

PROLOGUE

2150 hours, July 7, Graves' estate, O'ahu

Her right hand throbbed. Judging by both the swelling and pain, she'd broken it in defending herself. At least the flow of blood from her broken nose had now slowed to a dribble. She'd have to deal with all this, later. For now, she needed to get as far away from here as quickly as possible, before they could regroup.

With her left hand, she reached for the handle of the sliding glass door. With any luck, she could be out the door, across the balcony, down the stairs, to the garage, and off the estate before Nick, or more likely his friends, could stop her.

Yet, the door wouldn't budge. Looking up, she saw the master lock down bolts had been thrown on these state-of-the-art storm-resistant doors. The release switch was downstairs, in the living room, where she'd left Nick and his friends. She felt unequal to renewing her fight with any of them.

Trapped! Frustration, rage, and fear all exploded within her, along with a fresh surge of adrenaline.

A solid blow rattled the bedroom door, punctuated with the sound of splintering wood.

"Rose Jacqueline! Damn you! You're a dead woman! If you make me break down this fucking door, I'll make you suffer before I kill you!" Nick shouted.

"Oh my Jesus, mercy! Saints and angels, pray for me!" she prayed on a whisper while looking around the room for something, anything, she could use as a weapon against her husband.

"Leave me alone, Nick! Our marriage is over," she shouted at him.

1930 hours, July 12, Connecticut

Mona Graves sat in the funeral home for her son's vigil service. The words of the prayer service flowed, unheard, over her. The priest invited people to speak about Nicholas. Mona rose and went to the lectern.

"My dear Nicholas married Rose Jacqueline Byrnes, just thirty-seven days ago. It had been one of the happiest days of my life. Yet only days ago, my sweet boy died at our estate on O'ahu."

"Rose had Nicky's body burned to ashes before she even considered turning his mortal remains over to his family." The elegant older woman blinked back tears. "Was this cremation done to prevent further forensic investigation into the cause of his death? By burning his body to ash, does she think she's put an end to the suspicions she viciously, premeditatedly, murdered my Nicky?"

"You can draw your own conclusions why she would have had his body incinerated. But one thing no one can argue is Rose hasn't shown enough decency to make an appearance here at her own husband's wake. Nor is she expected to be at the funeral tomorrow. Instead, she's in seclusion at her Texas ranch, surrounded by her battalion of heavily armed mercenaries, secure in the knowledge she's literally gotten away with Nicky's murder."

"My son's innocent blood cries out to heaven for vengeance. I know God's justice is perfect. However, man's justice can be easily perverted, as it has been, so far. I swear, today, with all the Saints and Angels, as well as all of you, as my witnesses I will not rest as long as Rose walks free. I'm offering a ten million dollar cash reward to anyone furnishing evidence essential to convict Rose of Nicky's murder, payable after conviction. I'm utterly serious about seeing her brought to justice for her ruthless slaughter of my son."

"I have only these prayers to offer. May God grant rest to my poor Nicky's immortal soul. May God damn Rose Jacqueline Byrnes to the eternal burning Hell she so richly deserves for murdering my boy. May God give me the strength and courage not to rest until my dear, sweet, Nicky has his due vengeance. Amen."