



Shaken
to
the
Core

JAE

CHAPTER 1

Italy Harbor

San Francisco, California

March 18, 1906

Giuliana squinted against the brisk sea breeze and looked out across the bay. The fog was lifting, revealing glimpses of Alcatraz Island, but still there was no sign of the *Bon Viaggiu's* brown, triangular sail. Most of the other *feluccas* were already back in. Water lapped against the small boats, bumping them against the pier in a gentle rhythm that contrasted with Giuliana's growing anxiety.

Where was Turi?

Usually, her brother went out with the tide in the middle of the night and hurried back in the morning so his would be one of the first boats back and he could get a good price for his catch.

Today, the other *piscaturi* had beaten him to it. A group of Genoese fishermen sat on the pier, mending their nets and singing arias, while several of Giuliana's fellow Sicilians unloaded boxes of fish and crabs from their boats.

Next to Giuliana's crab stand, black-clad women had already set huge pots of water to boil. Clouds of steam billowed up, and the women huddled closer to ward off the chill. The aroma of cooking seafood and fresh-baked sourdough bread drifted over, mixing with the smell of fish and salty air.

Without any crabs to cook, Giuliana hadn't lit her fire yet. She shuffled her feet to keep warm and tried not to think about their father, who hadn't returned to the village when his boat had gone out for sardines. On the one hand, the pain of losing him was still fresh, even after six years, but on the other hand, it seemed like a lifetime ago. Sometimes she could hardly remember his weather-beaten features.

What if Turi didn't come back either? Then she'd be all alone in Merica.

The bellow of a foghorn interrupted her thoughts. Again she looked out at the bay.

Crying seagulls circled above a lone boat. This felucca was painted white with green trimmings, the same colors her father's and all other boats of their village had been.

The Bon Viaggiu! Her heart skipped a beat. *See? There he is. You worried for nothing.*

But Turi's boat wasn't sailing in front of the wind. It was being towed by a steam-powered fishing tug.

At first, Giuliana thought that Turi had caught a ride back to the harbor, as he and the other fishermen sometimes did. But the boat wasn't traveling low in the water. No catch was weighing it down. Something was wrong.

Turi! She rushed toward the edge of the pier and hopped up and down to see over the masts of the other boats.

When the *Bon Viaggiu* pulled in alongside the pier, she took just enough time to tie down the boat and then gathered her skirt higher and jumped on board.

Turi sat in the stern of the *felucca*. His broad shoulders, their muscles honed from lifting heavy nets, were slumped forward.

Giuliana scrambled over, spreading her arms for balance as the boat rocked. She fell to her knees in front of him and clutched his legs, which were encased in rubber boots up to the hips.

His body shivered beneath her hands.

"Turi? What's wrong?" she asked in Sicilian. "Did you get hurt?"

He coughed and looked up slowly, as if even that movement required a lot of strength. His skin, normally even darker than her own olive complexion, was pale; just his cheeks were blotched with red. He was shaking all over and clutched his chest as another cough rattled through him. "It's just a cough," he answered in their language.

He'd said that for the last week. So far, she had believed him. Now she reached up and touched his forehead. Heat seared her cool fingers. "You're burning up!"

He didn't answer. As he stood, he swayed a bit, clutched his head, and muttered a string of Sicilian curse words.

Strangely, hearing them made Giuliana feel a little better. She pushed forward, under his arm, so he could wrap it around her shoulders. His linen shirt was damp. It smelled like sweat, not spray from the sea.

He leaned on her as they climbed onto the pier.

Bedda matri, he was heavy! For a moment, they both swayed. Giuliana stiffened her spine to take more of his weight.

Another cough shook him. This close, Giuliana could hear a wheezing sound as he gasped for breath.

Two steps down the pier, he stopped. He shook like a loose sail in the wind.

Giuliana peered at him with concern. “Do you want to sit for—?”

Without warning, he collapsed.

She tried to hold him upright, but he was too heavy. They both went down onto the worn planks of the pier. Pain lanced through her hand as she caught herself, but she ignored it. Only Turi was important right now. She shook him frantically. “Turi! Wake up! You have to wake up. Please!”

His eyes remained closed, but his chest was moving up and down with each labored breath.

On her knees next to him, she looked around for help. “Ajutu!” she cried, then repeated it in English. “Somebody help, please!”

Two fishermen jumped over their nets, which they had spread out to dry. Others climbed out of the boats they’d been cleaning. Within seconds, they were carrying Turi along the pier.

“Wait!” Giuliana called in Sicilian. She hastened after them. “Where are you taking him?”

One of the men shouted something back, but the wind made it hard to understand. She caught the word *ospitali*.

For a moment, she wanted to protest. They didn’t have the money to pay for treatment in a hospital. But she bit her tongue because she sensed that the hospital was Turi’s only chance.



Giuliana barely spared a glance at the majestic granite columns or the magnificent dome of City Hall as she rushed

into the Central Emergency Hospital in the building's basement, where a horse-drawn ambulance had taken Turi.

Her leather lace-up shoes, which Turi had saved up for last Christmas, beat a rapid staccato against the marble floor.

A nurse walked past her, pushing a wheeled metal cart with medical supplies.

"Scusa...excuse me, miss," Giuliana said. "I search my brother, Salvatore Russo. He is sick, so they brought him here."

"Unless they took him to the operating theater, he's likely in the men's ward." The nurse pointed to the other end of the corridor.

After a quick thank-you, Giuliana hurried in the indicated direction and squeezed past two orderlies carrying a moaning patient on a stretcher.

The men's ward consisted of a large room. Metal-frame beds lined two walls, while a nurse sat at a desk in the center of the room, writing down notes in the light from the gas chandeliers suspended from the ceiling.

Giuliana started to walk up to her but then caught a glimpse of the patient in the bed to her left. *Turi!*

He was sitting up in bed, propped up against several pillows. His eyes were closed.

She nearly collided with a metal cart as she rushed over and perched on the edge of the bed. "Turi?" she whispered.

His eyes fluttered open.

"Oh Turi, it's so good to see you awake," she said in Sicilian.

He tried to speak, but a cough shook him, cutting him off.

She tugged his white blanket a little higher. "Don't try to talk."

Not that he could, even if he wanted. He continued to cough, and his shaking refused to cease. Exhausted, he slumped back against the pillows.

Giuliana held his hand, feeling the familiar calluses. She chafed his cold fingers between both of her hands and looked around for one of the doctors in their vests and bowler hats.

Her desperate gaze caught the attention of a nurse who had just entered the ward and was striding across the room toward them. One step before reaching them, she tripped over something

and careened into a cart. Medical supplies went flying in all directions.

An empty metal bowl hit Giuliana in the chest, and she caught it without thought.

With almost catlike reflexes, the nurse managed to stay on her feet and even grabbed the cart before it could topple over.

