

Chapter 10: Dance Back From the Grave

Madeline Cavanaugh got out and slammed the door to her light blue pickup after parking it next to Norman's old green Mercedes in the Bates' gravel parking lot. Correction: Norman's mother Norma's old Mercedes. He'd kept it the whole time she'd been comatose, refusing even the thought of replacing it with a newer car. Maddie found it sad and so sweet. Several times over the three years she'd gotten to know the handsome shy young man, she'd thought of offering to go with him to visit Norma in the hospital during one of his daily trips to her bedside. As far as Maddie could recall, Norman had rarely missed a day unless he was sick with a cold or flu. Even then, he went anyway. Only to have the nurses send him home until he recovered. Upon hearing this from him, Maddie had never known anyone else as devoted to another person. Let alone a son to his mother, and it was so endearing. She couldn't help being so drawn to him.

But then something would always come up with the hardware store that needed her attention, then came the mess of a divorce with Sam. It had been Norman who broke the news that Sam was screwing some girl barely out of her teens, meeting her in one of the Bates Motel rooms at least twice a week. It had been Norman who'd hugged her as she'd sobbed, her tears turning to righteous anger soon enough. She took out a loan to hire the best divorce attorney in WPB and went after the cheating bastard with everything they had to throw at him. It had been worth every cent. During that rough year, thoughts of Norman temporarily took a backseat. It was no wonder Maddie got a shock at her first glimpse of Norma Bates. Not unconscious in a hospital bed, but alive and standing in her store. Right at her son's side.

Maddie briefly flashed back to that embarrassing evening in her kitchen when she'd invited Norman over to try a new cake recipe with her. Putting a move on him hadn't gone well, Norman pulling away from the kiss and stammering embarrassed apologies; he wasn't ready to be with anyone and anyway she was still married.

Maddie's cheeks grew warm at that memory, and even after Sam was gone: she'd never tried again. It seemed best to stay good friends. She was first resigned, then thankful for that much. Flash forward to the present, and the strong resemblance between the two women would have shocked anyone. Norma was also enthralling, even more than her son. Friendly and so upbeat, so hopeful for the future going forward. Despite having amnesia, the severity of which had been subject to speculation and gossip around town. Some said Norma had had to relearn everything, including how to walk. Now Maddie saw that was an exaggeration. Norma seemed to be doing just fine, and her plans for brightening up that gloomy-looking old house were exciting. Maddie was glad to be a part of it, and not only because of the money. She also had a feeling there was more to the story behind Norma's shopping trip at Crystal Pathways. Not simply for new reading material. The former Mrs. Loomis hadn't practiced the Craft in years, but some intuition lingered about anything pertaining to it.

It was also a wonder she was as nervous as she was, her heart thumping with every step she took up the steep hillside stairs. She'd never before set foot inside the Bates' inner sanctum, and at first she couldn't shake the feeling of being an outsider despite being warmly invited to dinner. The front door opened seconds after her tentative knock, "Maddie! Come on in." Norma was wearing a lovely figure-hugging black-and-pink flowered dress, sleeveless and with a full knee-length skirt. A light pink shawl was draped over her shoulders, and her blonde curls brushed her shoulders.

Damn, she's beautiful. I only hope I look that good at 47.

"Hi. I know I'm a bit early." It was 5:45pm. "These are for you and Norman," Maddie stepped inside and handed Norma the bouquet of yellow roses and the bottle of Chardonnay she'd brought.

"No problem at all. These are lovely!" Norma took the flowers and inhaled their sweet scent. "Come on in. The roast chicken will be done in half an hour. Let's have a glass of that wine in the meantime." Norma led the way through the foyer and a hallway with a definitely-vintage runner rug, into her kitchen with its formica table that recalled a bygone era.

"You have a beautiful home." Maddie took a seat in one of the 1950s-style vinyl-backed kitchen chairs. Norma was looking around for a flower vase for the roses. She found one and took a pair of kitchen scissors to trim them to the right length before putting them in and filling it with water. Then Norma placed them in the center of the kitchen table. Maddie noticed she once grabbed and held to the kitchen counter to steady herself on her shapely but thin legs. There was a cane in the kitchen corner, underneath the wall phone. A small smile crept over her face as Maddie knew Norma would never use it, no matter what.

