

ONE

I was a cop in the city of New York for fifteen years. I was young and brash, and the Job was my life. I lived and breathed the gun and the shield. Those symbols were the source of the pulse beating in my chest. My veins ran NYPD blue and I was not unlike a Knight of King Arthur's Court, who moved amid the populace of the city streets, wrecking havoc upon those who would soil the structured canyons of my home. I was the man who lay waste the criminals before me. The Knight who slew the fiery breathing dragons. I was a soldier in the war on crime, and stood for what was right on the side of the law.

And then they killed my wife and it all became personal.

I threw my shield to the ground and let loose the hounds of vengeance. A madman whose scythe reaped a path bloody and surreal. The killing lasted three weeks until my daughter's life was threatened.

Christy was all I had left after ten years of neglecting my wife, and I swore to her mother lying in the grave, that I would never place anything ahead of my family again.

My hands were bloody. My life was bloody, but my newborn daughter's soul was precious and innocent, and I had no right to place her in harm's way. I left all I knew, all I was, and all that I could have been, to start over in the way I should have when I first met Samantha sixteen years ago this day. I never gave Samantha what she deserved; the least of which was my love, and through my love, her life.

The breeze blowing on the Gulf tussled my daughter's long, blonde hair as the four of us stood at the rear of my boat, drifting with the current. We stood, this day every year for the past six, paying our respects to the memory of Samantha Mia. Christy tossed the flowers she held into the currents of the sea. She had requested to perform our honorarium to her mother this year. My daughter was six years old, and though I had never told her the grisly details of her mother's death, my little girl understood the depth of the moment. She understood the meaning of this day. She understood we could never return to the place where her mother lay at rest.

The two of us spent most of her life as nomads, moving from one town to the next, from one coast to the other. We spent a period of time in Europe under the protection of the Armenti Family. But I wanted my daughter to grow up an American, to understand the great heritage of her birth, and where she came from. It didn't matter what had transpired to change our lives, or the circumstances that brought about the road we traveled.

The flowers cast into the waters left my daughter's delicate hands in a gentle arc, and I saw the tears swell in her eyes, and I too felt them; wet and full of an older person's burdens. My tears were for Christy as I witnessed the understanding of our loss blossom within her. My loss was in finally understanding what I had only after it was gone, and being foolish enough to have had it ripped from my grasp. Christy's loss was never having known. Her loss could never be replaced. My loss was irreplaceable. It was a vicious cycle, which had no comfort except for the love I had for my daughter and the love she had for me.

I lost a wife and lover, and my daughter never knew the love of her mother. I could only feel that Christy was worse off than I for I had squandered the love I knew, yet she would never know the love of her mother. This was my fault. There was no blame other than my own.

The flowers were taken by the Gulf Stream as I bent to take Christy in my arms, and felt her tears against my neck. She laid her head on my shoulder. I cradled her to my chest, smelling the fragrance of the sea in her hair. Carlton Briggs placed his large hand on my shoulder, and I saw Christy's nanny, Mrs. Diaz, wipe tears from her own brown, leathery cheeks.

"Sangua de Christo..." the old woman murmured, pulling the blue windbreaker tighter around her small frame. Mrs. Diaz turned away to hide her weeping.