At the sound of the crash, another nurse hurried over.

“For goodness’s sake, Miss Croft, how many times have I told you to put the bedpan beneath the bed, not in front of it?” the first nurse said.

The other one blushed. “I’m sorry, Doctor Sharpe.”

Doctor? Giuliana stared at the woman. Only now did she notice that the stranger wasn’t wearing a white, high-collared smock and a small cap, as the nurses did. Instead, she was clad in a dark brown skirt and a white shirtwaist that contrasted with her fiery red hair, which, instead of being swept up in the latest fashion, was neatly tied back.

“It’s all right,” the doctor said to the nurse, now in a milder tone. “Everyone makes mistakes. Just see that it doesn’t happen again.”

The nurse nodded and began to gather the scattered supplies.

The lady doctor stepped closer to the bed.

Giuliana was still staring at her. In Sicily, only men could become physicians, and she’d had no idea that there were women doctors in Merica. In her five years here, she hadn’t encountered any.

“I know what you’re thinking,” the lady doctor said. “But I can assure you that I was trained by some of the best physicians in the country, and my medical skills are just as good as those of my male colleagues.”

“Better, actually,” the nurse said with a smile.

Dr. Sharpe laughed. “Don’t let them hear that.” She looked at Giuliana. “Your husband will receive the best possible care.”

“He is not my husband. I am his sister. Giuliana Russo.”

“Pleased to meet you, Miss Russo. I’m Dr. Lucy Hamilton Sharpe.” The doctor offered her hand.

After a moment’s hesitation, very aware of any dirt or fish smell that might cling to her own fingers, Giuliana wanted to

reach out and then realized that she was still holding on to the metal bowl.

“Why don’t you give me that?” Dr. Sharpe took it from her and handed it to the nurse before shaking Giuliana’s hand.

If Giuliana had expected soft skin and a dainty touch, the doctor’s handshake proved her wrong. This wasn’t the hand of a spoiled, wealthy lady who had never needed to work. It was the strong, slightly callused hand of someone who was no stranger to physical labor.

Curious, Giuliana studied her, noticing the freckles on her nose that indicated that the doctor had spent some time in the sun without protecting her fair complexion with an umbrella, as the other ladies in San Francisco did.

A cough from her brother reminded her that she wasn’t here to stare at the lady doctor, as fascinating as she was. Quickly, she wrenched her gaze away. “Can you help my brother?”

Dr. Sharpe looked down at Turi, who had opened his eyes and peered up at her with a feverish gaze. With a steady hand, she pulled the blanket down a little and opened the top two buttons on his shirt.

Giuliana watched with wide eyes. Back in Santa Flavia, opening the shirt of a man you weren’t related to would have been considered very forward. Of course, Miss Sharpe was a physician. How else was she supposed to examine him?

The doctor took an instrument out of a leather case. Two black rubber tubes led down to a bell-shaped piece of ebony that Dr. Sharpe held to Turi’s chest.

“What is that?” Giuliana asked.

The doctor pulled the ends of the instrument out of her ears. “It’s called a stethoscope. It allows me to listen to his lungs and heart.” She gestured for Turi to open his mouth and peered into his throat. When she straightened, she looked from him to Giuliana. “He’s suffering from bilateral pneumonia.”

Giuliana bit her lip. She hated letting on that she was just an uneducated girl from a tiny little fishing town in Sicily. But, as her mother would have said, family was more important than pride, so she asked, “What does this mean?”

“It means that he has an infection in both of his lungs. They’re filling with pus and other fluids. That’s what makes it so hard for him to breathe.”

“But you can help him, yes?”

Now it was Dr. Sharpe’s turn to bite her lip. “We can try, but it’s a very serious illness, Miss Russo.”

Turi weakly squeezed her hand and sent her a questioning gaze. Unlike Giuliana, he had never learned more than a few words of English. Not necessary, he’d said. He didn’t need it out on the boat, and they would return home to Sicily in a year or so anyway.

“She says you’ll be just fine,” she said in Sicilian and tried not to flinch as she looked into his eyes.

He nodded and closed his eyes again. His sweat-dampened hair, as dark as her own, fell onto his face, emphasizing how pale he was.

Gently, she reached out and swiped an errant strand from his forehead.

“You’re hurt,” Dr. Sharpe said, pointing.

Giuliana peered at her own scraped hand. It was like looking at a stranger’s appendage; she didn’t feel any pain at all. “Oh.” It had probably happened when Turi had collapsed and they had tumbled to the pier.

“Let me take care of that.”

Shaking her head, Giuliana hid her hand behind her back. Bad enough that they would have to pay the ward fee for Turi; if there was to be any money left to send home to their family this week, they couldn’t afford treatment for her too.

“It’s all right,” Dr. Sharpe said, the expression in her green eyes kind. “I won’t charge you for it. I’ll have to wait until Miss Croft returns with the mustard plaster for your brother’s treatment anyway.” She gave the nurse a nod, which had her hurrying off.

Reluctantly, Giuliana brought her hand out from behind her back.

The doctor pulled over a stool, sat, and gently cradled Giuliana’s hand. She took a tiny medical tool from the cart next to her and, with a light touch, started pulling wood splinters from

Giuliana's skin. When she was finished, she spread ointment over the scrapes and covered them with gauze. "There. Keep it dry for a few days, and you'll be fine."

"Thank you." Giuliana wasn't worried about herself. Her only worry was for Turi. She put her hand in her lap and looked over at him. *Oh please, Madonna. Help him.*

The nurse returned, her arms piled high with supplies.

Dr. Sharpe used a metal bowl and a spoon to mix some yellow-brownish powder—probably the mustard she had mentioned—with a white substance that looked like flour. Then she poured in a little water from a pitcher next to Turi's bed. Finally, she added a few drops of a liquid that smelled like the kerosene they used to light their lamps at home. After stirring everything into a smooth paste, she spread it over a clean piece of cloth, which she then placed on Turi's chest. As she turned away from him, she gave the nurse a stern glance. "Watch the mustard plaster closely, please."

"Is it dangerous?" Giuliana asked.

"No. But if we leave it in place for too long, it will burn his skin."

"I'll keep a close eye on him," the nurse said.

So would Giuliana. She was determined not to leave his side until he was well.

"Miss Sharpe?" a man in a three-piece suit called from the entrance of the ward. "We're waiting for you in the operating theater. Or have you finally seen reason and admitted that assisting in a surgery would be too much for a woman's delicate sensibilities?"

"While I appreciate your concern for my 'delicate sensibilities,' Dr. Ferber, they are much more insulted by your attempts to keep me out of the operating theater than by witnessing a man being cut open to save his life." Dr. Sharpe looked him straight in the eye, her voice never wavering. "By now, you should know that I'm not the sort of woman who's prone to fainting spells. And, by the way, it's *Doctor* Sharpe, not Miss."

