

Chasing The Ghost

Maggie's World

A cool layer of orange light painted the sky over New Orleans as the sun slipped down the horizon. The air, while still warm from a late summer day, lost its sizzle with every passing moment. Maggie Drake leaned against the inner cubby of a storefront, watching a building across the street. Deep inside the center of the city, away from Bourbon Street and all things tourist, no people traversed the streets and few cars passed by. As darkness settled over her, Maggie was the only person around.

She was waiting for Marco Breaux to leave his hiding place. Marco wasn't the smartest tool in the shed when it came to confidence. He'd betrayed Drake to the core by helping The Company kidnap her, and telling them who knew what else. Marco should have known that after switching sides, his friends in The Family might return the favor and seize him if given the chance. He apparently thought he could trust a certain female to whom he'd disclosed his whereabouts. After various threats about her future, however, Maggie had been able to prove Marco's reliance on her untrustworthy.

While she was relatively certain that Marco's confidant had given her good information, Maggie had no way of knowing who else might be in the building with Marco. Her mission was too important to risk not having the upper hand, so she waited instead of barging into a potential trap. She knew that Marco could not resist going out on a Friday night, so he would leave soon to hit the streets. He was all about the satisfaction of here and now. When he left to find that pleasure he so craved, she would be upon him and he would not have any help in fighting her off.

The door she was watching finally opened after more than two hours of her watching it, long after dark had fully engulfed her. Maggie recognized Marco from his puffed hair and sleek build. He wore his customary sleeveless undershirt and blue jeans. A second person followed him out that Maggie did not recognize. The person was smaller and with longer hair flowing behind on the intermittent breeze. Marco's friend looked like a girl. Whoever she was, the woman threw a wrench in Maggie's plan, but not one that couldn't be overcome.

The couple turned up the street away from Maggie, heading into the more populated portion of the French Quarter without an apparent

care in the world. Maggie envied them their freedom, even though she knew that they needed to be worried. Marco seemed not to recognize or accept that he had forfeited his life by turning on Drake.

Maggie trailed the two walkers for several blocks from a safe distance. Marco touched the woman on the shoulder several times as they talked, completely unaware that Maggie was stalking them. They passed a few people who had no idea that they were seeing prey and predator in an ancient chase.

When they turned down a narrow alley to take a short cut, Maggie picked up her pace. In a city with as many tourists milling about at any hour of the day, she might not get too many chances to make her move on Marco. Rounding the corner into the darkened alley, Maggie made no further attempts to keep her presence secret, letting her feet slap against the bricks as she ran toward them.

“Marco,” she said. “I need to talk to you.”

Looking over his shoulder, Marco’s eyes burned fire. He pulled the woman along beside him and picked up speed, showing no intention of giving in to her request. Maggie burst into full speed, leaping over the couple’s heads and landing on the other side, blocking off their escape from the alley. Marco and the woman skidded to a stop a few feet from Maggie.

“Leave me alone, Maggie. If you guys don’t mess with me, I won’t mess with you,” Marco said.

“It’s too late for that. Why don’t you send your friend away so that we can talk,” Maggie said. She had no desire to deal out Family style justice to anyone except Marco. Whoever was with him did not deserve to suffer his fate.

The woman beside Marco looked like a college kid who likely thought she was in for a night of meaningless fun and frolic with a good looking older man. She obviously had poor judgment given her particular choice of man. Marco had nothing to offer anyone but death.

Marco tightened his grip on the brunette. “It doesn’t have to be this way, ya know,” Marco said. His eyes looked wild, darting from point to point.

“I told you that you were going to cross the line with Drake, and you finally did it,” Maggie said.

“He got no right to decide somebody gotta die,” Marco said.

While Maggie philosophically agreed with him, there was a big difference in what was right in the world, and what was reality. “You gave him that right when you accepted his protection.”

“What’s gonna happen when he comes for you, Maggie?”

“We’re not talking about me. We’re talking about you. And you know what has to happen here,” Maggie said. She took a step toward Marco, and he made an equal move backward, dragging the woman with him.

The young woman’s face was stricken with fright. “Marco, what the hell is going on?” she asked.

