

Fortunes are made and lives destroyed in...

The House of Kane

A dramatic cityscape at night, likely New York City, with a lightning bolt striking the Empire State Building. The sky is dark and stormy, and the city lights are glowing.

From the Author of
The Coach's Wife and Shyla's Initiative

**BARBARA
CASEY** A Novel

THE HOUSE OF KANE

A Novel by

BARBARA CASEY



ArcheBooks Publishing

THE HOUSE OF KANE

By
BARBARA CASEY

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DEDICATION

To Al, for his patience and understanding
of this writer's temperament;

To my parents, George and Charlotte Woods,
for always believing in me;

To my daughters, Carla and Rene,
for keeping me supplied with inspiration;

To John and Dan, for giving
so much happiness to those I love;

And to Sophia Belle, for sharing that magical
joy
that can be experienced only by a child.

With love.

For Hemingway

**OTHER BOOKS BY
BARBARA CASEY**

The Coach's Wife

Shyla's Initiative

Grandma Jock and Christabelle

Leilani Zan

Simultaneously wise and poignant, exotic and suspenseful, *House of Kane* is a fascinating story of loyalty, treachery and the power of destiny. With an insider's view into the world of high stakes publishing, Barbara Casey weaves a masterful story that haunts the reader long after the final page.

NANCY STEINBECK

Author of *The Other Side
of Eden: Life with John Steinbeck*

Barbara Casey's *House of Kane* is a touchingly tender love story, set in an intrigue-riddled publishing industry. Her characters are interesting and varied. Her story is refreshing and engagingly told. Aspiring writers will want to read *House of Kane* to tap her wisdom about getting into print.

JOHN DEDAKIS

CNN Senior Copy Editor
Author of *Fast Track*

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PROLOGUE

If you bring forth what is inside you, what you bring forth will save you. If you do not bring forth what is inside you, what is inside you will destroy you.

ST. THOMAS
Gnostic Gospels

Timothy Richards switched off his computer not waiting for it to go through the normal shut-down procedure and rushed out of his office. He would probably have hell to pay in the morning when he tried to turn it back on. It had a tendency to lock up or lose files whenever he turned it off prematurely, but at the moment he didn't care. He paused in

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front of the elevator, saw from the indicator that it was stopped on the sixth floor, and took the stairs instead, racing down the two flights in the building where he worked for a computer consulting firm. He was leaving work early, especially for a Tuesday, when there were time sheets to prepare, but he had plenty of comp time coming if anyone complained. Sick leave, too, if he had to use it.

His wife had said that the envelope was a cream color and that it had Kane Publishing House on the return address. That meant it wasn't the plain white envelope he always included with his submissions. The ones that were usually returned with a form letter rejecting his manuscript. No, this was the Kane Publishing House stationery, which hopefully indicated its contents held more than a form rejection letter.

Outside, he literally sprinted to the last row of the parking lot where he had left his 1987 Toyota earlier that morning. It was where he normally parked since that was where he could get the best view of the intracoastal waterway each morning before going into the building and again late in the afternoon before returning home. He liked seeing the yachts lazily navigating the north-south water lane and to imagine what it would be like if he owned one. Now, however, he cursed the parking lot, he cursed the distance from the building to his car, and he cursed his own blind stupidity for even parking there in the first place.

It was June and the hot, humid south Florida temperature was brutal. Normally there was a slight breeze stirring off the intracoastal, but on this afternoon there was nothing. He

could feel the sweat rolling down his sides and back, underneath his shirt. After fumbling with the keys, he finally got the ignition turned on. He rolled down the windows since the air conditioner didn't work and stomped the accelerator several times in an attempt to start the engine. The car jerked backwards in one sudden movement out of the parking space, reminding him once again that the transmission needed replacing.

It had been four weeks to the day when he sent off the rewritten copy of *The Ancients*, an historical novel based on the life of the Roman Emperor Hadrian. The first version had been rejected outright by seventeen publishers, the last one being Kane, who suggested he find a professional editor to help him. After making several inquiries, he located someone by the name of Aislinn Marchánt. She was a freelance editorial consultant who had a reputation for her thoroughness and accuracy. Several manuscripts she had edited had been published by major publishing houses. She had her own publishing credits that were quite impressive as well. Someone told him that she was recently divorced from Robert Marchánt, the chief surgeon at West Palm Beach Regional Hospital, but, best of all, she lived in El Cid, the old, established residential area of West Palm Beach, conveniently not too far from his office.

Hiring her had been expensive; his wife had stayed mad at him for two weeks over that one. But he saw it as an investment rather than a frivolous waste of money as his wife claimed, and he was right. Aislinn's edit of his manuscript had been comprehensive and critical. When he finally finished

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doing the rewrite and making all the changes, he was so pleased with the results that he even signed up for the two-week creative writing class she was teaching at Coastal College. Since it was held in the evenings, it was usually simple enough for him to go there directly from work. Tonight would be the final class.

It was Aislinn who had suggested that he rewrite the novel in first person rather than third, among other things, and to approach the subject of Hadrian's wall as another character. The results gave life and feeling to a story that was otherwise just another dry academic treatment of ancient Rome and one of its emperors. Aislinn worked with Timothy for three months on his rewrite. As soon as he finished, he sent it back to Kane Publishing House along with a copy of Aislinn's original written evaluation and editing suggestions. He wanted this publisher to know that he was serious about getting published, so much so that he had hired a professional editor.

Timothy turned off Olive Street and took a side street to avoid the red traffic light at the busy intersection ahead. If Kane published his book, he wouldn't have to worry about money so much. He'd be able to get some things taken care of—like his damn car. Maybe he could even quit his job and start writing full-time, which is what he wanted to do. He knew that Elizabeth, his wife, wanted things too—motherhood, for one. For some reason, though, that hadn't happened. Not yet, anyway. He couldn't help but feel that Elizabeth blamed him somehow, and that she tied it in with

his desire to write. If he were to get published, maybe she wouldn't feel that way. If he were to get published, maybe she would get pregnant, and then she could quit that dead-end bookkeeping job with the construction outfit she worked for.

Five minutes later, he pulled into his driveway and screeched to a stop. Elizabeth was waiting at the front door, lips tightly drawn, with the envelope in her hand. The last eight years, ever since he decided he could be a writer, had been hard on her. They rarely did anything together other than eat the evening meal. Whenever they talked, it was usually complaining about work or money. Whatever spare time he had was spent on writing. If *The Ancients* got published, though, he would make it up to her. He would take some time off so the two of them could go somewhere just for fun. Then he would start his next book.

Together they went to the kitchen table, the place where all of their important matters were handled, and sat down. Hands trembling, beads of sweat covering his upper lip, Timothy slit open the envelope and pulled out the letter.

Dear Mr. Richards:

After careful consideration of your manuscript, *The Ancients*, I am pleased to inform you of our decision to offer you a contract, two copies to be sent under separate cover. After you receive the contract, please sign both copies and return them for countersignature. I am looking forward to working with you.