Both Dr. Ferber and Giuliana stared at her.

Despite her concern for Turi, Giuliana struggled to hold back a smile. Dr. Sharpe sounded a little like Giuliana's strong-willed

nonna, who'd never been afraid to voice her opinion. Judging by the look on Dr. Ferber's face, it didn't make Lucy Sharpe any more popular than it did Giuliana's grandmother.

Dr. Ferber shook his head at her before disappearing down the corridor.

Lucy Sharpe followed. At the door, she turned back around and said, "I will be back later to check on your brother."

Nodding, Giuliana sat on the stool the doctor had vacated and started holding vigil over Turi's labored breathing.



With a gasp, Giuliana awoke from a nightmare in which Turi was drowning at sea, calling for her, but she couldn't get to him. Pressing a hand to her chest, she looked around.

Night had fallen. Turi was next to her in his bed. She must have fallen asleep, and her head had dropped onto the mattress. Yawning, she sat upright on the stool and rubbed her eyes.

He's fine. See?

But maybe he wasn't. His breathing was rapid, and he was tossing and turning. "Mamma!" he cried out. The rest of what he was saying didn't make much sense. Was he dreaming too? Hallucinating?

"Turi, wake up," she whispered in Sicilian, trying not to disturb the other patients, most of whom were asleep. "You're just dreaming."

He didn't react.

With a lump in her throat, she reached out and touched his cheek. Heat radiated from him like from a cast-iron stove.

Turi started flailing his arms. The back of his hand hit her shoulder, nearly throwing her off the stool.

Two nurses hurried over and secured his arms to the bed's metal frame.

Never opening his eyes, he struggled against them. A week ago, he would have been able to shake them off easily, but now he was too weak.

"No, no!" Giuliana jumped up to protect him. "Let him go. He did not hurt me."

“He’s hurting himself, miss,” one of the nurses answered.

“What’s going on here?” A confident voice rose over the commotion. Dr. Sharpe crossed the men’s ward toward them. The sleeves of her blouse were wrinkled, as if she had pushed them up her forearms.

“I believe Mr. Russo has taken a turn for the worse,” one of the nurses answered.

Dr. Sharpe bent over him, felt his pulse, and listened to his chest again. “If you’d rather wait outside, Miss Russo...,” she said over her shoulder.

Giuliana planted her feet and stayed next to the doctor at Turi’s side. “No,” she said firmly. She wasn’t the sort of woman who was prone to fainting spells either. “I stay.”

The doctor glanced up and gave her a short nod before bending over Turi again. She peeled back the blanket and unbuttoned his shirt all the way down.

Despite his fever, Turi’s skin was pale and had a grayish tint. His belly, white and streaked with fine, reddish-blue veins, looked like marble.

A moan came from Turi, but he didn’t wake as the doctor felt his arms and legs and then covered him up again.

When Dr. Sharpe straightened and turned to Giuliana, her expression was grim. “That’s what I feared. The infection has spread. Now he’s suffering from sepsis, a poisoning of the blood.”

Giuliana clutched the doctor’s sleeve. “Help him, please.”

Dr. Sharpe’s gaze dropped to the floor. “There’s nothing I—or any other doctor—can do. All we can do is try to get him to swallow a little water or broth to keep him hydrated...and then wait to see if his body is still strong enough to battle the sickness.” She softly squeezed Giuliana’s fingers, which still had a death grip on her sleeve. “I’m sorry.”

No, no, no, no. Giuliana didn’t want an apology. She wanted Turi to recover. Slowly, she unclamped her fingers from the doctor’s sleeve and dropped back onto the stool.



The first light of dawn filtered in through the hospital's barred windows. Giuliana watched and listened as the world outside awakened. The hooves of a horse clattered over the cobblestones, and milk cans clanked against each other as a dairy wagon made its way down the street.

Dr. Sharpe went from bed to bed in the men's ward, checking to see how each patient had fared during the night.

Did the woman ever sleep?

Anxiously, Giuliana waited until the doctor reached Turi's bed. They nodded at each other. "He did not drink the broth. But he stopped moving like a sardine on the pier. Maybe he sleeps away the sickness. That is what our papà always did when he was sick. He went to his bed with the fever, and he slept and slept, and when he got up, he was good again." She realized she was babbling and snapped her mouth shut.

But Dr. Sharpe wasn't paying her any attention. She was staring at Turi. Instead of listening to his chest with her stethoscope again, she lifted his arm and moved his fingers.

Giuliana held her breath. What was the doctor doing? It wasn't Turi's arm that was hurt.

Slowly, Dr. Sharpe lowered his arm back to the bed and turned toward Giuliana with a serious expression. "I'm very sorry. He's gone."

"What? No, no, no." He couldn't be gone. Not Turi. Giuliana gripped his hand, which lay stiffly on top of the blanket. "He only sleeps. He is not..."

"I'm sorry, Miss Russo. He slipped away some time during the night. I'm sure he didn't feel any pain."

Blood roared through her ears, and she saw the compassion on Dr. Sharpe's face only as if from very far away. "No. It's...not possible. This cannot happen. It cannot." She bent her head and pressed her face against his chest. It wasn't moving up and down in a painful struggle for breath anymore.

The truth hit her like a hard punch to an already bruised area. Her brother was dead. Never again would she hear his triumphant laugh as he jumped onto the pier after making it back with a boat full of crabs. Never again would she watch him

nearly choke on his food because he couldn't gobble down the spaghetti she'd made fast enough. And he'd never again set foot onto their island, never see home again.

Tears burned in her eyes, but she couldn't cry. Too many thoughts were tumbling through her mind. What would happen now—not just to her, all alone on this side of the ocean, but also to their family back in Santa Flavia?

As the oldest, Turi had taken their father's place as the breadwinner of the family. He'd tried to sell enough fish to earn a living, but their region was so poor that he barely made enough to keep their younger siblings from starving. Finally, he'd come up with a daring idea. Like other young men from their village, he wanted to go to Merica, the land where everything was possible, and work there for a year or two.

Their mother reluctantly let him go—under the condition that Giuliana would accompany him. That way, he wouldn't be all alone in this strange land and would have someone to cook for him and tend to his home.

Now Turi would be buried here, in this strange land, as their mother had called it, and Giuliana was left behind on her own.

When she finally lifted her head off Turi's chest, she realized that Dr. Sharpe hadn't left. She was standing next to the bed without saying anything, just keeping her company. "If you need any help making arrangements..."

Giuliana squared her shoulders. There was no time to grieve now. She had to take charge and do what was right. "I want to take him home."

"Home? But..."

"It is tradition where I come from," Giuliana said. Turi had forever teased her about her becoming too American; he would have wanted her to observe the old traditions.

The doctor nodded. "All right. I'll get someone to help you."