The beautiful older woman took a seat next to her at the table, setting down two wine glasses. Norma put the bottle between her thin thighs and screwed a corkscrew through it. "Thank you, Maddie." She pulled and struggled with the cork. "No." she held up one hand to Maddie's move to help. "I can do it. I need to do these things myself." After a few more tries, she wrenched the cork free and poured them each a glass. "Norman's upstairs taking a shower and getting dressed. He wanted to give us a chance to get to know each other. Cheers." Norma tapped her glass to Maddie's and both took a swallow. Maddie immediately felt the wine warming her insides.

Norma glanced at the dozen yellow roses Maddie had brought, "You know, yellow roses mean 'friendship', and also 'welcome back.'" she observed. "Norman has quite the rose garden, you know. An excellent choice." Norma took another swallow of wine, her eyes never leaving the younger blonde's.

"Oh yes, I know! His rose garden is incredible, when it blooms in the spring. Only a few more weeks to go until it does!" Maddie sipped more of her wine. "I've told him he should enter them in competitions, but so far he doesn't seem too eager about that."

Norma paused, seemed to consider this. "Maybe this year the two of us can get him to change his mind. So. Maddie Cavanaugh with the beautiful last name, among everything else, what's the rest your story?"

Maddie gulped, seeing the pink spreading on Norma's cheeks. A blush was spreading over her own face. "Well, my now-ex-husband and I moved here a few years ago and opened up the hardware store. Then he cheated on me." Maddie tried to keep the venom out of her voice. "He was sleeping with some barely-legal girl, here in the motel. Norman told me about it." She drew a deep breath, "But it's okay. Sam got what was coming to him. He got his fucking clock cleaned because he committed adultery. I'm well off because of it." Maddie drank some more Chardonnay, "I know you have amnesia, Norma. But if there is anything you feel comfortable telling me, I'm open to it."

Norma's eyebrows went up, "Sam? That was also Norman's father's name. That's a weird coincidence. He was my husband before Alex Romero. Sam died in a car wreck when Norman was 17. Sad, but I don't remember either of them." She gave a one-shoulder shrug, topped off her wine. "I wouldn't know either of them if I bumped into them on the street." She reached over and gave Maddie's hand a squeeze. It was reassuring, comforting. "It seems we both've had bad runs of luck with men. Apparently my last husband was a tool and a coward who ran off. Left town when I didn't wake up from the coma." She didn't know how much Maddie knew or had heard about Romero's disappearance, so she didn't say any more.

"I ought to introduce you to Sheriff Greene." Maddie told her, "She replaced him, and the whole police force put a lot of effort into trying to find him, for about a year.

Unfortunately we ran into nothing but dead ends. Sheriff Greene and I get together for coffee every so often. You should join us some time. She told me he was pretty well-liked around here. A lot of people were upset when they called off the search. She hasn't told me a lot of specifics, but she thinks he's probably dead." Maddie's turn to take Norma's hand. This time, they didn't let go right away. "I'm sorry, that's probably tough to hear."

"That's sweet of you, Maddie. But you can't really miss or be sad over someone you can't remember at all." Norma shrugged, "I'm ready to move on, move forward. Oh, hi honey!" She looked past Maddie to see Norman had entered the doorway, looking fresh and handsome in his blue sweater and white collared shirt.

Norman had just turned 26 that past Valentine's Day, but Maddie could tell from the way Norma kissed his face: he would always be her baby. It enthralled her further. As the wine kept flowing through the conversation, Maddie felt her voice slipping a bit back into the honeyed Louisiana drawl she's tried so hard to shake once she left home years ago. Some people elsewhere unfortunately believed certain stereotypes about people from the South.

Over dinner, this sweetly-close mother and son asked her more about her past. Maddie gulped more Chardonnay and admitted, "I grew up in N'Awlins, Louisiana. Not as fancy a neighborhood as the Garden District, but wasn't the lower 9th ward either. Right in the middle. It was lovely. My mother barely escaped during Katrina, and, um, my childhood home was destroyed, and pretty much everything she had. She lives in Lacombe now; that's on the other side of Lake Pontrichaine."

Norman gaped at her, "Maddie, you never told me about that! I'm so sorry!"

Her turn to shrug off a bad part of the past, "It never came up. Mom's doing okay. The women in my family, we're fighters." Maddie turned and locked eyes with

Norma, who'd gotten up to get the Chardonnay and refill their glasses. "So are the women in your family. Evidently."

Norma's warm smile brought on another blush. "You could say that. I'll never stop being one. Oh no, don't get up; we'll take care of this." Maddie had started to get up and help them clear the dinner dishes.

"That was delicious, Norma. Thank you for having me over."

