the cavalry, okay?" Connie whispers.

"Gotcha!" Buffy quietly answers.

“I hope you two aren’t plotting mischief. Connie, you don’t have time anyway. C’mon, let’s go.” Officer Cunningham opens the door for Connie and both leave.

“I just hope he knows what he’s getting them into.” Jacolby gives Buffy a look, then shakes his head.

“So do I.” Buffy states.

Then helping Jacolby to his feet, both leave the room.

About 45 minutes later, Darrin and Connie find themselves in front of the Mint Julep. It wasn’t a bad as Connie had previously thought, still it wouldn’t be a place where she or Brian would frequent. Darrin gives her a cautionary lecture.

“Let me do the talking, Connie. This is not one of your murder mystery scenarios. We’re playing with a loaded gun and it’s not wise to get caught. Got it?”

“I’m way ahead of you, Darrin.” Connie is in complete compliance.

They walk down the stairs to the entrance. The place is semi-dark and there are muffled sounds coming from the patrons. Connie gazes at Darrin. He squeezes her hand in reassurance.

“Let’s take a seat over at a corner booth. Someone will be here to serve us in a minute.” Darrin assures.

“Then you’ve been here before?” Connie queries in surprise.

“Comes with the territory.” Darrin answers flatly.

“Then, why didn’t you indicate this when Jacolby told us about it?” Connie enquires.

“Why should I? He was the one who’s volunteering information—not me!” Darrin remarks flippantly.

“Not I.” Connie corrects.

“Whatever.” Darrin concludes. Overhearing just a little of the conversation—a blonde waitress appears.

“Hi Darrin, who’s your girlfriend?” Bonnie Walters questions.

“Just a good friend, Bonnie. Tell me, is Russell Armstrong here?” Darrin inquires.

“That loser? Naw, but he’ll be here shortly. He always meets a nervous looking gentleman around this time. Then they go outside, and he returns smiling.” Bonnie informs.

“What about the other fellow?” Darrin asks.

“I never see him until next time. Poor fellow—he looks so beat down.” Bonnie shakes her head. “Now what can I get you folks?”

Just as Bonnie begins to take the orders—Russell appears.

“Speak of the devil,” Bonnie stares at him with contempt. “I hope whatever he’s done—you nail him to the wall.” Having received this nice tip from Bonnie, the duo move in toward Russell.

“What can I do for you folks, I’m kinda busy right now.” Russell declares, observing first Connie and then Darrin.

“Yeah, we know how busy you’ve been. Jacolby won’t be in today. His fiancée was murdered.” Darrin informs him.

“Is that a fact?” Russell replies, looking over in the corner as two burly men come toward them. Bonnie sees the predicament her friends are in and struts over with a tray of drinks “accidentally” spilling them on both men.

“Why don’t you watch where you’re going bi—” But before the first guy can finish his insult, Darrin places a well-aimed fist next to the would-be perpetrator’s jaw. Connie grabs the “family jewels” of the other man and yanks down with all her strength.

“Ouch, dammit!” The other man howls in pain. At the same time, Russell makes his exit out the back door.

“After him!” Yells Connie while both Darrin and she head for the same place at top speed.

“Who’s that—Batman and Robin?” One of the patrons laugh as the crowd admires the spectacle that has just transpired before them.

“You think?” Bonnie throws back.

As soon as Darrin and Connie get outside, Russell is waiting for them with a 9mm Parabellum in his hand.

“Glad you two could join me.” Russell gives them both a wicked smile.

“Is that the gun you used to silence Mrs. Webster?” Connie spits at him venomously.

“Give the lady a prize! Yes, it is. She wouldn’t listen to reason. I followed her to the Grand Worthington Hotel. I had heard from a couple of friends of mine that she and Jacolby were paying them to trash the place. So, I took the liberty of doing it myself. Figured I’d make some extra dough. Now, I had two people to blackmail.” Russell brags, unaware that Connie is slipping her hand into her pocket and is summoning Buffy.

“You scumbag!” Darrin roars at him and receives a smack in the mouth with the side of Russell’s gun.

“Keep it up, copper. I’ve never plugged one of NYPD’s finest—it would be a pleasure though.” Russell grins while Darrin wipes the blood from his mouth with his left hand.

“How could you possibly know that he’s a policeman?” Connie queries.

“Ain’t it obvious? The way he handled himself with one of my henchmen—and lady what you did is a thing of beauty. I haven’t seen action like that in years.” Russell states admirably.