"Good thing *Nonnu* can't see this," Giuliana muttered in Sicilian and pointed at the simple pine casket in which Turi now lay. Their grandfather had been a master carpenter in his day.

Nedda Galati, whose family owned the crab stand next to Giuliana's, patted her shoulder. "You did the best you could," she said, using their native language too.

Giuliana didn't answer. She moved around in their small room in the boardinghouse South of Market, trying to stay busy and avoid thinking too much. Every time she glanced at Turi's face, tears blurred her vision.

Nedda and her husband helped her lift Turi's head so she could sprinkle salt beneath it. They placed his favorite possessions—his good pipe, his razor, and a photograph of their parents—in the casket with him, as her grandmother had done when their grandfather had died. She didn't want Turi's soul to come back looking for the things he had loved most.

Nedda's husband, Francesco, opened the door and the room's single window so Turi's soul wouldn't remain trapped in this world. The aroma of boiled cabbage and sausage drifted in, probably from one of the rooming house's Polish tenants.

Giuliana's stomach growled.

"You should eat something." Nedda slid the *arancini*—fried rice balls—and the caponata she had brought closer to Giuliana.

"I'm not hungry," Giuliana said, even though she hadn't eaten all day.

Nedda and Francesco traded gazes. They kept her company as she sat next to the casket, trying to say good-bye to her dead brother, but not knowing how.

She stared down at Turi's now-calm face. How could this have happened? Just a few days ago, she had stared at him in this very room because his snoring had kept her awake. And now... Now he was gone. She still couldn't believe it.

Francesco cleared his throat. "What are you going to do?" he asked in Sicilian. "Go back home, I suppose?"

Giuliana looked at Turi as if he'd provide her with the answer.

Five years ago, she wouldn't have hesitated. She'd have grabbed the chance to return home with both hands, no matter what. Her first year in San Francisco, she'd ached for Mamma's food, for the familiar sight of old men playing bocce ball in the village square, and for the way her younger siblings' small bodies

draped over hers at night. But with every year that had gone by, that ache had faded a little more, until she was no longer sure where her place in the world was. Would she still fit in at home with her American ways, as Turi had called it?

“I’m not sure.” She looked at the photograph of her parents in the casket. “What would happen to my family if I go back?” They would be just as bad off as they had been five years ago, before she and Turi had set off for Merica—or actually even worse, without Turi. As a woman, Giuliana couldn’t provide for her mother and her siblings back home. In Sicily, there was no work for women, no way to make a living for her family.

“So you want to stay? All alone in Merica?” Nedda asked, her eyes wide.

Giuliana’s chest tightened until she could barely breathe. “I think I have to. At least for a while, until my siblings are older.”

“But how will you earn enough money to feed them all?”

Giuliana dug her teeth into her bottom lip. “I don’t know. Maybe...” She gave Francesco a hopeful look. “Maybe I could help you sell your fish. People tell me I speak English very well. I realized that Ida, Tommaso’s American wife, always sold more fish and got better prices from the restaurant owners, so I asked her to teach me her language. You know people cheat you and pay less for crabs if they think you’re an uneducated fool.”

Francesco sighed. “Giuliana, I... It’s not that I don’t want to help you, but I barely make enough to provide for my own family.”

“Of course.” Giuliana tried to keep her head up. “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to embarrass you.”

He squeezed her hand for a moment. His fingers, callused and strong, felt so much like Turi’s that tears burned in her eyes. “It’s all right. There’s one thing I can do. I could buy the boat from you. That would give you enough money to last for a while...or to pay for the journey back to Sicilia.”

Sell the boat...Turi’s boat... At the thought, a hand seemed to squeeze Giuliana’s heart. No, she couldn’t do it, no matter how reasonable Francesco’s suggestion was. “I can’t. Not yet.”

“I understand.” Francesco got up, followed by his wife. They pressed kisses to her cheeks and told her when to expect them and the other piscaturi for the procession to the graveyard.

Then Giuliana was alone with Turi and her despair. For the first time in her life, she was on her own, with no one to rely on for help. The other Sicilian families in the city wouldn't be able to help either; they just didn't have the money to spare. What was she to do?

She bent over the casket and kissed Turi's cold forehead one final time. "I'll stay," she whispered to him in Sicilian. "I'll find work in a factory or in a private home."

But that was easier said than done. Like most women in her village, Giuliana had never learned how to read or write, so how was she supposed to read the newspaper advertisements?

CHAPTER 2

Winthrop Residence

Nob Hill

San Francisco, California

March 21, 1906

Today was the day. Nervous energy prickled down Kate's spine as she headed for the morning room. She hoped she would be able to sit still during breakfast. Her mother hated it when she fidgeted. She took her place at the mahogany table, pulled her linen napkin from its silver ring, and spread it across her lap. "Good morning, Mother. Morning, Father."

"Good morning," her father said, glancing up from his newspaper.

With any luck, she would soon provide the photographs for this very newspaper. The thought made her giddy.

Her mother returned the greeting but kept looking at her plate with a frown. "The bacon is cold—again." She stabbed at it with her fork. "With a name like Obedience, you'd think our maid would manage to get the food onto the table while it's still warm. I've told her a hundred times. If it weren't nearly impossible to get good servants, I'd put her out on the street."

"Obedience can't manage all the work on her own," Kate said.

"Well, it's not as if we didn't try to hire another maid, but you know how hard it is to find a reliable girl nowadays—or any girl, for that matter." Her mother tsked with disapproval. "Many young women are seeking employment in the factories South of Market."

"Then why don't we hire a Chinese houseboy?" Kate reached for the pitcher of cream and poured a little over her bowl of oatmeal. "The Harringtons have one, and they seem very satisfied with him."

Her mother's frown deepened. "You know I don't like Chinese people. They are just not trustworthy."

Kate sprinkled sugar over her oatmeal. "How do you know, if you've never employed one?"

"It is common knowledge," her mother answered. "Right, Cornelius?"

Not looking up from his newspaper, her father gave a noncommittal nod. "It shouldn't be a problem for much longer. They're running our ad again today, and they added the bit about 'good wages,' just the way I suggested. See?" He turned the newspaper around to show them the help wanted section.

Her mother pushed the plate with the cold bacon away. "I hope a competent girl will turn up this time."

The grandfather clock in the vestibule struck nine.

By the time it struck ten, she would either be the *San Francisco Call's* newest staff member or be on her way home, dejected.

Her father folded the newspaper and emptied his cup of coffee. "I have to head to the office now. The *Millicent* sets off for Shanghai tomorrow, and I want to make sure all the cargo is accounted for."

The mention of the ship named after her softened her mother's expression.

Kate hastily swallowed another spoonful of oatmeal and then jumped up. "I'll go with you. I have some things to attend to on Market Street."