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Please contact my office if you have any questions or concerns.

Yours sincerely,

Caldwell Kane
Publisher

Timothy grabbed his squealing, tearful wife and spun her around the room. Then he read the letter again just to be sure he hadn't misunderstood. He lightly brushed his fingers across the gold embossed letters KPH in the upper left-hand corner and then, overcome with emotion, covered his face with the letter. This was what he had been hoping for. All those years of rejections; the frustrations and self-doubt; the late nights of writing until five or six in the morning, only to have to stop and get ready to go to work exhausted; the stress on his marriage. Even the other employees where he worked had started kidding him, calling him "Mr. Shakespeare" to his face and making jokes about him behind his back. He was sick of being asked, "Have you gotten published yet?" The cost had been high; with each rejection letter, a new humiliation to suffer. It was all worth it now. This is what it had been about. Now he could say he was an author; and yes, dammit, he was published. His dream had finally come true.

PART ONE

CHAPTER 1

You don't write because you want to say something; you write because you've got something to say.

F. SCOTT FITZGERALD

“But I still don't understand why I can't write a story about a little girl's best friend who happens to be a dragon.” This was the third time Aislinn had tried to explain, and the whine in the woman's voice was starting to become annoying. A large man sitting in the back of the room coughed loudly and shuffled his feet in irritation.

“It is important to write on themes that haven't been overdone. There are already several hundred titles out there in the children's market about friendly dragons. Publishers want to see something new, something that hasn't been tried before.”

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The woman just kept shaking her head, and Aislinn knew it was useless to try to explain further. Gloria Hart was one of those writers who had blinders on where her own writing was concerned. She couldn't accept constructive criticism, no matter how valuable it was. Aislinn glanced at her watch. It was ten o'clock already.

"It is getting late, so if there are no more questions..."

"I have just one more, Aislinn, if you don't mind. How do publishers feel about using profanity in middle grade or young adult novels? After all, it does seem to be a part of the culture now."

"That's a good question, George." George Weston was a retired US Marine Corps Captain who was writing a nonfiction photographic journal on little-known skirmishes that occurred in the South Pacific during World War II. Aislinn was quite sure it was filled with profanity, and justifiably so no doubt. "Most publishers prefer not to include it. They feel there are enough legitimate descriptive words that can be used without promoting something that is, for the most part, negative or in bad taste. This is true in adult novels as well, by the way. There are exceptions, of course, as in everything."

"Like another friendly dragon story," added Gloria.

Aislinn ignored her. "This has been a pleasant two weeks for me, class. I have seen a lot of talent, and I want to wish you all the best in your writing endeavors. Thank you all for coming these past two weeks and for making my job so enjoyable."

Everyone started getting together their papers, notepads,

briefcases in some cases, and anything else they had brought to class. Several men and women came up to Aislinn to thank her. She had given them help as well as hope. Now when they returned to their normal daily lives as hair dressers, computer programmers, teachers, homemakers, and factory workers, they would have a better sense of how to achieve the goal of also becoming published.

With the classroom empty, Aislinn walked briskly down the corridor and through the side door exit into the darkness of night. She was at once aware of the scent of sweet jasmine, probably growing in the nearby arbor, and the thick, humid air enveloping her like an invisible damp sheet. It too had a scent, but more of the earth. She felt her hair coil into ringlets, especially where it was cut short around her face, a characteristic of naturally curly hair over which she had no control.

Since this was the last session, there had been more questions during class than usual. A few of her students had brought copies of their manuscripts to give to her to take home and edit. Then she had to gather all of her own papers together. Everyone was gone. The other classes being taught in the same building as part of the Coastal College continuing education program had been dismissed long ago.

Her car was parked in an area that was illuminated, but just barely, and located at the opposite end of Sedgfield Hall from where she had just come. She considered briefly going back inside to see if there was anyone around who would walk with her to her car, but then dismissed the idea. She was just

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being silly. She breathed in deeply and then slowly released the air through her mouth, trying to relieve the anxiety she could feel building up inside of her.

Her writing course, “From Printed Page to Publisher,” had gone extremely well, with more than twice the enrollment of the previous year. She had already received an offer of a contract renewal for next summer. Aislinn enjoyed teaching creative writing. The two weeks during the summer provided a break from her usual routine of writing and being a freelance editor, and the pay was good. It also introduced her to new writers who would hire her to evaluate their manuscripts after the course was completed.

All of her students were adults with day-time jobs, but who were taking her course because they really cared about writing. Several of her students, in this class particularly, displayed an unusual amount of talent. One elderly Chinese woman, Mrs. Mon-Sun Norcroft, had written and illustrated with charcoal and water colors a picture book that beautifully and simply demonstrated the Eastern philosophy of *chi*. Aislinn felt sure it would get published by one of the major houses. She had even given her the names of some editors to contact.

A retired judge was working on a nonfiction memoir of criminal court cases over which he had presided during his long tenure on the bench. Somewhat impatient with the submissions rules and guidelines required by publishers, he had typed his manuscript single-spaced, and it was filled with typographical errors and penciled-in notes. It was his contention

that the publisher would “fix” it. Aislinn finally convinced him that in order for it to even get read by a publisher, his manuscript had to follow the basic rules of grammar and formatting, which meant double spaced with proper headers.

Another man who worked in computer technology had written an historical novel which Aislinn had edited a few months prior to the start of her course. The spelling and grammar in it were atrocious, and the story line was disjointed and difficult to follow. But the theme and his presentation of facts were solid and unique. He had an unusually strong writing style that Aislinn felt showed promise with just a little guidance. She was surprised but delighted when he showed up to take her class, and on this final night, he had informed her that he had been offered a contract from Kane Publishing House for his novel. She couldn't have been more pleased. She remembered when she received an offer of publication for her first book. It was a middle-grade novel, there was no advance, and only five thousand copies were printed. But it didn't matter. More than anything else, she felt she was finally validated. With that contract she crossed over from being just a writer to being an author, and once she did she didn't slow down.

Aislinn felt around in her purse until she found her car keys. Tightening her grip on her briefcase, she walked in the direction of her car, reminding herself that since she had been teaching at Coastal College, there hadn't been any problem with security. In fact, in the fifteen years the small coeducational college had been operating, there had never been even

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the slightest hint of a problem. For some reason, though, in the two weeks she had been teaching her writing course, Aislinn's instincts seemed to be warning her of danger or some impending disaster, and her instincts were seldom wrong.

Maybe it was the fact that it was a night class, and by the time each session ended it was already dark. Or maybe she just needed a break from everything. She couldn't even remember the last time she had taken time off just to relax. Certainly not since her divorce. She had even considered the possibility that she was starting her "change of life," even though she was only thirty-seven years old, and maybe the hormonal activity was causing her to be more nervous than usual. That still didn't explain the fact that sometimes she felt she was being followed, even though she never actually saw anyone.

