

Franco Callahan slammed the door to his Delancey Street townhouse and hurried into the April morning, glancing at his watch as he ran down the steps. He was late. He'd wanted to get to work early. He had a busy day ahead. His mind on the Connecticut casino bid and the pile of work waiting on his desk, he strode along the uneven pavement to his black Mercedes parked at the other end of the narrow street.

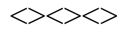
He answered his ringing phone as he hurried toward his car, and heard a deep male voice rasp, "You didn't get our message the first time, Callahan. You've forced us to play dirty. Give us the money and we might let you live."

The menace in the stranger's voice chilled Franco, tightening his gut. "Who is this?"

"Maybe you'll listen to our new message." The call disconnected.

Franco stared down at his phone.

An ear-splitting boom rent the air, vibrating the ground beneath his feet. The blast sent Franco on his rear, the breath knocked out of him. Ears ringing, struggling to sit, he saw a ball of fire at the end of the street. Flames licked at what was left of his car.



*One Week Later*

"Heard you need a bodyguard, Callahan."

The sultry female voice jerked Franco's attention from his computer. He swiveled his chair and glanced toward his office doorway. A thrill shot through him at the sight of the petite redhead, arms folded across her chest, leaning impudently against the doorjamb. He tamped down the excitement she always aroused in him and narrowed his eyes.

"Well, if it isn't Josephine Fortune. What are you doing here?"

She stepped into the room and deposited her duffel bag on the floor. "I'm real glad to see you too, Callahan. And the name is Jo."

The tough little spitfire rarely wore anything other than camouflage fatigues, T-shirts, and combat boots. He couldn't help noticing the way her khaki-colored T-shirt stretched over her firm breasts and the way her full, pink lips—kissable lips—parted. She wasn't his type he reminded himself, not for the first time in their five-year association. His type was tall, blonde, leggy, and a tigress in bed—not a fireball more comfortable on the shooting range than between satin sheets. He shot her an insolent smile, retreating into the playboy persona he showed the world.

Her green eyes, translucent and light as a spring leaf, studied him. "Logan and Doriana sent me to protect your sorry ass."

His eyes never leaving hers, he stood. "I told them I don't need protection. I'm sorry you had to come all this way. Go back to Tucson."

Tension in every line of her toned body, she moved closer. "I don't like this any more than you do, Callahan. Think I want to spend my time babysitting some spoiled playboy? As far as I'm concerned, if one of your bimbos has it in for you, that's your problem."

"Then leave."

"No can do. Logan's my boss. He sent me to keep someone from killing you and that's what I'm going to do."

The fear that was his constant companion these days pressed against his chest. Masking his feeling of vulnerability, he flattened his palms on his desk. "Tell Logan and Doriana thanks, but the Philadelphia police are handling the case. I don't need a bodyguard."

She moved even closer and leaned over the desk until their faces were inches apart. The woman had guts. He had to hand that to her. He wondered if anything scared her. A familiar

scent surrounded her, teasing his nostrils. Grapefruit? On her the fruity aroma smelled tantalizing and seductive. Jo Fortune, seductive? He moved back from temptation.

She straightened and stepped away from his desk. “Sure, I’d rather be in sunny Arizona than rainy Philadelphia. But Doriana’s not too keen on her brother getting killed. So you’re stuck with me until the cops get whoever’s after you.”

He studied her and something stirred in him, the same feeling he’d had minutes ago; the feeling he’d gotten the first time he’d met her at Logan and Doriana’s wedding five years before, and every time after that. As an honorary member of the Callahan-Tanner clan, Jo was present at family holidays and functions. For all her smart mouth and bluster, he recognized the hurt that shadowed her eyes and softened her generous mouth. A part of him wanted to find out who put that hurt there and to take it away if he could. Jo brought out a protectiveness in him that scared him nearly as much as the thought of someone killing him.