“And just what do you plan to do with us now?” Darrin is more concerned for Connie’s safety than his own.

“I may as well take care of some unfinished business. Since you’ve discovered me—no use letting you spread the word.” Russell answers, moving the gun from side to side.

“You wouldn’t dare.” Connie responds, trying to stall for time until her friend arrives.

“Lady, you have no idea.” Russell says.

At that moment Sam, the cook from the Mint Julep Tavern, comes out of the back door with intentions of throw a pot of boiling water in the vicinity of a stray dog he assumes is outside prowling around again. He has warned

the animal several times to keep away and he's hoping the sight of it will frighten him. Sam would never hurt him, though.

When Sam sees Russell with the gun, he throws the water at his legs instead. Russell drops the gun shrieking with pain. Darrin then takes the opportunity to dive for it and retrieves it from the ground.

"Thanks, Sam—better get an ambulance for this one." Darrin replies, pulling out the cuffs from his back pocket and putting them carefully on Russell.

"He won't be giving you any more trouble, Officer Cunningham. I never cared for that character. He's rude to Bonnie and most of our patrons. What did he do anyway?" Sam becomes curious.

"He killed Percy Webster's widow. Just call an ambulance, will ya Sam." Darrin requests while looking at the extent of Russell's wounds. He has severe burns on both legs and minor damage to his hands.

"I want to press charges against that idiot. He could have killed me." Russell bemoans.

"Oh, like what you were planning to do to Darrin and me?" Connie queries cuttingly.

Within a few moments the ambulance appears with a couple of police cars. Buffy still hasn't made it yet.

When Buffy makes it to her car at the Webster's home she decides to check her portable surveillance equipment she has stored in the trunk of her car. She notices that it probably has been beeping for some time.

"Oh my gosh! I wonder how long that thing has been going on?" Buffy replies and Jacolby comes to her aid.

"Is that what I think it is?" He looks at Buffy in surprise.

"Yeah, when Connie and I were snooping around the Brunswick Estate, we happen to find it. It seems that they have been keeping tabs on several stockholders." Buffy offers.

"Well I'll be—let me look at that signal. It looks like it's coming from the Mint Julep Taverns." Buffy looks at Jacolby in horror. "C'mon, I'll take you there."

Buffy follows Jacolby to his car and they speed down the road in the direction of the tavern. It's not too long before they reach their destination. There are several squad cars and an ambulance on the scene. Buffy looks around and is relieved to see both Connie and Officer Cunningham safe. She also sees a man with both his legs taped up and an IV drip in his left arm.

"Who's that?" Buffy questions as Connie heads in her direction.

"That would be that blackmailing Russell Armstrong." Jacolby states between clenched teeth. Connie arrives soon.

"He confessed to everything. Apparently, he was going to blackmail Mrs. Webster along with you Jacolby. Unfortunately, she had other plans and as a result—"

Before anyone can stop him, Jacolby lunges toward the man lying on the stretcher and begins choking him. It takes quite a few police officers to finally pry Jacolby loose from Russell who is coughing and sputtering at the same time.

"I'll sue you—you and that damn cook."

"I very seriously doubt if that's going to do you any good where you are going." Officer Cunningham retorts, reassuming his role as arresting policeman.

The paramedics load Russell into the ambulance. The medication finally taking effect—he lies back and falls into a peaceful sleep.

Connie looks at Buffy, "And where were you, dear friend?"

At County General Hospital, Abbie has fully recovered from the surgery and the doctor's prognosis is good.

"I believe she will have a full regaining of her cognitive skills." Surgeon Callahan tells Nathan. "We'll just have to wait and see if her clairvoyant abilities return, though."

"I am just fine." Abbie tells them. "I remember everything that happened.

"Don't you think you need to rest a little more?" Nathan questions.

“I’ve been doing that for a while now, haven’t I?” Abbie reprimands. “Your wife has had herself quite an adventure, hasn’t she?”

“You can say that again.” Buffy, along with Connie and Inspector Riley enter the room. Officer Cunningham is still at the 10th Precinct filling out a lot of forms.

“I see that you caught that man who hit me from the back. He’s also the one that killed Mrs. Webster. She wanted to see me about everything that has happened. It’s unfortunate that she chose that spot. The Grand Worthington Hotel has a history of death, degradation, and despair. It’s time somebody turned that around.” Abbie replies wryly.

“And I plan to do just that.” Connie enters the room, and everyone smiles.

The End