Several times there had been strange phone calls—annoyance calls with implied threatening or sexual undertones more than anything else—always to her answering machine at home when she wasn't there, in a voice that sounded muffled and distorted. The last call she received was two nights ago when she returned home from her writing class. Then just yesterday morning she received an instant message in her email from someone called the *Predator* which read: *Does it feel strange to know that I know when you are working?*

At the time she received it, it was still early and she had just logged onto the Internet to do some research. Startled, she immediately deleted the message and went about her work, but it left an uncomfortable feeling that she hadn't been able to shake off. Now she was wondering if perhaps she had

deleted the message too hastily, and that she should have notified the authorities about it.

“Ms. Marchánt?”

Aislinn jumped at the touch of someone’s hand on her arm.

“Sorry. I didn’t mean to frighten you.”

It was one of the men from her class, Roy Mathews. He had been trying to write a middle-grade fantasy mystery novel that smacked heavily of the Harry Potter books. With her encouragement and a lot of suggestions, he had changed his focus from witchcraft and magic to an adventure that was contemporary and realistic. In his rewrite, the characters were more three-dimensional; the plot was stronger. He had worked hard on it.

“I was just wondering if it would be all right if I send you my manuscript when I have finished making these last changes you suggested? Since tonight was the final session, I would like to have you edit the whole thing and help me find some publishers to send it to. That is, if you think it is good enough that a publisher would even want to look at it.” He smiled self-consciously.

Aislinn thought about the work waiting for her at home—a box of unanswered phone messages and correspondence that she hadn’t been able to look at in the past two weeks, the stack of manuscripts on her desk to be evaluated and edited, plus the ones she had been given that night, and her own novel, a metaphysical fiction, she was longing to work on.

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“I would be happy to, Roy.” She reached into her briefcase and pulled out one of the brochures she always carried with her along with her business card. “This explains my fee structure,” she said handing him the folded paper. “Make sure you send me only a copy, not the original, and, of course, a stamped, self-addressed envelope.”

“Will do,” he said smiling more openly. His mouth became more centered on his face. “I’ll talk to you later, then. Thanks, again.” He walked off in the opposite direction.

Aislinn enjoyed working with writers and illustrators and guiding them through the submission process. She had found that most people who asked for her help, however, had a desire to write, but too often they didn’t want to take the time or make the effort necessary to perfect what they had written before submitting it to a publisher. Aislinn blamed the computer for a lot of it. The computer made it so easy just to dash off a story and send it out to several publishers at once, not giving any thought to whether the story was suitable material for a particular publishing house or not, or even if the story was any good.

There was also a lack of objectivity in these writers, and an inability to judge their own work, the Gloria Harts of the world. It was the end they were interested in—a filmy dream of fame and fortune—not the journey it took to reach that end. There were some, however, who enjoyed the journey and who also revealed that certain sparkle in their writing. They were the ones who would do whatever was necessary to get it right, no matter how long it took or how much work. They

had the talent and they had the instinct. Roy Mathews was one, as was Timothy Richards. They were the ones who eventually succeeded in getting published. Aislinn had helped a few to achieve that goal. She regretted there weren't more, however.

Safely locked in her car with her seat belt on, Aislinn drove out of the parking area and headed north to the historical district of El Cid twelve miles away where she lived. Her home, part of the divorce settlement from her husband of three years, was a two-story Spanish style stucco built in the early 1900's and located a block from the intracoastal, the primary north-south water route for motorboats, yachts and sailing vessels. The house was positioned more or less in the center of two lots and completely enclosed by a six-foot stucco wall and black, wrought iron gates. She loved her home with its tall ficus hedges, climbing red bougainvillea, and detached garage. Grapefruit and orange trees that produced fruit on a regular basis filled in one far corner of the yard. Up closer to the main house, she had completely redone the flower beds, tearing out the old diseased and decayed plantings that had become much too overgrown, replacing them with the yellow-flowered alamanda, blue plumbago, and orange ixora. Those same three colors she had also carried inside her home, in fabrics, tiles, and the many decorative accessories she had collected on her occasional trips, at home and abroad, giving lectures and workshops.

The house itself had large, spacious rooms, and the thick plastered, ocher-colored walls helped keep it cool during the

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hot south Florida summers. Aislinn's office was upstairs, just off her bedroom. Because it was located in the front of the house and faced directly east, she could easily see the intra-coastal and whatever nautical activity was passing by. Watching an occasional yacht or sailboat relaxed her and helped her to better organize her thoughts when she was working.

Aislinn's home was her sanctuary. It was where she allowed her imagination total freedom in order to create, and it was where she helped others to create. When she wasn't writing or editing, she worked in the yard, weeding, pruning her flowers and shrubs, adding a water garden here, a concrete bench there—personal touches that helped her feel in touch with her innermost self and everything around her. It was also the place where she could be completely separate and apart from the rest of the world. Aislinn Marchánt thrived on privacy, which made her anxiety over being followed, the unexplained phone calls, and the strange email even more worrisome. One of her students from the previous summer was a county sheriff. He had told her if she ever needed anything to let him know. Maybe she would give him a call.

Aislinn pushed the button on the remote she kept in her car which opened the large iron gates leading onto her property and drove in. The gates closed behind her automatically. She had left several lights on outside as well as inside the house. Even with the longer summer days, it was still always dark by the time she got home. Now that she was divorced and living alone, she couldn't be too careful. Leaving the

lights on also made it more cheerful for her small Seraphim Maltese who waited patiently for her to return from these four-to-five-hour sessions.

Aislinn unlocked the door and was immediately greeted by a five-pound fluff of long white hair named Hemingway. Hemingway had been a present from her husband the previous year when she received special recognition by the National Association of Writers for her collection of short stories. Since that time, he had been her constant companion.

“Well, hello, Mr. Hemingway.”

The small dog lovingly wove the figure eight around her legs with his small wriggling body, all the while grunting and displaying a full set of perfect, white teeth in a happy smile.

Aislinn put down her briefcase and scooped him up into her arms, nuzzling his soft silky fur and smothering him in tiny kisses. “You are such a good boy. I bet you have to go outside.”

She reached for his leash which she kept on a hook near the back door and slipped it around his neck. On the table next to the door she noticed the blinking light on her telephone answering machine, indicating that there was one message. She leaned over and pushed the button to see who it was.

This is Caldwell Kane and I would like to speak to Ms. Aislinn Marchánt. Please call me either this

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*evening before eleven o'clock or tomorrow morning,
any time after seven.*

Reaching for the pen she kept nearby for that purpose, Aislinn scribbled down the telephone number.

Caldwell Kane.