"The pleasure's all ours. Right, Norman?"

"Of course," Now it was his turn to redden, and he quickly faced away from Maddie. His mother was very close at his side, her movements brushed against him as she ran water and soap over the dishes he'd stacked in the sink for her. The tightness in his slacks was starting. Ordinarily, it would have been exciting, but now: it was dangerous. In front of anyone, let alone his only real friend in town. Yet...the danger somehow made it even more thrilling. He felt Norma's breath quicken, ever so slightly. Both of them were going to badly need release once Maddie went home.

If the other lovely blonde noticed, she didn't let them know. "Well, should we go out and I'll at least take a rough guess at how much paint the house will need?"

It was late twilight on this spring evening, the last of the sunset having a deep violet tone that cast long shadows. Norma pulled her shawl tighter around her, as the early spring night was cool though not really cold. The three of them walked in a circle around the hilltop, Maddie noticed up close: a lot more intricate woodwork around the doors and windows, also on all the railings and columns holding up the porch.

"This house has the coolest architectural design; it's a shame they don't build them like this anymore. I can't wait to see it all brightened up." Then Maddie gave them a rough estimate of how much paint it would all take, and the cost. She noted that

neither mother or son raised an eyebrow at the price. With the sanding and priming and painting, they could expect to be stepping around the work crew on their way back and forth to the motel, for at least a month.

"We'll handle it," Norman assured her, "Won't we, Mother?"

"Oh yes. It'll be worth it. More than worth it." Norma added, "Let's do this. And I hope this means we'll be seeing more of you."

"I would love that," The suggestiveness of a few things said that night wasn't lost on Maddie. And why did her body keep getting warmer every time her gaze lingered on the two of them so close to each other. It should bother her, but strangely it didn't. It only magnified the pull they were having on her. "I, um, I guess I should probably get going. Gotta get up early to open the store."

She thanked Norma and Norman again for dinner as she gathered up her purse. Ever the gentleman, he held her jacket open as she slipped into it. Before any conscious thought about it, Maddie turned and hugged him. Norman seemed not to have expected that, but seconds later his arms were around her. With his mother right next to both of them. "I'm so happy for you, both of you." She whispered in his ear. The words were out before she realized they could be taken an entirely different way. Norman didn't appear to notice or care. She'd never seen him this happy; a dark cloud had lifted from over his head.

"You were always there for me. Thank you." He murmured before releasing her.

Norma's turn to give her a firm hug that sent an electric thrill through the younger blonde's body. A crazy image of both of them holding her tight between them flashed through her mind. Suddenly there was nothing she wouldn't give for that. "You've been a wonderful friend to him, Maddie. I'd really like you and me to be friends too." She dropped her arms and let her go too soon.

"So would I. I'll see you two soon." Maddie descended the hillside stairs with her head pleasantly swimming, and it wasn't only from the wine she'd had at dinner.

Over the next two weeks, things progressed. March gave way to April, the weather warmed up, and the rose garden began to bloom. Norman had several white and red rose bushes, along with a handful of different shades of pink. On the first day the rosebuds were big enough, he got up early and stole downstairs to clip a red one and a deep pink one. Trying to be quiet and not wake her, he placed them in a small crystal vase on the nightstand so she'd see them first thing upon waking. Norma's eyes fluttered open, "Aw, Honey!" She propped herself on one elbow, the comforter sliding and revealing her bare shoulder as she beckoned him back in bed with her. Her smile was still enough to make his knees tremble. "I'm in love with you too. Forever." as she wrapped him up in her arms and legs. Two roses meant "deeply in love with each other."

He played with strands of her bed-messed hair as they kissed deeply. Her hands pulled apart his blue plaid robe and under his pajama top. Norman pressed his lips to her neck, biting gently as she moved onto her back. He reached down and rubbed her tightening nipple between two fingers. Morning lovemaking was slow, sensual, as they took their time bringing each other to their peak. As Norma impatiently relieved him of his robe and pajamas, she closed her eyes and wondered what a second pair of hands would feel like on her bare body at the same time. A pair of feminine hands belonging to a certain someone who kept showing up in both their latest fantasies.

Norman got up on his knees and took hold of her legs, wrapping them around his waist as he thrust deep inside her. The loud moan of pleasure she gave was the most beautiful thing he could ever hear. He held her hips as he sped up, nearly withdrawing from her before sliding back in to the hilt. Nothing in this life was as

gorgeous as the look of bliss on her face, her eyes burning into his. Norma cupped her breasts and ran her thumbs over her pink nipples.

