

13 NAMES ON A DEAD MAN'S CHEST

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Prologue

“If he think he can steal my woman from me, he is wrong, I will have her.”

The angry man tears up the photograph he is holding in his hand. He punches the wall of his bathroom door.

“Honey are you okay in there?”

“I’m fine, be out in a minute.”

“I married a useless woman who can’t give me children. The woman I want is married to someone else. This must end.”

Chapter ONE

It wasn't an accident. Melani knows who the man is but refuses to tell anyone. She had always known he was a killer for hire and that's why she became a cop. He never berated her for her choice or made a fuss over it. He knew what he was doing was wrong but it paid well and that was his story. For years, he would come home to his wife, her mother, with expensive gifts and they never questioned where he got the money from. Until one day a man came to the house and asked for Kincaid. Her mother never faltered in her response.

She simply told him that he was not there and she didn't know when he would be back, which in its entirety, was the truth. The man gave her some details which he said she needed to seriously consider.

“Your husband is a killer and I am going to find him and put him behind bars.”

Kincaid would leave and stay away for days sometimes weeks on end. The news would carry a story about a high end business man or a politician, or some millionaire, a drug Lord here or there being shot or killed in some way. She knew deep down in her heart it was the man she married. She was never afraid of him and each time he came home, she prepared dinner, they all sat and talked about what happened while he was away. Melani adored her father. He doted on her so much her mother felt left out at times but she never showed it in front of her

daughter. Whenever she mentioned it to her husband it would always end in a passionate love making session.

“You love her more than you love me.”

“Not this again Lyn, you know my love is different for both of you, I’m your husband and her father, why do we have to do this each time I come home? Don’t you want me here?”

“I.....”

“You’re leaving me?”

“What? No, but I’m raising her all on my own, I sleep alone almost every night and I’m lonely. I married you because I love you but yet I am always alone, what kind of marriage is that? You won’t tell me what you do for a living and I keep having to make up stories for Mel, that’s not fair.”

“Don’t do this please Lyn, I promise I will be with you and Mel soon, just trust me.”

Kincaid walked up to his wife and kissed her softly on her lips. He wrapped his arm around her waist and deepened the kiss.

“No, you can’t do this to me again. I want a divorce.”

“Like hell you do, no man is coming near you or my daughter, do you understand me?”

Kincaid crushed her mouth against his and he knew she would not resist for long and he was right. Maralyn gave into her husband as she always did, she knew her love for him was strong but would it be able to stay that way forever?

About 6 weeks after Kincaid left yet again, Maralyn found out she was pregnant.

Melani was 8 and she was heading for 40. If Kincaid was around more she may have considered keeping the baby. She tried to have an abortion before her husband came back but something went wrong and she bled to death. Melani, now alone, was shipped off to a foster home and when Kincaid came back to his family, the house was locked up and all the things were gone. Since no one could find Kincaid, the things were sold and the money was deposited into an account for Melani. He went to the police station and inquired as to what happened to his family. When he heard the news of his wife's death, he flew into a rage. He demanded to know where his daughter was. It took him 6 weeks to find her but

when he did, he realised she was coping quite well and after talking to the foster family, they decided it was best that she stay in a stable home and he would be allowed to visit. He made sure she had everything she needed. Kincaid told the family not to take any money from Child Care for her, he would support her until she was old enough to help herself. He took over her bank account and purchased an insurance policy for himself with her as the beneficiary. He paid all her school fees, and sent a souvenir from wherever he went.

15 years later

Melani joined the police force with every intent on not being the type of person her father was. Although she loved him, she knew he was a bad man and she partly blamed him for her mother's death. The foster family allowed her to stay until she was ready to be on her own, she would help out with the younger children and share in the household duties. She moved out when she was 21 and returned every week to chat with the children, help out with groceries, so the home would not have to depend solely on the government for support. She even arranged for a van to take the children to school and bring them back home. She met Vanelli on her first day on the job and they literally crashed into each other.

"Whoa slow down there little lady, you're too small to pack such a wallop."