She knew who he was, of course, but she had never dealt with him personally. Caldwell was the third generation to take control of the family-owned Kane Publishing House. Over the years, through mergers and acquisitions, as well as natural fruition, Kane had become one of the largest publishing houses in the country. The number of titles it published annually listed well over a thousand, and many of them consistently made it to the *New York Times* list of bestselling books in both fiction and nonfiction. The name of Kane appeared regularly in *Writer's Digest*, *Publishers Weekly*, and other news and trade periodicals. Most recently, Aislinn had read that Caldwell Kane, now age sixty, was expanding their children's line with two new imprints in addition to opening another office in South America, Brazil she thought, in order to break into the Spanish language market. When all the other publishers seemed to be scratching for blood to just barely stay alive, Kane's tenth house, astrologically speaking, was definitely on the rise.

So why was Caldwell Kane calling her? She replayed the message. For a man who made a living from words, he certainly used them sparingly.

Hemingway was licking Aislinn on her cheek in rapid-fire

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strokes to remind her of her duty. She glanced at the clock; it was a few minutes before eleven. Well, Caldwell would just have to wait until morning. At the moment, she had more urgent matters to attend to.

“Okay, Hemingway. Let’s go outside.”

CHAPTER 2

Writing, at its best, is a lonely life. Organizations for writers palliate the writer's loneliness, but I doubt if they improve his writing. He grows in public stature as he sheds his loneliness and often his work deteriorates. For he does his work alone and if he is a good enough writer he must face eternity, or the lack of it, each day.

ERNEST HEMINGWAY

Dr. Robert Marchánt walked along the quiet, deserted corridor, head down, half-framed reading glasses perched on the end of his nose, clipboard in his hand by his side. It was five o'clock in the morning, the time he routinely checked on the hospital patients, read their medical charts from the night before, and confirmed schedules with the head nurse on duty.

There were three surgeries scheduled before noon that day, two of them routine—a tonsillectomy on a six-year-old boy and a gall bladder extraction on a fifty-two-year-old man. Then there was a heart by-pass on an eighty-three-year-old woman. That one could be a little tricky; there was always the possibility of things going wrong in someone that old. But it shouldn't pose any problems; she was strong and healthy in every other respect. Her doctor performing the surgery was qualified and experienced, as were the other two surgeons scheduled that morning. Robert, being chief surgeon, wouldn't have it any other way. He glanced at his watch. The first surgery, the tonsillectomy, would be underway shortly.

Since being named chief surgeon, and along with that an appointment to the board of directors at West Palm Beach Regional, everything at the hospital had changed—and for the better. A new administration had taken over, the mortality rate had dropped from six percent to less than one percent. The staff was energized, its morale high, and for the first time in fifteen years, the hospital was showing a profit. His own reputation as one of the nation's leading neurosurgeons was attracting doctors from around the world wanting to be associated with him, offering their services in those critical cases needing their expertise. As a result, new sources of government as well as private funding were being received on a regular basis. A state-of-the-arts cardiac unit had been added in the past year, and a new Alzheimer's facility was two-third's complete.

As with any large medical facility, of course, there contin-

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ued to be problems in spite of the successes. Blood supplies were consistently low, the turnover in personnel was still too high, and Robert, himself, needed to delegate more instead of trying to personally oversee everything that took place. Nevertheless, even with these problems, in just three years West Palm Beach Regional Hospital had taken its place among the premiere health facilities in the country, and it was all because of Dr. Robert Marchánt.

“Good morning, doctor.” Margaret Peters, the head nurse, was expecting Robert and had the patient files ready for him.

“Nurse Peters.” He nodded and took the files, carefully scanning the information in each one. On a couple of the files he made notations to the doctor in charge; from others he copied information into a small black book which he kept with him at all times. “Let me know when Dr. Turner gets in.” He handed the files back to the nurse.

“Yes, sir.” The nurse watched Dr. Marchánt walk down the hall to his office located at the far end. “What a waste,” she muttered under her breath.

Everyone in the hospital knew he was divorced now, even though he hadn’t said anything about it. News like that just got out. And she wasn’t the only nurse who had her eye on him, either. In fact, several of the women doctors had been coming around the second floor nurses’ station lately, supposedly on business, but she knew better. Different make-up, new hair styles, perfume strong enough to trigger a migraine; Dr. Marchánt would definitely be a good catch in anyone’s book. He was still relatively young—forty-five, he was good

looking in that strong, silent kind of way, and he obviously had money. The only thing she could see that might be on the downside was his almost obsessive dedication to his work. She had heard, in fact, that that was the reason he and his wife had divorced. Apparently his wife was some sort of writer or editor, and as anyone can tell you, a two-career marriage is difficult at best.

Margaret Peters sighed and glanced at the clock on the wall behind her. Several of the nurses under her charge were returning from their early-morning routines. It would soon be time for the cafeteria to start sending up the breakfast trays. Before that, though, she needed to check all of the medications going to the different patients. As head nurse, that was her responsibility; that, and keeping all of the other nurses on their toes.



In his office Robert sat down at his desk and pulled out a folder from the locked bottom drawer. In it was a large envelope marked "X-rays." Just as he pulled them out, there was a knock on his door. It was Josh Turner.

"Did you get those X-rays I sent you?"

"I'm looking at them now. It doesn't look too good, does it?"

"You know the answer to that better than I do. All I know is, the sooner you get it taken care of, the better off you will be. I assume you want me to do the surgery since you came to

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me in the first place. If that is the case, then as your doctor I want to schedule you for Friday morning.”

Robert didn't say anything. It was already Wednesday. That only left Thursday, and there was just so damn much happening right now at the hospital. The last thing he needed was to get tied down to a hospital bed, even for just a couple of days. But Josh was right. He had to get it taken care of it as soon as possible. There was too much of a risk involved not to. Delaying it could result in another transient ischemic attack. It was just a matter of time before it would lead to a stroke. That was the nature of plaque in the carotid artery.

As far as Robert could tell, there had been five attacks in the past four weeks: a sudden weakness and tingling on his left side, a blurring of vision, difficulty in swallowing. Each attack had been slightly worse than the one previous. During the fifth attack, he had momentarily lost his coordination. That was when he went to see Josh Turner. He and Josh had gone through Duke Medical School together. They had specialized in the same field, neurology, and then, ironically, they both wound up in south Florida. He trusted Josh completely.

Josh immediately gave Robert a complete physical examination which included a blood profile and an endarterectomy. The results confirmed what Robert already suspected. He had a significant plaque build-up in his carotid artery. Had it been someone else, Josh might have recommended first using anti-coagulants in order to improve the arterial blood supply to the brain thus avoiding stroke, but the amount of plaque was so great he didn't want to take a chance that the drugs might not

work.

As in all surgeries, especially those involving the brain, there were risk factors: brain damage, paralysis, irreversible stroke. As a surgeon, Robert was aware of each and every one of them.

“Go ahead and schedule it, then,” said Robert. “But try to make it in the afternoon. I’ll get someone to cover for me while I am incapacitated. Do you know if Mack Courie is back from his honeymoon yet?”

“I believe I heard someone mention that he was. He could certainly take care of your patients for a few days.” Josh waited to see if Robert wanted to say anything else. He wouldn’t go into his usual explanation of what to expect as he normally did with his patients. Robert’s knowledge of this type of surgery was extensive. Robert also knew what his chances were of getting through it without any negative side effects. Hopefully, there would be none.