"Mother..." he hissed, "So naughty...yess.." He was holding back but couldn't for long. Moments later, she tightened around him. That warm spasming made her cry his name out. He released into her, filling her as they rode out their climax. Norma jolted against him as he brought her there again. Spent, he collapsed onto the mattress, keeping her held in his arms as they turned onto their sides.

"Oh god..sweetie. That was wonderful." She didn't let him answer before kissing him hard. His chest vibrated as he moaned into her mouth. Both were quivering with aftershocks of pleasure as he stayed inside her. Finally both relaxed fully into the soft mattress, the sheets and comforter long since in a tangle. "My favorite way to start every morning," she said with a very satisfied smile.

"Ohhh yes, me too Mother." Norman exhaled.

"Honey?"

"Yes?"

"What if we had her join us, eventually?"

Norman turned and gaped at her in disbelief.

"Oh come on, baby. I may be amnesiac, but I'm not blind. I've seen the way you look at both her and me when we're together. And I see the way she looks at you *and* me! Like we're ice water and she's dying of thirst."

"But...Mother! You and me, it's against the law here. What if she said something about it?"

"Call it intuition, but she likes us. In more ways than one. I have a strong feeling she wouldn't, and even if she did: It would be her word against ours. But why would she ruin something so great, the way it's been going?"

Norman lay back, staring at the ceiling and letting this sink in. Images of Norma and Maddie flashed through his mind. It was true: the two women now in his life had become fast friends. Maddie had been over at the house more than half a dozen evenings since that first dinner. First she said she wanted to check the progress on the house's priming/paint job, but soon she dropped the pretense.

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Over those weeks, with the whiny noise of wood-sanding outside, Maddie and Norma spent an inordinate amount of time close together on the sofa with their laptops. Both of their legs were partially covered with their flowered skirts. Not enough. It only made Norman stare harder. He noticed they spent a lot of time on Pinterest, pinning and sharing recipes. One Saturday morning, Norma dragged him out of bed at 5am so they could all make it to the Portland seafood market by the time it opened, so they could grab the freshest. Maddie and his mother spent that evening in the kitchen together, cooking a couple of variations of jambalaya. The spicy delicious results were well worth the trip.

The sanding and priming of all the house's old intricate woodwork took longer than anticipated, and Norman fretted over the dust that kept getting in his rose garden. Round healthy-looking buds were already appearing in shades of red, pink, coral, white, and pink-tipped yellow. "It's not good to keep them covered at this early blooming stage!" he complained, "They need sunlight and fresh air."

Along with her enjoyment of relearning how to cook, Norma also began spending spare time trying to get her herb garden on the opposite side of the house back in

top shape. It was a painstaking process as well. "I know, honey! I don't like it any more than you do, but we're going to have to wait it out." She came to his side and put her arm around his shoulders, pressed her side against his and leaned her head on his shoulder. "Just think how beautiful this will look when it's finished. It'll look new, and all ours, even more than now."

His features softened into a smile as he looked into her eyes, "I know, Mother. You're right. I'll just stay on top of turning the soil, and I'll help you with yours too." He kissed her cheek, just an innocent kiss as the two of them stood admiring the front of their new home. Norman's gaze lingered on the upstairs bedroom window - the bedroom that now belonged to both of them - out of old habit. There had been no sighting in weeks of the tulpa who had begun as an imagined version of his mother and later broken free. Still some small part of him expected to see her watching them, but there was only a flicker of curtain movement.

Another welcome distraction was the planned color scheme that it had taken forever to settle on. Norma, Norman, and Maddie finally all agreed the best look for the house combined a deep slate-grey color for the roof, then a soft sage for the main structure, with accents of off-white and blue for all the trim. It was going to look perfect against the hillside at any time of the year.

By the time another weekend was upon them, the last of the priming work was finished, much to their relief and excitement. That Friday night brought Maddie joining them for dinner as had become routine and welcome. As the evening grew later, Norma and Maddie were first relaxing on the couch, flipping once again through the pages of architecture magazines Maddie had brought over while they were trying to narrow down the color combination. Norman leaned back in the armchair, sipping on a glass of Pinot Noir; they were on their second bottle of the evening. He could feast his eyes on his mother and his closest friend all night, the two of them bright-eyed, laughing. Happy and so hopeful for all that was still to come.

