

## Chapter 2

Chris sat in his new office and surveyed his surroundings. The wall lined with bookcases full of law books made it look impressive. His diplomas and shiny new license, not old enough to have gathered any dust yet, hung on one wall. He knew that as time passed, he would accumulate the trophies for that wall like in Dad's office.

He had a window, he smiled. New associates didn't usually get an office with a window. This was one time he didn't regret being the boss's son. His step-mom, Candace, also a newly minted attorney, had the window office next to him. *A little nepotism goes a long way, he thought. What the hell? One day, we'll be running this place. We might as well get used to it.*

He thought about Candace for a minute, and how much he'd hated her when she first married his father, Harry, in large part because he had thought that she was a gold digger. She was closer to Chris's age than she was to his father's. He probably resented her looks too. She could have graced the cover of any fashion magazine with long black hair and emerald green eyes. Hell, with her figure she'd look great as a Playboy centerfold.

He resented the fact that she was trying to take Mom's place. That was long over now. She had worked her tail off as a paralegal and never tried to be his mother; she had been a great study partner in law school. He saw her at the office every day and he liked how she treated him like he was something special.

He respected the way she took to the little girl, Kayla, too. Poor thing, her mother had been killed by the Mexican drug cartel and her father was rotting in prison on drug trafficking charges. Dad and Candace were planning to adopt Kayla. *I guess we'll have a new little sister, he thought.*

He stared out his window again. From the sixty-fourth floor of the Columbia Tower, he could look up Puget Sound all the way north to Possession Point. On the other side of the Sound, he could see Bainbridge Island and Eagle Harbor with the ferry boats going in and out. A few puffy white clouds hung in the deep blue sky. Sail boats, motor yachts, tour boats, tugs and container ships plowed back and forth on the inland sea below him. His mind slipped away for a second.

He was at the wheel of his Dad's sailboat, the *Courageous*. The bright red hull sliced through the water and kicked up a white wake. He heard the gulls crying and smelled the sea air.

"Hardwick," Ben Johnson, one of the senior partners at Hardwick, Bernstein & Johnson said as he blew through Chris's door. "I have a little job for you."

Chris snapped back to the present. Ben was dressed impeccably as ever in a charcoal pin striped suit with a starched white shirt and a red power-tie.

"Morning, Ben." Chris smiled. It was hard calling him Ben. He had known Mr. Johnson since he was a little boy.

He thought about his own attire. He never thought he'd be showing up to work every day in a tailored suit. However, he had to admit to a little vanity. He liked the way the soft fabric draped off of his athletic build. He knew he looked good with his blond hair cut long as a last statement of his individuality. He hoped his long, thin solid red tie that flapped around unrestrained gave him an appearance of insouciance.

"It's a good first case. Really not much to do."

"What is it?" Chris hadn't handled a case on his own yet. He had spent several years as a paralegal while he worked his way through law school and had second chaired a case or two since passing the bar.

"My wife has a relative, kind of a distant black-sheep cousin. I hate to sound snobbish, but she's kind of trailer-trash. She is family though.

“Anyway, her kid’s in trouble. Again. She has a problem-child son. Always getting in trouble with the law. Maybe you can reach him.”

Chris put down the stack of papers he had grabbed when Ben entered the office. “What’s he done?”

“He’s been arrested up in Island County. Breaking and entering. He’s only sixteen, so it’s juvie stuff. We normally wouldn’t bother with a case like this, but Edith put the pressure on. This is her cousin.”

“Okay, what do you want me to do?”

“Talk to the boy. Your closer to his age, maybe he’ll relate to you. Maybe he’ll think you’re some kind of hippy lawyer. God knows that he doesn’t listen to me. He won’t listen to anyone. Thinks he’s smarter than everyone else. Talk some sense into him. Protect his rights. Keep him out of court. Get a plea bargain. Get this thing handled and we can all go about our lives.”

“Yes sir.” Chris accepted the folder that Ben Johnson handed him.

Ben turned and headed out of the office, then stopped at the door.

“Oh, by the way, I hear that you’re looking for crew for your sailboat for the fall racing season. My son, Timothy would love to sail with you.”

“Great. Have him give me a call.”

Ben continued out the door.

*Shit, Chris thought. Just what I need, a senior partner’s snot-nosed kid on my boat.*

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The offices of Flaherty & Associates hadn’t changed much. Ted worried about parking his sleek black BMW in the parking lot of the old warehouse. He’d take the bus if it was easy, but it would require

a transfer downtown and a six block walk. A bus trip would take an hour. He could drive in fifteen minutes.

The SODO neighborhood location was a cluster of warehouses, factories and tired old buildings. The glamour of the areas surrounding Seattle's new ball parks hadn't reached this far south yet.

He flashed his keycard to the reader and pulled open the heavy glass door. There was no lobby, just a landing with a distressed ficus plant and a long staircase leading to the mezzanine level offices.

Ted climbed the stairs and used his keycard to unlock the heavy oak door. He took a moment to look around before entering.

Near the door, Abiba, a large black woman from Ethiopia wearing outlandishly bright colors looked up from her desk.

"Mr. Higuera. Good morning." She always had a smile in her voice.

"Good morning, Abiba."

Ted stepped inside. Behind Abiba's desk, he saw the two dozen or so other mismatched garage-sale desks filled with women who looked like refugees from some third-world conflict.

The desks were pushed together in twos and fours. The tired looking women all worked busily on one project or another. These were Catrina's rescues. Time after time, his boss saved women from abusive relationships, found them a new place to live and provided employment to get them back onto their feet.