"Sorry sir, it's my first day and I am totally lost. Can you tell me where to find the Forensic Lab?"

"Ah new kid on the block, I am heading there to drop off a few assignments, walk with me."

"Thanks sir, I appreciate it."

"If you really appreciate it quit calling me sir and have dinner with me on your next night off."

"Are you hitting on me?"

"I'm too old to hit on any woman, I am asking you out to a casual dinner, that's it."

Melani and Vanelli dated for two years, then they got married. Vanelli was 32 and she was 24. She wanted to have a baby right away but he wanted to wait a little longer. She agreed as she was in love with her husband and she would do anything for him.

Chapter TWO

Melani wasn't in danger from her father – he was on his way to tell her to run. He knew too much and they would come after her next. Harland retraced Kincaid's steps and finds out all he needs to know. He stages a kidnapping without telling Vanelli and ends up dead but he left clues and Vanelli has to find Melani before 'they' do.

Vanelli follows the trail to Barbados, Melani's birth place. How in the hell did he get her out of the country? Then he remembered the reach and skills of his best friend. He found his wife in a beach house on the east coast.

“Vanelli! Oh god I'm so glad you're here but wait... that means... oh no!”

“Yes my love, Hartland is dead!”

“I'm so sorry! He spoke very highly of you.”

“I'm not, knowing him, he will turn up again. He died twice before. Now I have to get you to another location before...”

The sound of gunshots ring out and as the glass doors and windows shatter into the night, they dive for cover. They stealthily turn off the lights and sneak out the side door, hop into the hire car parked at the back of the house and hightail it out of there. Vanelli hitches a ride on a private yacht going to St. Lucia. His friend Hendy meets them in a small boat and they go to his house. They make plans for their next move.

As Melani slept, her husband stood looking out the window. His boss warned him what would happen if he left without permission. He told him to take the badge, gun and job, this was his wife and she needed him. She made a whimper and he turned to look at her. She was the reason he made it through every gruesome day. The last conversation they had she told him she wanted a baby and he said again it wasn't the right time. He was right to a point looking at everything going on now but as soon as it was over, he would quit his job, and give her everything she needs including a baby. He knew why she longed for one, she always said she felt the need to share her love with someone who treats her with respect. She told him he was everything she wanted in a man and a baby would make her his forever. He never understood this until now. He thought she needed a father but all she needed was love and he would give it to her unconditionally.

"Honey, come to bed."

"Not yet, I'm too wound up."

"Come lay down with me then, I feel safer with your arms around me. Please." The last word was barely a whisper. Vanelli, walked over to the bed and lay down next to Melani and she curled up in his arms. Within minutes she was fast asleep. When she awoke again, the room was dark and Vanelli was nowhere in sight.

"Van?"

No response. Melani's body shuddered when she thought she was alone. Then she heard the faint sounds of arguing. She got up from the bed and made her way to the source of the voices. When she reached the kitchen, Hendy looked up, acknowledged her and left. Vanelli on the other hand was running his hand over his bald head.

"Tell me."

"I need to leave you here, Hendy will protect you."

"You can't leave me here, Van, I need you, please don't leave, I....."

"What honey?"

"I'm pregnant."

Vanelli plunked down on the bar stool next to the counter. He didn't know what to say.

"I'm sorry, I let this happen and I know you wanted to wait. I didn't do it on purpose, if that's what you are thinking. If you don't want the baby, I can terminate until you are ready."

"You would do that just because I asked you to?"

"You are my soul, I would give my life if it meant you would be happy."

"I would never ask either of those things honey. I was telling myself only last night as soon as this debacle is over, I will give you the baby you want."

"No."

"No?"

"You need to want our baby as much as I do. I won't bring a child into this world unless both of us are happy."

Melani turned away and went back to the bedroom. She sat on the bed and let the tears fall. She heard a sound and when she looked up her husband was standing in the doorway.