He ignored her. Marco shook his head and took another step away. “You don’t need to do this. I’m not gonna just roll over.”

Maggie shook her head. This was going to get ugly. “I’m not letting you get away.”

Marco stared at her for a moment more, then made his move. Grasping the woman by the shoulders, he heaved her toward Maggie. Having no choice, Maggie caught the flailing woman and stumbled backward. When Maggie regained her footing, Marco was already sprinting down the alley. He had a head start of about twenty yards. That would be more than enough of a break for Marco to escape from an average beat cop. Maggie was anything but average, though, and he knew it.

Emerging from the alley into the street, Maggie’s eyes took a moment to adjust to the brightness of the street lamps. She barely caught sight of Marco rounding the next corner. Not surprisingly, he was headed toward the French Quarter, probably hoping that either she wouldn’t be willing to chase and apprehend him there, or that he could get lost in a crowd.

If he did question her resolve, Marco was making a mistake this time. She didn’t relish the assignment to eliminate him, but she agreed with her father that it had to be done. Marco was a bigger threat to the Family at this point than any drug cartels or murder investigations. The risk that one of their own kind would sell out the Family presented much more far reaching implications. In the Drake clan, loyalty wasn’t just an altruistic goal, it was a necessity.

Taking a breath and bearing down, Maggie sprinted as fast as she could. She spotted Marco doing the same on the next street. He had the advantage of being male, but she had the advantage of youth. He

couldn't out run her, and slowly, she began closing the distance between them.

Half a block later, Maggie seized her opportunity to catch him. As they approached a cross street, Maggie used the curb as a push off point, locking her feet against it as she lunged forward toward Marco's back. She cleared the final distance between them, the width of the street, latching onto him with her strong hands. They tumbled down onto the sidewalk on the other side of the street. Marco hit the pavement hard with Maggie on top of him.

Shrugging backward, Marco pushed Maggie away and regained his feet. Blood from his nose covered his lips and chin. He lashed out at Maggie with quick right hooks, but none connected. The more agile woman dodged and weaved away from the strikes, looking for an opportunity to disable her nemesis. A sudden roundhouse kick from Marco almost connected with her head. Instead, she side stepped the blow and threw a punch that connected with Marco's temple. He staggered backward, shaking his head like a dog with an itchy ear. He put his hands on his temples, trying to regain his senses.

Pulling out her knife, Maggie surged forward toward Marco. She didn't think about how distasteful she found death. Marco let go of his head when he saw the knife in her hand. The eight inch long blade was gracefully curved on one side, and serrated like crocodile teeth on the other. The handle under her palm was crusted with jewels.

Marco looked back up into her eyes. "You can't do this," he pleaded.

Maggie had no plans to let him talk his way out of his fate. She stepped forward with purpose, trying to anticipate his next move. She hoped that he was disoriented enough that this was going to be quick and easy. Maggie surged forward with the knife in lead, aiming for his chest.

He was ready for her, and moved out of the way. In a series of movements faster than she thought him capable, Marco knocked the weapon from her hand and hit her in the face. It was her turn to stumble away with her ears ringing. Maggie cursed as Marco began running again. She looked down at the ground around her. She had to have the knife. It had scattered away several feet and rested next to the front door of a closed office. She scrambled over, picked it up, and resumed her pursuit.

Marco's distraction tactics had gained him another twenty yard lead. Under normal circumstances, it probably would have been enough to get him into populated areas where she would abandon her chase.

Today, she didn't want to kill him in front of a crowd of people, but she had no plans to let him go. Maggie realized that they were on LaRue Street, and likely headed to a familiar destination. A place where Marco might actually have a chance of disappearing.

Picking up her pace, Maggie put every ounce of energy she had into the pursuit. Unfortunately, sensing her renewed urgency and that he was succeeding, Marco also increased his speed. Storefronts zipped by beside them as they sped straight down the street. They passed a few pedestrians who paid them little notice on the other side of the street.

Maggie gritted her teeth when Marco's destination came clearly into focus. It was early in the evening, but the place could be crowded. If Marco was lucky, it would be. If not, he would be hers just as easily as if he were a cow delivered to a butcher.

Caring not about the consequences, Maggie followed Marco into the darkness of Club 9.