After Josh left, Robert closed the folder and put it back in the drawer—away from wandering eyes. Most of the staff were trustworthy and reliable, but they were also curious. For the first time in his life, he felt vulnerable, like he was seeing his own mortality being taken from him. So many times he had heard his own patients say the same thing. He said he understood, but he really didn’t—not until now. He stood up and walked to the window wondering if this is what it was going to come down to. After all the work and sacrifice, is this how it was going to end?

Aislinn.

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He wanted to talk to Aislinn. Even though they were no longer married, she was the one person he could talk to. She would be able to help him get his head back on straight. She would understand because she knew him as no other person did.

Just then the red light located above the door began flashing, a warning device that Robert had insisted be installed when he first took over as chief surgeon at West Palm Beach Regional. It tied in directly to the surgery room upstairs. Briefly he thought of the scheduled surgeries for that morning. The heart by-pass wasn't supposed to take place until ten o'clock. Robert rushed out into the hall and to the main nurses' station.

Something was wrong.

Margaret quickly handed Robert the phone. The nurse on the other end of the line relayed the message. It was the six-year-old boy. There was hemorrhaging. Apparently his blood wouldn't clot. He needed a blood transfusion, but his was a rare blood type, AB-Rh negative.

Robert threw the phone down and quickly explained what was happening to Margaret. "Get hold of his parents and any other relatives who are here at the hospital with them and get them tested. We need blood now. Let me know what you find out. I'll be in surgery."

He disappeared into the private express elevator leading up to the third floor where all of the operations were performed. This wasn't supposed to happen. A tonsillectomy was as routine as you could get. And yet they were going to lose a

six-year-old child because the hospital didn't have reserves of AB negative blood. Exiting the elevator, he immediately went to the gallery where he could see everything taking place. Dr. Miller was working frantically trying to stop the flow of blood. The heart monitor and respirator were fluctuating, an indication of problems.

The phone in the gallery buzzed. It was Nurse Peters. There was an aunt with the same type. They would send up the first amount in a matter of minutes. More would soon follow.

Robert pressed the intercom button on the wall next to the window where he was standing. "Dr. Miller, blood is on the way. Hang in there."

Miller glanced up at the gallery and nodded. A nurse wiped the perspiration off his forehead. He secured a clamp just above the one he had already attached to the artery. Another monitor sounded and then showed a straight green line. Miller ordered the electrical cardioversion to be administered. The green line fluttered, and then went straight again.

Robert gripped the handrail in front of him. "Don't lose him, dammit, don't lose him."

Moments later a nurse ran in with the life-saving blood, the blood from the child's aunt, and handed it to one of the nurses on the surgical team. She quickly and efficiently hooked it up to the intravenous tube already inserted in the boy's arm in order to start the transfusion. Once again Miller ordered the electrical cardioversion.

Nothing happened.

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Later that morning, a follow-up examination determined that the boy had suffered a heart attack, and that was the cause of death rather than the loss of blood. Knowing that didn't help when Robert went with Miller to try to explain to the parents why their son, Julio, was dead.



After walking Hemingway, Aislinn took a quick shower and dressed in shorts and a T-shirt. Rather than taking time to style her hair with the blow dryer and curling iron, she brushed it up off her neck and tied it with a ribbon. It was easier that way and a lot cooler. She could be casual since she planned to stay home and work all day.

With Hemingway settled with his toys, and her favorite yellow-flowered mug filled with fresh hot coffee on her desk, she turned on her computer and began working on her own novel where she had left off two weeks earlier. She was so absorbed in her work, she didn't even notice how late it was getting until Hemingway scratched at her desk chair indicating that he needed to go outside. By then it was almost noon. On her way out the back door she noticed the telephone number she had written down the night before. She slipped the leash around Hemingway's neck, promising herself she would return Caldwell Kane's call as soon as she came back in.

The efficient-sounding woman who answered the phone at the publishing house put Aislinn through without any wait once she identified herself.

“Thank you for returning my call, Ms. Marchánt. I have something I would like to discuss with you, and I think you will find it interesting.” Caldwell Kane’s deep voice was more soft-spoken than Aislinn had expected. She also sensed a certain amount of tension in it. Regardless, he had certainly gotten her full attention.

“I must tell you, Mr. Kane, you have me extremely curious.”

“Please call me Caldwell, and may I call you Aislinn?”

Aislinn didn’t know whether to be flattered or frightened. “Certainly.”

“It means ‘inspiration’ but I am sure you already know that.”

Aislinn felt she had been tossed into another dimension. Had she missed part of the conversation?

He quickly picked up on her silence. “Your name. Aislinn. It is from the Greek word meaning ‘inspiration.’ It is very pretty and very appropriate.”

“Oh, I see. Yes, I did know that. My great grandmother was Greek, and I was named after her.”

Caldwell certainly didn’t waste time on any preliminaries.

“Aislinn, the reason I called is that recently a manuscript came across my desk that you had edited. Earlier I had seen the original draft of this same manuscript, and I have to say in all honesty that it wasn’t the worst I have ever read, but it was close. What you were able to do with it is something just short of a miracle.”

He had to be talking about *The Ancients*. “Are you refer-

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ring to Timothy Richard's manuscript?"

"Yes. That was good work, Aislinn. In all of my years in publishing, that was the most thorough and imaginative job of editing I have ever had the pleasure of reading. In fact, I have offered Mr. Richards a contract."

"Well, thank you, Mr. Kane, for your kind words. That is so nice of you."

"Caldwell."

"Yes...Caldwell."

"Which brings me to my purpose for calling you. I'm not sure how familiar you are with Kane Publishing House."

"I know it is one of the largest and most respected houses on either side of the Atlantic. And that it was started by your grandfather."

Caldwell chuckled. "Back then there was just my grandfather and one assistant working in the back room of a dry goods store. The first year they managed to publish two slim volumes. One was a reference book on herbal home remedies, and the other was a collection of poetry that my grandmother had written. That was probably the reason my grandfather went into the business in the first place—so my grandmother would have someone to publish her poetry. Family stories have her as a fairly head-strong woman. In just a few years, however, those two volumes grew to over twenty-five. That was when my father, Carl, took over the business, eventually passing it down to me. At the present time in the home office here in New York, we have eight associate editors, including my two sons, Jason and Tyler, sixteen assistant editors, and at

last count twenty or so staff assistants.

“Just to tell you a little about our operations here, when we receive a submission, it is first “read” by one of the staff assistants to see if the manuscript follows the general rules of format and also to determine whether it is fiction, nonfiction, or children’s. There is also a miscellaneous pile for things that don’t fall into any category as well as the different genres such as romance, mystery, science fiction, and, of course, poetry. If the manuscript is not formatted correctly, it is returned, providing there is a stamped, self-addressed envelope enclosed. If there is no envelope, the manuscript is recycled. Amazingly, about fifty percent of the submissions we received fall into this category.