"I love you with all my heart Melani, I put on my badge everyday trying to make our lives better. I come home and the world disappears into oblivion because you

are there. I want everything you want because your love is my strength. I helped make our baby, how could I not want him? I wanted us to wait but we don't have a choice now. I am scared I am going to disappoint you as your father did with your mother. That's my fear. I can't bear to see you hurt because of something I failed to do."

"I was never afraid of that, I just want you to be happy that we are having a baby together, a little person that no other person can claim. The power is in our hands to raise the baby the best way we can and the love I know we share will get us through the tough times but you have to want him or her as much as I do."

"I admit I was shocked when you told me but I would do my best to make sure you are happy as well. I do want our baby, it just means I have to pull out all the stops to protect you from these madmen. I do have to go though, it's the only way I can find out who's behind your father's murder and the attempts on your life."

"Please don't go without me, it was hell back in Barbados not knowing anyone and not being able to go outside and now with the baby I feel so needy and lonely. I would rather lose my life by your side than alone."

"Nothing will happen to you here, Hendy is a good man he will protect you with his life. I will be gone when you wake up in the morning. I have left some cash in case you need to send out for anything. Make sure you eat well, our baby needs you."

"Where will you go?"

"Back to the US, I need to talk to my boss even though I'm fired, he is still a man I respect."

"When will you be back?"

"I'm not coming back here, if Hendy doesn't get a call from me in 24 hours, he will take you to Miami and I will get you from there."

"Okay, I trust you. Will you make love to me before you go?"

"Anything for you my love."

Vanelli took his wife's hand and led her into the bedroom, locked the door and they were out of all semblance of clothing in seconds. Their need to feel each other was equaled to the need for sea water to be salty.

Their love making was always passionate but this was different, it's as if each one was thinking they would never be seen again. As Vanelli spilled himself into his wife, she let out a soft cry.

"I'm not going to die honey, I promise we will be together soon. I promise."

"You can't promise me that my love I know you are just trying to reassure me and I appreciate it. Just do your best to be safe. I know there is something you aren't telling me but that's okay."

"You know me so well. I will be gone in a few hours, think of me every second as I will you."

"It's a done deal."

They fell asleep in each other's arms and when Melani awoke her husband was gone. There was a note on the night stand.

'I miss you already, take care of our baby, and see you soon. Love Van.'

She folded it up and put it in her purse. She got up to take a shower and her tummy fluttered.

"Yes little one, your daddy will protect us."

After her shower she dressed in a blue halter sun dress and made her way to the kitchen. Hendy was seated at the breakfast table and when he looked up she knew something was wrong. She tried not to let any expression show on her face but she was already close to tears when she thought of Vanelli not being there with her.

"Good morning Hendy."

"Sit and have breakfast, we need to talk."

"What's wrong?"

"Van's dead."

Melani felt the world spin and then she plunged into nothingness. When she awoke, she was tied to a four poster bed, spread eagled. She blinked into focus and the face of her husband's best friend came into view.

"You are finally awake." Melani kept quiet.

"Not even 'gonna ask why? Fine, I'll tell you because I'm such a nice man. I saw you first but never you paid any attention to me, you fell right into Vanelli's lap, next thing you know I'm attending your wedding. Do you have any fucking idea what that feels like? Watching the woman you love get married to your best

friend? I suffered through it but I wanted to kill him. I was going to kidnap you and I hired the one man I know who could do the job, how was I supposed to know he was your god-damned father. He took my money and was on his way to warn you when he got killed. Van called me and told me what happened and that he was bringing you over. I could not believe that after all this time I would get to have you in my house. Your husband is so fucking stupid. He actually thinks I am his friend. I told him he should go back to the Chief and beg for his job back and it would help find the man who is trying to kill you and I am right here with the wife he cherishes so much. How's that for a bit of information?"

"You know he is going to figure it out soon enough."

"It will be too late by then, I am going to impregnate you with my child and when he finds out he will leave you and you will come to me."

Melani let out laugh that would make the Joker proud.

"I believe there is a God somewhere out there looking after me. I am already pregnant for my husband, so I guess the joke's on you."

Hendy did what Melani did not expect. He walked over to her and punched her in the face.