Her mother's delicate china cup rattled on its saucer. "But I need you to be here when the applicants for the maid position arrive. What could you possibly have to do on Market Street that is more important than that?"

"I'm sure you'll manage to pick the best one," Kate responded without answering her mother's question. Her mother wouldn't approve if she knew Kate was heading to the *Call* building to ask for a job as a staff photographer. While her mother at first hadn't objected to Kate taking up photography as a hobby, she now thought it was an unnatural obsession for a young lady of Kate's standing. She wanted her daughter to spend her time in the drawing room, drinking tea, crocheting for one of her charities, and receiving dapper young gentlemen from wealthy families.

Kate found that kind of existence mind-numbingly boring. She preferred the darkroom to the drawing room. There had to be more to life than just marrying well. In fact, she didn't want to marry at all, but it was better not to come right out and tell her mother that.

"But how will you get back home?" her mother asked.

"I'll take the cable car. It stops right in front of the Fairmont Hotel, so I won't have to walk far," Kate said, knowing her mother didn't like her walking along the street like a commoner, especially not while she was unchaperoned.

Kate sighed. Sometimes she wondered if her family's money afforded her any more freedom than their servants or the other working-class women had.

"Kate," her father called from the entryway. "Are you coming?"

Not waiting for her mother to object again, Kate rushed out of the morning room.



Kate had her father stop the automobile in front of the Emporium, between Fourth and Fifth Street. She would walk the rest of the way and let him assume she intended to shop at the department store.

Without waiting for her father to help her, she jumped down and stepped up onto the sidewalk. "Thank you."

"Don't spend too much," he said.

"I won't." Quite the opposite. If all went according to plan, she would soon have her own money to spend and wouldn't have to rely on the spending money her father gave her anymore.

She watched as her father set his Model N Packard into motion and veered around a horse-drawn carriage on the way to his office at the foot of Market Street, near the ferry building. For a moment, she stood in the middle of the sidewalk of San Francisco's main business street. Tall buildings—hotels, banks, restaurants, and stores—lined the broad avenue on both sides. A cable car rumbled down the center of the street while horse-drawn buggies, automobiles, and the occasional bicycle used the outer tracks. Newsboys dodged the vehicles, boldly crossing the street, sometimes jumping onto cable cars or the back of automobiles.

After watching for a minute, she set off toward the intersection of Market, Kearny, and Third Streets, known as the Newspaper Angle. Here, the city's three leading newspapers—the *Chronicle*, the *Call*, and the *Examiner*—had their offices.

Kate ignored the *Chronicle* building with its clock tower and the *Examiner* with the Spanish tiles atop its roof. Her destination this morning was just one: the Spreckels building, home of the *San Francisco Call*. With its eighteen stories, it was the tallest building west of Chicago. The terra-cotta dome made it look like a crowned queen towering over her underlings. Kate glanced up at the square sandstone tower. She'd been in the building just once, dining with one of her suitors in the restaurant that occupied the domed roof. The view over the city had been spectacular even though her dinner companion had failed to impress her.

Today, she wasn't here to enjoy the view or the food. She marched through the marble lobby and to the elevator.

Two men stepped in with her, one of them wearing a press badge on the lapel of his coat.

Kate stared at it with longing. She would do her very best to march out with one of those.

The elevator doors opened with a loud ding, and the two men indicated with a polite gesture that she should go first.

Deep breath. Don't show them how nervous you are. Kate squared her shoulders before stepping out of the elevator.

The newsroom clearly was a world of its own—a world that she wanted to be part of.

As soon as she entered, a cacophony of sounds engulfed her. The large room resounded with the clatter of typewriters. Telegraph wires clicked, and a telephone rang somewhere. Messengers and telegraph boys rushed in and out, weaving between the rows of desks spread through the newsroom. A few were still empty at that time of the day, but about ten reporters and copy editors were already bent over their typewriters, hammering away at the silver-rimmed keys. Cigarette smoke curled up, filling the room with a haze. The smell of tobacco and smoke mixed with that of ink and paper.

Most of the reporters were men, who worked with their shirtsleeves rolled up and their ties loosened. Kate saw just one woman.

Well, hopefully that will change soon. With her head held up high, she walked past the desks and knocked on a door that said EDITOR written in large block letters. The clacking of the typewriters drowned out any other sound. Had there been a “come in”? She wasn’t sure, but she couldn’t very well press her ear to the door.

After one last fortifying breath, she reached for the brass door handle, monogrammed with CS for Claus Spreckels, who owned the building. She opened the door and peeked in.

A large man sat behind a desk that seemed to groan beneath stacks of paper. He puffed on a cigar, making his graying handlebar mustache twitch.

“Good morning, Mr. Fulton. I’m Kathryn Winthrop. Could I have a minute of your time?”

The *Call*’s editor looked up from his cluttered desk. “If this is about an ad or your subscription—”

“It’s not.” Kate stepped into the office and closed the door behind her, shutting out the noise from the newsroom so she wouldn’t have to keep shouting. She looked around for a moment, taking in the filing cabinets and the framed newspaper editions on the walls before returning her attention to the man behind the desk.

He frowned, rolled his cigar into the opposite corner of his mouth, and regarded her through the haze of smoke. “Aren’t you Cornelius Winthrop’s youngest daughter?”

“His only daughter,” Kate said. “But that isn’t why I’m here.” She wanted him to employ her, but not because her father owned the biggest shipping company on the West Coast. “I’m here because I’d like to work for the *Call*.”

“Well, I’m not sure we need another secretary at the moment, but I can certainly make inquiries on your behalf and let you know if there are any openings.” He looked down, his attention already returning to his work.

Kate took another step toward him and stopped directly in front of his desk. “You misunderstand my intention, Mr. Fulton.

I'm not looking for secretarial work. I'd like to join your staff as a photographer."

Now he took his cigar out of his mouth for the first time and held it between his thick fingers while he stared at her. His bushy brows bunched together. "A photographer?" he repeated as if she'd just told him she wanted to grow wings and fly to the moon.

Kate stood up straight. "That's right. I've experimented a little with cut film and roll film, but I mostly work with dry plates. I develop my own prints. I brought you some examples of my work so you can see for yourself." She opened the embroidered bag, took out the stack of her best photographs, and held it out to him.

Mr. Fulton didn't take it, nor did he spare a glance at the picture on top. "Miss Winthrop..." As he lifted his hand, ash rained down on his desk. He brushed it away with an absentminded swipe of his large hand. "I'm sure your photographs are quite pretty."

Pretty? Something about the way he said it made Kate frown.

"While photography makes a wonderful pastime for a lady like yourself, I hardly think it would be appropriate for you to take photographs of the sort of things we report on," Fulton said. "A lady doesn't need to involve herself with such concerns."