"Coffee's ready. Can I get you a cup?" Abiba asked.

"Sure, thanks."

Ted entered the warren of desks and made his way to the back of the large, open room. Against the back wall were two offices with large windows and glass doors. One was Catrina's, the other had been Jeff's.

Jonathon Jefferson, who everyone called Jeff, had been a Seattle Police Department officer until his partner outted him. No one wanted to work with a gay cop. When no other officers responded to his call for backup in a shots fired situation, Jeff decided it was time to resign.

True to her nature, Catrina rescued Jeff. She made him her partner and gave him a home at Flaherty & Associates.

Ted thought for a minute about his friend. Jeff lost his life capturing a drug dealer in Mexico to free a mom from jail in the US. The macho ex-cop was anything but your stereotype gay man. Now Ted had his office.

He stopped at the office door. Abiba had cleared out all of Jeff's things. Except for the American flag that stood on a brass eagle topped pole in the corner.

"Henry, Jeff's husband, wanted you to have the flag," Abiba said from behind Ted. "He said he wanted you to remember how much Jeff loved his country and all he did to protect those who couldn't protect themselves." She handed Ted his cup of coffee. "Just like you like it, black like me."

"Thanks." Ted put his computer bag down on Jeff's desk. His desk now.

"Can I have a minute?" he asked the large black woman.

She patted Ted on the shoulder, turned and left without another word.

Ted sat in the swivel chair and checked out his new digs. There were some boxes of computer equipment on the floor in front of the book case. The two chairs opposite his desk actually matched, a rarity in Catrina's office. The cherry wood desk and credenza matched too, a testament to Jeff's taste. Everything else in Catrina's business looked like it had been rescued at some flea market.

Sitting on the desk, his desk, was a brightly wrapped package. Ted sat in the chair and picked up the package. He shook it. Not very heavy, it made a rattle when he shook it.

"Morning, Higuera." Catrina leaned against his office door.

She looked her usual wonderful self, a tall middle aged woman with short blonde hair and piercing steel-gray eyes. She wore black jeans and a tight black turtle-neck sweater that showed off her generous curves. As always, she wore black boots with three inch heels. At five foot nine, she was an inch taller than Ted, but with her boots, she towered over him.

"I thought Christmas should come a little early this year." She smiled as Ted picked up the package again.

"What is it?" Ted asked.

"Open it."

Ted tore open the wrapping paper.

"A gun?"

"A Glock 17. Nine millimeter. Seventeen shot magazine."

"You know I hate guns."

"Ted, it's time you faced reality. After our little adventure in Mexico, I decided I needed to arm you properly and teach you how to use it. Get your coat, we're going to the gun range."

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Jerry's indoor shooting range was only a few blocks from Catrina's office. The clientele was very diverse. Construction workers shared space with men and women in business suits. The office smelled of sweat and gun oil.

An assortment of firearms was displayed in the glass counter. Hand guns from .22's to an Israeli Dessert Eagle .45 sat next to shot guns, rifles and assault weapons.

Jerry was doing a brisk business.

Catrina led Ted to an empty stall.

“Okay, let’s start with the basics,” she said as she opened the box. “This is a Glock 17 semi-automatic pistol.” She pushed the lever and dropped the magazine from the handle. “Always insure that your firearm is not loaded before working with it.” She slid back the slide to check that there wasn’t a cartridge in the chamber.

“The magazine holds seventeen rounds. I chose this weapon because it’s light weight and simple. Over sixty-five percent of the law enforcement agencies in the US use this pistol. It has a polymer frame and is easy to draw and holster. There’s nothing protruding from the gun to get caught on the holster or your clothes.”

Catrina proceeded to strip down the firearm. “After you make sure that the gun isn’t loaded, you pull the trigger and slide the top off. You’ll notice that I’ve replaced the plastic guide spring rod with a Brass Stacker steel guide. The old guide is okay, but it’ll eventually wear out. The new steel guide will last for the life of the weapon. The extra weight also helps you bring the gun back on target after firing.”

Ted stood and watched in amazement. Katrina was so knowledgeable and proficient.

“I got you an Equipping the Workers holster and mag pouch.” She produced a slim black molded holster and a smaller black pouch. “This has a spring steel clip that slides onto your belt.”

She turned Ted around. “Wear it here, next to your kidneys.” She slid the holster onto Ted’s belt in the small of his back. “You wear it on the inside of your pants. Always use the holster. Never just tuck a pistol inside your pants. The trigger can catch on your shirt and cause the gun to go off. You don’t want a bullet flying around inside your pants.”

Ted grinned. “Damn, I feel like I’m in the first grade,” he said.

“You are, Junior.” Katrina gave him a little shove on the shoulder. “This is firearms 101. When we get through today, you’ll know enough to not shoot your foot off.”

Ted hated guns. Growing up in the *barrios* of East LA, he knew that whenever you played with guns someone got hurt. Yet, when his father was murdered and his brother kidnapped in Mexico, he had turned to guns to rescue his brother.

He had shot a man to save Chris's life. He still had nightmares about the gun battle at the ancient site at Teotihuacán. Now, in his new role as Catrina's partner, he knew that he would need a gun someday. In this kind of business, you had to be prepared.

"Drawing and re-holstering your weapon is an important part of the training," Catrina was saying. "You don't want it to go off before you're ready."

Ted nodded his head.

"And, Ted, never draw your weapon unless you're ready to use it."