"You slut, you think you can fool me, I am going to take what's mine and you will have my baby!"

Hendy ignored Melani's soft pleas not to touch her. He dropped his pants and climbed onto the bed between her legs. Hendy was so eager to be with Melani, he never even bothered to touch her, or to enjoy her. Then, without pause or hesitation, mercilessly shoved himself inside her, not hearing or seeing anything but the purpose of his mission. He grunted and groaned, uncaring, unfeeling, shoving, bruising, hating.

Hendy was so engrossed in his onslaught he never heard the front door open, he never heard anyone walk through the house and he surely never heard the trigger pull and but he sure as hell was dead as the bullet whizzed through the silencer and entered his skull.

Melani was crying softly as Vanelli dragged Hendy's body from his wife.

"Mel honey, I'm here."

"Who are you?"

Vanelli's heart broke, he had seen trauma like this before but to see it happen to his wife tore him to bits.

"It's me your husband, Vanelli."

"Vanelli's dead."

"I'm so sorry honey, we will get through this."

He lifts her in his arms and takes her into the shower in the bedroom next door. All his years of training, should have kicked in as he was destroying evidence but this was his wife. He washes and dries her off and finds something for her to put on. He puts her to sit on the bed and he brushes her hair with long strokes. He kisses her forehead gently and whispers her name.

"Melani. That's my name isn't it?"

"Yes honey, you are my beautiful wife and we are going to have a baby." Just then there were shouts and sounds of people bursting into the house. Vanelli was so concerned with Melani he forgot his gun on the dresser, Hendy on the floor and anything not centered on her. He heard a voice behind him and he stood to face its owner.

"Are you okay buddy?"

"I'm fine but Mel was.... he..... I killed him."

"Don't say another word until we get back home you got me? Wait, how did you figure out it was Hendy?"

"I was telling him I was leaving to find out who killed Mel and who was after her. He said 'You shouldn't have brought her to me.' As opposed to being her 'here'. I put the pieces together quickly. All the things he said to me while we were arguing, then I got a text message Kincaid programmed his cell to send to mine before I boarded the plane. It was a photograph of Hendy and the information that came with it said he was hired to kill Kincaid and kidnap Mel. What I don't understand is why Mel?"

The chief moved closer and the house filled with local cops, paramedics and medical people. Mel was crying softly.

"He raped her?" His voice was soft and filled with concern.

"Yes, I was too late." Vanelli's eyes filled with water as he looked into his boss's face.

"I'll have you both cleared to go home under my jurisdiction. He was a sick man and we should have realised it sooner, this was not your fault. The locals will want a word with you. By the book, no extra." The Chief turned away and went to speak to the local Chief of Police.

"You know I can't just let him leave, he killed one of our own."

"I need to get him out of here Johnathan, you know what things like this does to a man when he actually sees his wife being raped. She doesn't even remember him and he's holding it in so far, don't push him. I will personally bring him back for the trial myself if there is one. You owe me this. Please Jo."

"Okay, okay, I will have to let the public know what has happened. God Hendy's wife must be in shambles. I have to talk to her as soon as I drop you off. As a matter of fact, you can go with me, I can't handle tears from this woman."

"Sure let's go."

They drove to Mrs. Sealy's home and the front door was open and they could hear screaming and things crashing inside. They approached the house cautiously guns at the ready. What they saw was heartbreaking. Mrs. Sealy was throwing the photographs of her wedding at the wall. She was ripping down her husband's trophies from his years on the force.

She turned to grab something else from the shelf and saw the two men.

"It's my fault we couldn't have children. When I had the abortion something went wrong and by the time I found out we had already gotten married and when I told him he was so angry. He called me a liar and a trickster. I told him we could adopt and he called me useless and said he would find another woman to bare his child. I never thought he would pick Melani. It's only when you called and said she was in trouble I knew somehow but I couldn't prove it. I'm so sorry Jo, maybe

if I had told someone this never would have happened." Annetta sunk to the floor and for the first time since she heard her husband was dead, she cried.