“The other fifty percent—fiction, nonfiction, and children’s—are then passed on to the various assistant editors specializing in those categories. The miscellaneous manuscripts are also distributed among the assistant editors. They read the manuscripts for such things as content, theme development, characterization, overall presentation of material, that sort of thing. Out of these, roughly eight out of every ten are rejected. The two that are remaining are then sent to the appropriate associate editor for another read. It is up to the associate editor to determine, in addition to whether it is a good read or not, such things as the practicality of publishing the manuscript, the cost involved, the market, and predicted forecasts for the manuscript’s success once it is published. If the associate editor accepts it, then the manuscript is passed out to the other seven associates and to me to read. The final

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decision is then made at our editorial staff meeting the first Monday of every month.”

So far, the things Caldwell was telling Aislinn were typical of most of the larger publishing houses. She still didn't understand why he had called.

“This brings me to you. I need someone with your talent and ability—no, it's more than that. I need someone with your instinct to ferret out those submissions we receive that have the potential to be good books. In the past several months, we have lost a number of titles to other publishing houses, primarily Sheldon-Talbert Publishing House the best that I can tell, that have gone on to be bestsellers. I don't need to tell you what that has done to our profit margin. These were submissions that had been sent to us first, but for whatever reasons, they were rejected. Most didn't even make it to that final step with the associate editor. Aislinn, I want you to evaluate the manuscripts that come in before they are sent to the associate editors. If there is a manuscript in this group that is rejected by one of the associate editors, but you feel it is good material, then I want to know about it.”

Aislinn was caught completely off guard. She simply didn't know what to say.

Caldwell continued, “This isn't a casual offer, Aislinn. I don't want you to be offended, but I did some checking into your background. I know that you have your own editorial consulting business and that your reputation is sterling. Your own credentials as a writer are unusual in that you are published in fiction, nonfiction, children's and poetry; therefore,

you know the markets and your knowledge of publishing is comprehensive. You have received numerous awards for your published works, you occasionally give workshops around the country, and for the past two summers you have taught a two-week creative writing course to adults at a liberal arts college there in West Palm Beach. I also know that you have been divorced for just a little over a year, and I believe that you were married for slightly less than three years. Is that correct?"

Aislinn ignored his last question. After all, that was private between Robert and herself, and Caldwell Kane seemed to already know enough about her as it was. "Then you must realize that my plate is pretty full already. I don't think at this point I want to change anything." She definitely felt at a disadvantage. He seemed to know so much about her, and she knew absolutely nothing about him.

"I'm not asking you to. What I have in mind should fit easily into what you have already built up for yourself. It would just be a matter of logistics. Basically, I would be hiring you to be a consultant for Kane Publishing; more specifically, for me personally. Each month you would be sent copies of the manuscripts that the associate editors receive. I don't expect you to edit them. All I want from you is your evaluation: Is it something that would benefit the House of Kane if it were to be published? I would also like for you to attend the editorial staff meetings once a month. That way the others will be able to hear your input. You will, of course, receive a monthly salary and all of your expenses will be paid."

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Aislinn did some quick calculations. Even if less than two percent of the submissions made it to an associate editor, it would mean having to read a minimum of twenty or twenty-five manuscripts a month. With all the work she had now, she wasn't sure she could do it.

"Aislinn, there is something else, but I don't care to discuss it over the phone. All I can say is, I really need your help. Don't make up your mind right now. What I would like to suggest is that you come to our next editorial staff meeting. That way you can meet everyone and find out what Kane Publishing House is all about. The meeting is scheduled for nine o'clock Friday morning. You can fly up here tomorrow, spend the night, and then return home following the meeting on Friday."

All of the numbers in Aislinn's head disappeared. She found herself even more curious about Caldwell Kane and what that "something else" was that he couldn't discuss on the phone. She knew he didn't want to hire her just so he wouldn't lose a few titles to other publishing houses. It had to be something more serious. Besides, she loved New York. She and Robert had gone there several times while they were married to see plays, shop, try new restaurants, and to just spend some time together away from their usual routines. It would be nice to go back, even if Robert wasn't with her.

"That sounds like a good idea, Caldwell."

"Wonderful. Mrs. McLaughlin, my secretary, will make all of the arrangements and be back in touch with you later today." For a moment Aislinn thought he was going to say

something else. After a pause she asked, "What was the title of your grandmother's book of poetry?"

Again she heard him laugh. "*A Dusting of Petals*. Apparently it was a pretty good seller in spite of the fact that back then it was considered improper for a woman to write anything other than correspondence and recipes."

After hanging up the phone, Aislinn couldn't get focused enough to work. She kept thinking about her conversation with Caldwell and, strangely enough, his grandmother. She wondered what her name was. Finally, after sitting in front of the computer screen for an hour and having nothing to show for it, she gave up. Besides, with Thursday less than twenty-four hours away, she had a lot of things to take care of before flying off to the Big Apple.

She glanced down at Hemingway who was sitting at her feet with a braided rope, his favorite toy, in his mouth. "Come here, you," she said lifting him up into her arms along with his soggy "stringy." Once she knew what time she would be leaving, she would ask her neighbor, Miss Howard, if she could take care of Hemingway while she was gone.

CHAPTER 3

Writing is an adventure. To begin with, it is a toy and an amusement. Then it becomes a mistress, then it becomes a master, then it becomes a tyrant. The last phase is that just as you are about to be reconciled to your servitude, you kill the monster and fling him to the public.

WINSTON CHURCHILL

Moving slightly beyond the shade of the seventh column, the old man carefully positioned the shopping cart so that its four wheels were perfectly aligned with the expansion cracks in the sidewalk. Then, one by one, he lined up all seven plastic bags in the cart so that they, too, were parallel to the cracks. The bags were important for they contained the sum of everything he owned. Next, he felt the inside pocket of his old jacket for his Bible. He knew all of the Old Testament by

heart and most of the New Testament, but he needed to feel its physical presence. It was there.

The hot sun was now overhead and the shadows had disappeared. It was time to move to the other side of the building, to the recess of another column. This was also the seventh column if you starting counting from where he had just come. In numerology, his birth date added up to seven, as did his name. The number seven was important in his life path. It was the number that controlled his destiny, along with the parallel lines and his Bible. Without these things in his life, the voice would become too loud and the universe would dissolve. Without these things in his life, he wouldn't survive.

Clouds and thick darkness surround him; righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne (Psalm 97:2), the voice reminded him.

With the cart and the bags in place, he was ready to leave the recessed area in the granite façade of the multi-storied building, the area that was hidden from the street by the large Doric columns.

The name on his birth certificate was Clarence Tirell Wood, born 7/11/34. The name on his Army discharge papers was Clarence Tirell Woods, discharged for medical reasons 5/05/69. On the street he was known as "the Professor" because of his love for books. It was also because of his love for books that he chose this particular place to call home. It was the Sheldon-Talbert Publishing House, and he had been living there in its shadowed recesses for two years.