Norma eventually grew bored of the magazines and went over to the old-fashioned stereo with its record-player. The Sam Cooke vinyl they'd been listening to had just ended. "Hey, come here. Help me pick out something else," she told them over her shoulder. Soon the long-dead original owner's old music was scattered across the rug, along with a few other classics Norma had added.

Maddie held up one vinyl single still in its shrink-wrap, "I didn't know you liked Marc Cohen, you two!" The wine was making her giddy. She opened it, dropped it on the turntable and pressed the "on" button. The living room was filled with the heavy blues-infused "Dance Back From the Grave." A musical portrait of New Orleans if there ever was one.

*"...get your tambourines...slide trombones...and dance...back from the grave..oooh yeeah..."*

"It reminded me of you," Norma finished off the last of her wine, "In the best way, I mean, I know it must hit close to home, but still...it's beautiful."

The younger woman clasped Norma's hands and tugged her closer, "Hey, it's fine. More than fine. I'm flattered." She spun Norma around once, playfully.

Norman would have been more than happy to see this action progress, as much as Maddie was comfortable with. This growing intimacy was becoming thicker than ever. But he wasn't going to just sit back that easily. Norma stretched out her hand, "Come here, honey! Dance with me." He gladly took it and joined her, only embarrassed for a moment at Maddie seeing this. She twirled once back towards the coffee table and sipped the last from her own wine glass. Her eyes shone as she couldn't look away from the two of them swaying together. Such a perfect man who loved his mother more than anything, very rightfully so.

"You're not getting out of this either," Norman teased her before the song ended. He and his mother separated; this time he held his hand out to her so she could cut in. As Norman brought her closer, Maddie felt the unmistakable brush of Norma's hand over her hip before she separated and sat back down. The rush it sent through her was headier than any wine. A few sways and spins before the record ended and they dropped back onto the couch on either side of Norma.

"I can't remember when I last had this much fun, than when I'm with you two." she admitted with a nervous little laugh.

Norma squeezed her hand, lacing their fingers together. "Likewise. Absolutely."

It had grown late quickly, and unfortunately time for Maddie to go home and get enough sleep for an early morning. The painters were coming to start on the house, and she promised she'd be over to see their progress as soon as she could get away from the store.

Before she departed through the outer front door, and before any doubting thoughts intruded, her arms were around Norma in a tight hug. The women's nearly-identical shades of platinum curls blended together, and Maddie inhaled the floral scent of Norma's shampoo. It smelled like roses, fitting. Before she could pull completely away and compose herself, Norma cupped her chin and went in for the kill, kissing her squarely on the lips. Full, smooth lips just like her own. After a second of initial shock, Maddie caressed the other woman's mouth with her own. Electric tingles were starting in her chest and heading immediately south.

"I'm sorry." Norma exhaled, "I don't know what happened there, I-"

"Don't be sorry." Maddie stroked Norma's cheek. "That was beautiful." She pecked her one more time on the lips before turning to Norman and hugging him as tightly. He only got a kiss on his left cheek, close to the corner of his mouth. "See you two

tommorrow afternoon," She grinned as she made her exit, practically skipping down the hillside stairs despite the light wine buzz.

"Oh. My. God." Norma collapsed into his waiting arms, "Did I just do that? Was that my imagination?"

He chuckled, "No. It happened, and it's one of the most beautiful things I've ever seen in my life." Norman squeezed her around the waist and lifted her off the floor, their foreheads pressed together as he spun her around once. "I want to see more of you two together,"

"Me too. Take me upstairs. Right now!" she demanded. Norman swept her up and did exactly as he was told, laying her on the bed that now belonged to them both. It was hours before they drifted into nude, exhausted, and oh so satisfied blissful sleep. They should have known things were going too well to last.

In the dead of night, the annoying whine of the motel buzzer woke Norman. He groaned in irritation and pawed for his phone as Norma's still-sleeping form clung to him. 2:17am read the time.

"Now? Really?" he griped, before kissing her forehead. "Go back to sleep. I'll take care of it." He tucked the comforter higher over her bare body as he got out of bed, threw on his slacks, pajama shirt, and robe. The weather had been too tepid for him to need his wool overcoat until next winter.

*Who cares how I'm dressed? If they're going to show up at this hour.*

Norman padded to the front window and pulled back the curtains, peered down at the motel parking lot. A big dark blue F-150 pickup truck was parked to the side of the office. It definitely wasn't Maddie's smaller one. It was one he recognized from years ago, and one he hoped he'd never have to see again.