Kate gritted her teeth. Trying to keep her voice steady and firm, she replied, "I'm an avid reader of your newspaper, and if I can look at such photographs, I don't see why I can't be the one to take them."

He leaned back, making his chair creak as if in protest, and shook his head. "That's hardly the same thing. The newspaper business is too rough for the feminine nature."

"But you are employing at least one woman reporter." Kate pointed to the newsroom beyond his office door. "I'm sure she's doing just fine."

"Miss Gardner is reporting on fashion, art, and household matters, but our other reporters and our photographers are out on the streets at all hours. You'd have to take photographs of crimes, scandals, and unpleasant events."

"I'm willing to do that," Kate said. "If you give me half a chance, I will prove myself within a month. You wouldn't even have to pay me until I have proven my worth to you."

He let out a sigh that stirred his handlebar mustache. “I appreciate your candor, Miss Winthrop, but you should apply it to a more proper line of work. I’m sure your father would agree.”

Unfortunately, he would. With slumping shoulders, Kate stood in front of his desk, not sure what else to say to change his mind.

“If you’ll excuse me now, I have to get back to work. A newspaper doesn’t write itself.” He picked up his cigar and put it back into his mouth.

Kate found herself dismissed. She stared at him for several seconds before trudging to the door.

When she stepped out into the newsroom, the woman reporter looked up from whatever column about fashion, the arts, or household matters she was writing. Their gazes met through the smoke-filled room.

As if knowing what had happened, Miss Gardner sent her a commiserating smile.

A minute or two later, Kate was back outside, amidst the chaos on Market Street.

Maybe she should have expected such a reaction, but she had thought that the editor of the *Call* would be different. After all, the *Call* supported women’s suffrage. It seemed their support concerned just a woman’s right to vote, not a woman’s right to work in the newspaper business.

Now what? She peered across Third Street at the *Examiner* building. Should she try her luck there? Or maybe at the *Chronicle*?

But their answers would surely be the same. They, too, would believe that a woman shouldn’t—or couldn’t—take photographs of crimes, scandals, or unpleasant events for a living. No one would even take a look at her pictures.

She wanted to scream at the unfairness of it all, but it would only make people stare at her. With the kind of luck she’d been having today, someone would promptly report her unladylike behavior to her parents.

Sighing, she trudged toward the cable car stop to make her way back home.

CHAPTER 3

**South of Market
San Francisco, California
March 21, 1906**

As Giuliana made her way up Sixth Street, along a row of cheap wood-frame hotels and rooming houses, she stayed on the lookout for someone who could help her. Someone had to be able to read the help wanted section of the newspaper for her, right?

But all she heard were unfamiliar languages. A pushcart vendor called out in what might have been German; several boys playing baseball in an alley sounded Polish, and the owner of the Chinese laundry down the street likely wouldn't be able to read a newspaper in English either. South of Market, it was hard to believe that she was in an American city, so she continued on to Market Street.

Finally, she caught sight of a newsboy on the other side of the street.

She dodged a clanking cable car and a street sweeper who was cleaning the cobblestones of horse manure.

The newsboy waved a copy of today's newspaper and shouted out the latest news.

When Giuliana stopped in front of him, he held out his hand. "That'll be five cents, miss."

"I do not need a whole newspaper, just the part with the advertisements."

"Five cents," he repeated, still holding out his hand.

Every cent she spent would be one more cent that wouldn't feed her younger siblings back home, but if she didn't find work, her siblings wouldn't eat at all. Sighing, she pressed the coin into the boy's hand.

He gave her a newspaper and continued to shout out the headlines.

“Please.” Giuliana held on to his sleeve so he wouldn’t move past her. “Please help me. I search a new work, but I cannot read. Please read for me the advertisements.”

He started to shake his head, so she quickly added, “Oh. I understand. You cannot read. I am sorry. I did not want to embarrass you.”

His small chest inflated. “Of course I can read.”

“That is all right.” She patted his shoulder. “I do not tell the other boys.”

He stomped his foot. “But I can read. I swear!”

“Then show me. Read me the advertisements,” Giuliana said.

When he unfolded the newspaper, she bit back a grin. Male pride was the same anywhere in the world. She had often tricked her brothers into doing what she wanted by using the same strategy. After stepping around, she glanced over his shoulder at the long list of advertisements. *Good*. It seemed there was no lack of job offerings in San Francisco.

The pages rustled as he shifted the newspaper and then read the ads to her.

The more he read, the more disheartened Giuliana became. The first ad asked for office experience. The second wanted a trained nurse. The third was looking for a German or a Swedish girl. The fourth needed a stenographer. Giuliana didn’t even know what that was. All she knew was that she didn’t qualify for any of those jobs.

Finally, the boy tapped his finger on the last ad. “Wanted at once: A neat, tidy girl of good character for general housework in a family of three.”

Giuliana’s hope returned. General housework. She could do that.

“Good wages,” the boy continued to read. “Apply in person, with references at 1075 California Street.”

“Good wages,” Giuliana whispered to herself. That sounded just like what she needed. Taking care of a three-person household shouldn’t be a problem at all. Counting Nonna, there had been nine people living in their house back home. She’d helped Mamma take care of her three younger sisters and little Antonino

practically since she'd been a little girl. "California Street? Where is that?"

"Up on Nob Hill, where the rich nabobs live." He gestured north. "Nabobs?"

He nodded. "The stinking rich people who built their mansions up there during the gold rush back in '49."

Giuliana just shrugged. In her five years in San Francisco, she had gotten to know most parts of the city well, helping Turi deliver fish and crabs to restaurants, but she had never ventured anywhere near the homes of the wealthy families.

She thanked the boy and then set off toward the cable car stop. On the way, she repeated the address to herself. *1075 California Street*. Good thing she had learned to read numbers when she had sold crabs at the harbor. All she needed to do was ask the cable car conductor to point out California Street to her, and she would find where she needed to go.

When she arrived at the turntable, the conductor was just rotating the cable car with the help of several waiting passengers. People quickly boarded, filling the cable car, so Giuliana had no other choice than to step onto the running board and cling to one of the poles. She handed the coin for her fare to the blue-uniformed conductor, trying not to think of how much money she was spending today. If the rich family employed her, every cent spent would be worth it.

The gripman clanged the brass bell and pulled back the grip lever.

When she'd first arrived in San Francisco, the vehicle had confused her. How could it move up the steep hills without horses to pull it or an engine, like the newfangled automobiles had? Now she knew that the grip clamped on to a thick cable that ran underground and pulled the car along.

The cable car lurched forward and went up the street. Once the hill became steeper, Giuliana had to hang on to the pole more tightly.

Finally, after less than ten minutes, the cable car crested the top of Nob Hill. The gripman eased the lever forward, releasing the cable, and the vehicle came to a halt.

“California Street,” the conductor called out and pointed to the street that crossed the cable car tracks.

Giuliana stepped off.