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The bags were his friends. He had named them after the twelve disciples in the New Testament—Matthew, Judas, Thomas, James—he had a bag for each one. Occasionally, he became confused, thinking that the pilgrims in Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* were disciples of Christ, and that he was one of the Canterbury pilgrims, “The Knight,” who, like God, dispensed justice along with mercy. The green leather-bound edition of *Canterbury Tales*, something he had found in the dumpster behind the building, was in one of the bags—the one named “Simon.”

Except for the Bible that he had carried with him into the military service, the dumpster was where he found all of the books and discarded manuscripts he read, along with most of the food he ate. He had read this particular volume of *Canterbury Tales* many times, because, like Chaucer, he considered himself to be a student of physiognomy. Each day he watched the editors entering and leaving the building. He observed how they walked, gestured, and interacted with each other. He also noted other things: a weak chin, slumped shoulders, broad forehead, narrow eyes. From these observations he felt he knew these people, not by name, but by their physical characteristics. He recognized their weaknesses and strengths.

From one of the bags, the one he called “Philip,” he pulled out a calendar and a short, blunt yellow pencil, both salvaged from the dumpster. He placed a big “X” through the date: June 27. It was that time of month when an unexplained activity occurred at the publishing house. Each of the other days were all pretty much the same. The editors arrived in the

morning with large envelopes containing manuscripts they had taken home with them the evening before to read. Other large brown envelopes containing rejected manuscripts that were being returned would get picked up at lunch time by the US Postal Service. But for the past several months, on the last Wednesday of every month, one of the editors brought a large brown envelope back from lunch. She was the only editor to do this, which was why he had noticed it. He had also noticed that she had narrow eyes, an indication of untrustworthiness. According to his calendar, this was the day when she would once again go out to lunch alone and return with a large brown envelope.

He could feel his heart beat a little faster. Identifying the puzzles in life and trying to solve them was what kept him alive. Just like discovering the importance of the number seven in his life and the importance of existing within parallel lines, it had become important that he discover the meaning behind the single brown envelope. It was no longer just a casual interest in what was taking place; there was now a sense of urgency about it.

The sun was directly overhead. Within minutes, just as he had figured, she came out of the building and started walking in the direction of downtown. She was wearing a smart dark gray suit and a bright mustard-colored blouse. Her stockings and high heels matched the suit. He slipped back into the recess of his hiding place just as she glanced around. She didn't see him. She never did. He watched her until she got to the end of the block where she caught a taxi. Now he would wait

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for her to return.

His heart started pounding harder.

Maybe he would be wrong this time, and she would come back empty-handed. He didn't like being wrong. That would upset him. He had gotten upset when that stupid military clerk made a mistake with his name. It threw his life force off balance with the "s" added onto his last name like that. That was when he learned just how important the number seven was in his life. Up until that time, everything had been all right. Everything had been in balance. It was afterwards that he began hearing the voice.

Vengeance is mine, sayeth the Lord (Psalm 94:1), and Clarence Tirell Wood was His instrument.

He placed the calendar and pencil back into the bag, making sure the bag was positioned correctly. The idea of being wrong troubled him. He began quoting a mixture of Bible scripture and quotations from Chaucer. His hands trembled and his eyes began blinking uncontrollably making them feel like they were too large for their sockets. He tried to focus on the parallel lines; he rechecked the wheels on his cart to make sure they were aligned properly. He felt his breast pocket. Rocking back and forth and muttering things that only he could understand, the feeling of panic gradually subsided. Soon the trembling stopped. His eyes stopped blinking.

Watch out for those dogs, those men who do evil, those mutilators of the flesh (Philippians 3:2), he muttered.

Quietly he squatted in the recess of the building behind the seventh column and watched for the editor to return.



“Mrs. McLaughlin, I want you to make plane reservations for Ms. Aislinn Marchánt from West Palm Beach International to La Guardia for early tomorrow afternoon arrival. Book her a room—make that a suite—at the Waldorf Astoria.”

Lorraine McLaughlin scribbled away in her notepad as Caldwell barked his instructions. Immediately after hanging up from talking to Aislinn, he had commandeered his secretary on her way out to lunch, insisting that he had something that needed to be taken care of immediately.

“See that there are fresh flowers delivered to her suite before her arrival. Roses. Red.”

“Do you want a card?”

Caldwell fumbled with a button on his shirt and thought for a moment. He never knew what to write on a card. He could write a five-hundred-page book that sold over 250,000 copies, and had done so many times over the years, but a little card stumped him.

“How about, ‘In celebration of a mutually beneficial arrangement.’”

Mrs. McLaughlin dropped one corner of her red lipsticked mouth, something she had perfected in the nineteen years she had worked as Caldwell Kane’s personal secretary. She had found him to have a good head for business, be knowledgeable on practically every subject, and fairly entertaining to be

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around. But when it came to women, he just seemed to miss the mark somehow. She was convinced it was because he did nothing but read all of the time; that, and the fact that he had been widowed since his two boys were just babies.

“What’s wrong with that?”

“It sounds like you are hiring her to be your prostitute.”

Caldwell’s eyebrows shot up. “Well, what would *you* say?”

“Why don’t you just say, ‘I hope you enjoy your visit to New York.’”

“Isn’t that what I said?”

Mrs. McLaughlin shook her head and scribbled some more notes. “Anything else?”

“Call Ms. Marchánt with the information once you have everything nailed down. And once you have done that, make dinner reservations for two on Thursday night at Apollo’s. Make it early, say around six-thirty.”

“That Greek restaurant?”

“That’s right. Anything wrong with that?”

Mrs. McLaughlin shook her head and smiled. She just loved giving him a hard time. She had worked for his father until his retirement and was ready to retire then as well, thinking that the younger Kane would want to hire his own secretary. But Caldwell wouldn’t let her. He convinced her that the success of the company was in her hands. If she left, it would be the end of the House of Kane. She stayed on, working as Caldwell’s personal secretary and treating him as if he were her own family.

“Anything else?” she asked.

“Could we have something—maybe pastries and coffee—set up in the conference room tomorrow morning for the editorial staff meeting? And maybe some fresh flowers on the table.”

Mrs. McLaughlin scribbled some more notes and then returned to her office to start making phone calls. Lunch could wait. Ms. Marchánt was obviously someone important to Caldwell.



Having talked to Aislinn, Caldwell felt sure he could convince her to work for him. She would understand once he explained everything. Whistling a series of off-key notes, he walked down the hall to his son’s office and stuck his head in the door. “Want to go out for lunch?”

Jason glanced up from the stack of papers he was reading, looked at his watch, then leaned back and stretched. “You buying?”

“Don’t I always?”

Jason grinned and grabbed his jacket hanging on the back of his chair.

“Is Tyler around?”

“Nope.” Jason matched his father’s long stride as they headed toward the main foyer of the office building. “He stopped by earlier and said he had some errands to take care of.”