Johnathan walked over to her and sat next to her. He put his arm around her shoulder and just sat with her. The other Chief, called her mother and asked her to come get her. They would tidy up the house and lock it up.

"You love her don't you Jo?" He looked at his longtime friend as they watched Ann's mother drive away.

"Sweet Jesus, how did you hide it for so long?"

"Hendy was a good friend, I could never betray him like that. She is perfect."

"Oh wait a minute, it was you wasn't it. I just remembered what she said. She didn't say I had an abortion, she said when I had the abortion. She was talking directly to you. You were the father and you said earlier you can't handle tears from 'this' woman."

"She was 15, I was 21. I used to sneak her out of the house and we would make love on the beach. My heart broke when she decided to get rid of the baby. I told her I would support the both of them but she was afraid of her mother. I cried for weeks. Then I moved to another part of the island and joined the force and met Hendy. When he showed up with her on his arm, my heart broke all over again but I kept myself in check. I should be mourning my friend but I finally have the chance to be happy. I never found another woman like her and if she will have me, we will be married and if she still wants to adopt, we will, she has enough love in her heart for a million children."

"Well I wish you all the best. Now I 'gotta go take my man home and give him some time off. I fired him ya know. I told him I would if he went after the people who tried to kill Mel. He dropped the gun and badge on my desk and left. That's why I came down. He is a good man who knows his priorities."

"Fair enough. I think I can quell the situation here, if I need him I will let you know."

The two men shook hands and said good bye.

Vanelli had taken his wife to the hospital to get checked up. She was fading in and out of memories but the more he talked to her the more she responded to the present time. He told her about their life together, the baby they were going to have, their parents, her work, his work and everything he thought was important. The doctor had just come in to see her and he asked Van how he felt about the babies.

"Babies?"

"Yes you are having a twin, didn't you know?"

"No, I only found out she was pregnant yesterday."

"Ah I see, maybe she was going to tell you before all of this happened. Are you okay with the pregnancy?"

"Out with it Doc, what's going on?"

"While I was examining her she said 'He isn't ready for you babies.'"

"Oh shit. I told her recently we weren't ready to have children but I don't feel that way anymore, I almost lost her and I would give anything to have her back."

"Okay I just needed to know because she seems to sense your moods, even in her state. Keep talking to her positively and I am sure she will come around. You can take her home if you want to there is nothing wrong with her physically, although she may be a bit sore after the meds wears off."

"Thanks Doc and thanks for being honest."

Vanelli shook the Doctor's hand and went to sign the release forms. When he came back Melanie was sitting on the bed smiling.

"Hi sweetie, would you like to go back home today?"

"Yes honey, did the Chief come down to get us out or do we have to talk to the police before we go?" She smiled a bit more.

"Melani?"

"Yes Van." She giggled.

"You..... remember me?"

"Of course I remember you and I remember everything that happened in the last few weeks. Seeing Dad in the lab, running to Barbados, coming to St. Lucia, us making love and last of all the rape. I was lying here and it just all came back, gave me a quick headache too."

Vanelli stared at his wife, not knowing what to say. She held out her hand and he stepped forward and took it. He sat on the bed next to her and just stared at her.

"I'm pregnant with twins Van isn't that wonderful?"

"I know the Doc told me. Are you sure you're okay?"

"I thought Hendy was going to kill me. I saw the evil in his eyes, then I remembered you, the love that we shared and the children we are going to have and I just shut him out. He became non-existent to me. When the memories came back, I had to unscramble everything and focus on you. I was getting bits and pieces of the things you told me and the one thing that resonated throughout was that you loved me. I love you too Van, so much and I am determined to put all of this behind me and enjoy my pregnancy but I need you with me. Wherever you go I am going."

Vanelli leaned forward and kissed her gently on the lips. She grabbed his collar and pulled him in for a deeper kiss.

Eight months later

"Oh my love look at them, aren't they precious!"

"Yes they are, you did well, and I can't wait to teach them how to shoot."

Melani punched Vanelli in the arm as they looked down at the twins. Everything was right with the world again.

The End.