When the cable car continued on its way, plunging down the hill toward the harbor, Giuliana stood there for a moment and looked around.

The view from the top of the hill was breathtaking. To the south, where she had come from, City Hall’s great bronze dome gleamed in the sun that was breaking through the fog. To the east lay exotic Chinatown and the financial district beyond. To the north, past Russian Hill, she could make out the gray waters of the bay and the Golden Gate. The sails of boats looked like tiny white dots.

A fierce longing gripped her. She wanted to be out there, at the pier, breathing in the salty air while she waited for Turi to return with the night’s catch.

Then she firmly shook her head. Turi would never come back, and her future was here, not down there at the harbor—at least if she was lucky enough to get employed by the rich family that had advertised for a maid. She forced her gaze away from the bay and looked west. Judging by the numbers on the buildings to her left and right, this was where she’d have to go.

Gathering her skirt and clutching her straw hat with her free hand so that the fierce wind wouldn’t blow it away, she crossed the cable car tracks and walked west on California Street. For about a block, it was a steep uphill climb that made her gasp for breath. Or maybe it was the magnificent residences that made her breathless. The higher she climbed, the bigger and more majestic the houses became.

To her right was a building that occupied an entire block. She couldn’t read its name, displayed on a large sign, but the word next to it was familiar, since the rooming houses in her street had the same signs: hotel. With its white granite walls, the seven-story building looked like a palace. A sign on the roof announced something that Giuliana couldn’t read. From the army of craftsmen with tools and buckets of paint streaming in and out of the building, Giuliana guessed it to be an announcement that the hotel would be opening soon.

The building to her left was even more impressive. With its arched windows, towers, steeples, and gables, it reminded Giuliana of a medieval castle. Two men were carrying a large oil painting to one of the entrances.

While Giuliana walked on with her mouth agape, the street leveled out as she reached the very top of the hill. She passed a huge brownstone mansion and a granite palace with two marble lions guarding the front door.

Her heart started to beat faster as she neared the house with the number 1075. At the street corner, she paused. There it was. Under the watchful eyes of two stone lions stood a huge marble mansion. A wrought-iron fence surrounded the property. Giuliana peeked through the bars and admired the pruned rose bushes growing behind the gate.

Would she get to live here? After living in their one-room house in Santa Flavia and then the tiny room in the boardinghouse, she couldn't imagine what it might be like.

You'd better hurry before another girl beats you to it!

With a lump in her throat, she opened the gate and walked along the broad cobblestone path toward the circular driveway directly in front of the building. Slowly, she climbed the granite steps leading up to the mansion. On the top step, she took a moment to marvel at the parklike garden surrounding the house before turning back to the front door, which was flanked by four ornate pillars on each side.

The top part of the door held a stained-glass pane that showed a ship sailing on the ocean.

Giuliana smiled and took it as a good omen. One more deep breath and she gripped the heavy door knocker. Her thumping heart nearly drowned out the noise of metal against wood. She struggled not to fidget while she waited.

A man in a black tuxedo opened the door. He looked down at her, his gaze sweeping her simple black dress and the battered straw hat she wore.

If this was the master of the house, his skeptical gaze didn't bode well for her employment plans.

“Good morning,” she said with as much dignity as she could muster. “My name is Giuliana Russo. I am here for the job of the maid. Is it still needed?”

“It is indeed. I’ll see if Mrs. Winthrop will receive you. Wait here.” He gestured at the foyer behind him and then disappeared down a long hall.

So he was a butler or another employee, not the master of the house after all.

Worrying her straw hat between her hands, Giuliana entered and closed the heavy door behind her. The circular entry hall was about as large as her family’s entire home. A massive crystal chandelier hung from the high ceiling, its lights reflecting off the gleaming marble floor. The silver candlesticks on the hall table had to be worth more than she and Turi had earned selling crabs in a whole year. A winding, red-carpeted staircase with a mahogany banister led to the second floor.

Within a minute, the butler was back. “Mrs. Winthrop will see you in the drawing room.” He led the way down the hall.

Giuliana hurried to keep up, not wanting to get lost in the big house.

He opened a door and gestured for her to step through.

With wobbly knees and damp hands, Giuliana entered what the butler had called the drawing room. A small table and a group of three chairs sat along one side of the room while a rocking chair occupied one corner. Marble busts and vases with tiny embossed golden roses were displayed on polished mahogany tables. Watercolor drawings covered the walls. One of the amazing inventions of the Americans, electric bulbs, lit the chandelier.

Giuliana’s gaze was drawn to the only person in the room. A slender, middle-aged lady in a lilac dress with a high lace collar rose from a green velvet chair.

The butler closed the door, leaving them alone. Silence reigned in the drawing room, interrupted only by the rhythmic ticking of the clock on the marble mantle.

The lady looked her up and down, and Giuliana feared that she might be found lacking.

Finally, when Giuliana couldn't stand the silence anymore and was just about to speak, Mrs. Winthrop asked, "You are not from here, are you?"

Was that good or bad in Mrs. Winthrop's book? "No. I come from Sicilia five years before," Giuliana said with a careful smile. "It is a very beautiful place. So is San Francisco, of course." Was she babbling, as she often did when she was nervous?

Mrs. Winthrop sighed. "Take a seat, please."

Giuliana carefully walked across the golden oriental carpet, sank into the velvet chair across from Mrs. Winthrop, and clutched her hands together in her lap.

"Have you brought any references?" Mrs. Winthrop asked.

"References?" Giuliana wasn't sure what that meant.

"A letter of recommendation from other employers," Mrs. Winthrop said.

Had the newspaper ad said it was required? Giuliana couldn't remember. She bit her lip. "Eh, no, I do not have a letter."

Mrs. Winthrop lifted an eyebrow that was perfectly shaped, not as thick as Giuliana's. "But you have worked in a similar position before, haven't you?"

Giuliana hung her head. "No." She peeked up at Mrs. Winthrop's disapproving expression. "But I cleaned the home of my brother. I washed his laundry, I cooked, and I sewed. I am very tidy and a hard worker, ma'am. That is what my mother and my grandmother taught me. They always said, 'A clean home is a happy home.'" Now she *was* babbling.

The lady of the house regarded her for what felt like an eternity. Finally, she said, "Show me your hands."

"My hands?" At a rebuking look from Mrs. Winthrop, she held out her hands, palms up, without asking any more questions. She pressed her lips together into a tight line as Mrs. Winthrop examined her hands.

Compared to the lady's soft, elegant fingers, her hands looked downright ugly. Once, a few years ago, a large crab had grabbed her index finger in its strong claws, leaving a ragged scar. She had also burned her hands a time or two before she had learned to drop the crabs into the pot of steaming water without scalding

herself. The salt water and the hot steam had roughened her skin and turned it red.