Caldwell pushed through the massive glass doors into the

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bright sunlight outdoors. Hiring Aislinn was something he had decided to do on his own. He hadn't told either of his sons about her yet. They would find out at the meeting the next day along with everyone else. "Pizza or Chinese?"

"Chinese."



"So, did you have a nice lunch?" Scott Darnell smiled at the young, attractive woman sitting at her desk. Stacks of manuscripts surrounded her. Scott had been working as an assistant editor with Sheldon-Talbert Publishing for five years with little to show for it. He seemed to try hard and he was enthusiastic, but he just didn't have a feel for what would make a bestseller. His editing was sloppy at best, but it didn't seem to bother him or those he worked for. He was friendly, helpful, and a good listener, especially to the women who were employed there. And he was good to have around just to move large, heavy stacks of manuscripts from one place to another, if nothing else.

Tracy Cord glanced up from the manuscript she was reading, another romance novel. It wasn't the kind of thing she enjoyed reading, but because she was the only female associate editor, she usually got stuck with them. "Of course."

She smiled showing off her perfect white teeth, the result of some expensive dental surgery during her childhood no doubt. She leaned back in her padded chair and stuck out a bare stockinged foot. Two perfectly shaped breasts pulled

against the buttons on her silk blouse, also the result of some expensive surgery no doubt, although Scott didn't know that for sure.

"Do you need help with anything?"

"Would you mind taking these to the mailroom?" She motioned to a stack of rejected manuscripts on the credenza behind her desk that were leaning precariously toward the left. "If I need anything else, I'll let you know," she answered still smiling. "Thanks for offering."

Scott nodded, picked up the manuscripts, and continued down the hallway, looking in each office that he passed. It wasn't that he was nosy, he just liked keeping up with what everyone else was doing. After dropping off the manuscripts in the mail room, he returned to his office at the end of the hall next to a make-shift lounge area. His office was smaller than the other offices, with one window overlooking the docking area and the rear lot where the dumpsters were located. But he was lucky to even get that much. All of the other assistants were assigned desks in one large work space divided into cubicles.

Not wanting to settle down to work, he walked over to the window and looked out. The old man was rummaging through the dumpster again. Scott watched him pull out some rejected manuscripts and a couple of books that had been discarded. Editors were always getting books from other publishers, old returns and remaindered books, and books that had been self-published, the majority of which got thrown out. A couple of times Scott had been tempted to give the old

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guy money, but then had second thoughts about it. He had to be unstable as hell at the very least to live that way. And who knows what might trigger him off.

As if he sensed he was being watched, the old man suddenly jerked his head up and looked directly at Scott. Startled, Scott shrank away from the window and sat down at his cluttered desk. When he glanced up again, the old man was gone.



Tracy waited until she was sure Scott was gone before she reached into her briefcase under her desk and dug out the big brown envelope she had brought back with her from lunch. He had said this one would insure her own imprint, something she had wanted ever since getting into the publishing business. She pulled out the manuscript and read the title, *Then There Was Light*. It had been written by someone in North Carolina and it had 85,000 words. She stuffed the manuscript with the envelope back into her briefcase. She would work on it that night.

Since her promotion to associate editor she had come up with absolutely nothing to show for it. Everything she had recommended for publication had been turned down. The last manuscript she managed to push through had been over six months ago, and although the forecasts for its success were good, it wouldn't be released for at least another eight months. In the meantime, she needed to come up with some better material, something that would make her look good so

that when she asked for her own imprint, Sheldon-Talbert would let her have it.

Tracy's real name was Trista Cordillio. She was born in Buenos Aires where her family settled after leaving Italy during the war. When she was a teenager, she moved to Miami and completed high school. She later worked her way through Indiana University where she graduated with a double major in English and journalism, and then went on to attend the University of California at Berkeley School of Journalism on a full scholarship. She graduated in the top five percent of her class. Attractive, aggressive, and determined, she immediately set her career sites on Washington, DC.

She worked as an intern, or gopher, depending on one's perspective, at *The Post* for one year before getting her first legitimate assignment: reporting on the crime rates in the city. It was a filler piece that required little effort. From that assignment came others, most of them insignificant, until one day, just on a fluke, she stumbled across a story that involved "latch-key kids" in the inner city. She wrote it up and presented it to her editor who gave it first-page status. She followed up with three additional stories, these focusing on the hardships of the families with latch-key kids, all single parents trying to survive. At the end of the year she was nominated for the prestigious Pulitzer Award in journalism. The only problem was, she had made up everything. Nothing about any of the stories was true. She took a gamble and got caught, ending her career in journalism. It was just a minor setback, however, as far as she was concerned. After all, in

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Buenos Aires where she was from originally, that kind of “editorializing” was done all the time. No one really cared. And she certainly didn’t see any harm in it.

After leaving *The Post*, she moved to New York, changed her name, invented a new resumé, and began working as a reader with Sheldon-Talbert. She was good. Having received her formal education in the United States, she had a superior command of the English language and a critical eye for detail. Most important of all, she had a feel for what would sell. After two years, she was promoted to assistant editor. Her first assignment as assistant was to attend the Bologna Book Fair in Bologna, Italy, as representative of Sheldon-Talbert Publishing House. This was an annual event that all of the major publishers and most of the smaller ones from around the world attended. Booths for the various publishers were set up in a central location, and, as luck would have it, Sheldon-Talbert was wedged next to Kane Publishing House being represented by Tyler Kane, younger son of Caldwell.

For Tracy, experiencing Bologna for the first time was like returning to her roots. The city itself was one of the most beautiful in Italy, medieval in plan, a jumble of red brick, tiled roofs and balconies, fountains and monuments, and porticoes the color of sun-bleached sand. Tracy was filled with a sense of truly belonging, and for the first time since leaving Washington, she felt she could stop looking over her shoulder.

Quite naturally, Tracy and Tyler became inseparable; she a beautiful, flamboyant and intelligent Latina with energy and

ambition to burn, and he the wealthy son in a publishing empire, old enough to feel competitive toward his father and older brother, but still young enough to need the flattering attentions of an attractive woman. During the day they worked at their booths. At night they strolled the streets, attended the theater, shopped in the markets, and sat at outdoor cafes sipping the local wines. They even found time to look up some of Tracy's distant relatives who still lived just outside the city. By the end of the six days, Tracy and Tyler had become lovers. By the end of six months, Tyler was doing everything he could to help Tracy professionally.

In a year and a half, thanks to Tyler, Tracy had managed to push through a half-dozen manuscripts, four of which made it to the *New York Times* bestseller list. With that much success, it was no wonder she was promoted to associate editor. But that was six months ago, and lately she had been getting primarily junk to read. She was tired of being just another editor. She wanted her own imprint where she could decide what would or would not get published. She would be able to set the focus and eventually, who knows, she might even start her own publishing company. But right now she needed another bestseller.

Hopefully, *Then There Was Light* would be it.

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