She wanted to curl her hands into fists and hide them in shame, but Mrs. Winthrop seemed to like what she saw.

“Good,” she said. “I find that if a maid has soft hands, she’ll turn out to be lazy.”

“Oh, no, ma’am. I am not lazy. I promise.” Giuliana held her hands out for a moment more before placing them back in her lap.

The clock on the mantle ticked along for several seconds. Finally, Mrs. Winthrop nodded. “All right, Julie, we’ll give you a try. I’d like you to start tomorrow morning, if that’s possible.”

“Of course,” Giuliana answered, thinking it better not to correct Mrs. Winthrop’s use of the wrong name.

Mrs. Winthrop stood, indicating that their conversation was over.

Giuliana got up too but hesitated to leave the room just yet. Should she ask about her wages?

Before she could decide, Mrs. Winthrop spoke again. “You’ll have to provide your own board and lodging. Except for my personal lady’s maid, I don’t like having servants around during the night.”

“Oh.” So she wouldn’t get to live here and would still have to pay for her room in the boardinghouse. She gathered her courage. “What are my wages, ma’am?”

“If we’re happy with your services, we’ll pay you four dollars a week, plus the expenses for the cable car. You’ll have Sundays and one afternoon a week off.”

Was that considered a good payment? Giuliana wasn’t sure, but she knew that it was more than what she and Turi had earned in a week of crab fishing—and she hadn’t had an afternoon to herself in the past.

“I expect you to report here at six tomorrow morning,” Mrs. Winthrop said. “I won’t tolerate tardiness.”

“I will come here at six, ma’am.”

“Very well.” Mrs. Winthrop gave a regal nod and rang the bell so the butler would escort Giuliana out.

Awkwardly, Giuliana curtsied and followed the butler back down the hall. Only when the heavy portal closed behind her did

she breathe a sigh of relief. She had secured the employment! Turi would be so proud of her—at least she hoped so.

She made her way past the rose bushes, barren at this time of year, and reached out to open the iron gate.



Kate trudged up the hill from the cable car stop, still disappointed and furious. The editor hadn't even spared her photographs a single glance, as if he'd already been sure a woman couldn't produce anything of value. The worst thing was that she wouldn't even get a compassionate response from her mother if she told her what had happened. Her parents insisted that only working-class women should hold a job. The last time they had discussed Kate's future, her mother had told her, "If you feel you must work before marriage, you could teach school for a while"—as if it was already decided that she would marry not too far in the future.

Well, not if Kate had her way. She wanted a career, not a husband. With a determined shove, she pushed open the iron gate in front of her home.

Instead of opening fully, the gate bounced off an unexpected obstacle on the other side and hit her in the forehead.

"Darn!" Kate stumbled back and landed on her rear end in the middle of the sidewalk. *Wonderful*. Could this day get any worse?

A suppressed cry came from the other side of the gate.

Oh gosh! Had she hit Obedience or Mrs. Tretow? Kate scrambled up and peeked through the gate's iron bars.

It wasn't her mother's personal maid or the cook sitting in one of the flowerbeds, nor was it one of the girls who came by once a week to help out on washday.

This stranger didn't look anything like the Irish girls her mother usually hired. Her straw hat had tumbled off when she had fallen, revealing hair as dark brown as the chocolate the Ghirardellis produced at the North Waterfront. The young woman looked just as Italian as the famous chocolatier. Big eyes of the same rich brown color, framed by long lashes, stared back at Kate, and her full, generous mouth formed a startled "oh."

A flush—either of surprise or of embarrassment—had darkened the stranger’s olive complexion.

More carefully than before, Kate opened the gate and squeezed through. She knelt in front of the woman without caring whether her skirt would get dirty. “I’m so sorry. I was...distracted and didn’t see you. Are you hurt?”

The young woman—probably no older than Kate’s twenty-two, perhaps even a year or two younger—still stared at her and shook her head.

“Let me help you up.” Kate stood and offered the stranger her hand.

“Oh, no. No need.” A warm accent colored the woman’s words. “I can—”

“I was the one who bowled you over, so let me be the one who helps you up too,” Kate said, still holding out her hand.

Finally, the young woman laid her fingers into Kate’s. Her grip was strong and her palm callused. Like her clothing, her handshake confirmed that she was a working-class woman, not one of the wealthy high-society ladies who had visited Kate’s mother to talk about one of her charities.

Kate pulled her up. Again, she misjudged her own strength, and they nearly collided a second time. For a moment, only inches separated their bodies. Kate stared into the woman’s eyes, dark and beautiful like a warm summer night. She caught a whiff of tomatoes, something nice-smelling that she couldn’t identify, and...fish.

Quickly, the young woman pulled her hand free and started brushing down her dress.

On impulse, Kate lifted her hand, about to help her. *What are you doing? Let her clean her own backside, stupid!* She tried not to stare as the stranger ran her hands over her lush hips and shapely figure to brush off clumps of earth. “Did you come to apply for the open position?” Kate asked, keeping her gaze on the woman’s worn leather shoes.

The stranger’s hands froze in mid-motion. “How do you know?”

Kate couldn’t resist. “Telepathy.” She pointed from the woman’s head to her own and grinned. When the woman stared at her without comprehension, Kate added, “I read your mind.”

The chocolate-brown eyes narrowed, and then a hesitant smile spread over the woman's face, lighting it up in a way that made Kate stare again.

"All right," Kate said. "Maybe I didn't really read your mind. Maybe my mother told me."

The smile disappeared, as if someone had flicked one of the new electric light switches. "Your...mother? You...you are...?"

"Kathryn Winthrop. But, please, call me Kate, or I'll think I'm in trouble."

"Madonna mia! Please do not take away the job. I did not mean to..."

Kate held up her hand. "It's all right. I was the one who knocked you over, so your position is safe—assuming my mother took you on."

"She did."

"Then it seems we'll run into each other again—hopefully not literally this time," Kate said.

A hint of a smile darted across the woman's face but then quickly disappeared.

"So do you have a name?" Kate teased, just because she wanted to see if she would get another smile.

She didn't.

"Oh. Scusa. My name is Giuliana Russo. You can call me Julie if you want. Your mamma did that."

Kate mentally repeated the name. Giuliana Russo. It was unusual, at least in her circles, but she liked it. "What do you prefer?"

"Giuliana," the other woman answered without hesitation.

"Then Giuliana it is."

That earned her a smile.

The front door swung open. "Kate? What are you doing?" her mother called across the driveway. "Come inside now! Mr. Jenkins just telephoned to let us know that he'll call on you this afternoon."

Kate bit back a groan. "I'm coming." Under her mother's watchful gaze, she didn't dare say another word to Giuliana, so she just gave her a nod and hurried past her to the house.

TO CONTINUE READING,
PLEASE PURCHASE

SHAKEN TO THE CORE

BY JAE

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