

# **The Holiday Chronicles**

## **Part One: The Anniversary**

By Elaine Calloway

All contents are Copyright 2018, The Writers Canvas, LLC, Author Elaine Calloway  
All persons, places and things are fiction. Any resemblance to people, living or dead, is coincidence.

Many thanks to the “characters” of New York City who stirred this story in my imagination many  
years ago...

## Part One: The Anniversary

The woman's shoulder ached as she reached for the restaurant's heavy wooden door. Winter in New York City only made her arthritis worse, like a roaring lion refusing to be ignored. The bitter wind seemed early, arriving in December instead of in the New Year.

Inhaling deep, she prepared to pull open the door with all her weight. Just as she'd wrapped her wrinkled fingers around the handle, she was taken aback as a waiter with a bowtie pushed open the door.

Startled, he said, "I'm so sorry, ma'am. Are you okay?"

Nodding at her reprieve, she smiled at him. "Yes. Thanks."

He held the door and waited.

Sigh. She hated making others wait, but the situation had become inevitable. When had life started going in slow motion? In her mind, she was still young in her twenties and ready to take on the world.

Shuffling her feet—as fast as time would allow—into the dining area, she tried to ignore how long the walk was taking and focused on the occasion.

"Table for one this evening?" the young waiter asked. His voice sounded warm, like honey, and his dark hair and hazel eyes reminded her of someone from so long ago. Was it possible for souls to re-enter a body and come back? She didn't know, but on that cold winter night, looking into the green glints of his eyes, she hoped such a thing was true.

"Yes, table for one," she said, barely able to recognize her own voice. After a lifetime singing on Broadway, her vocal chords had turned raspy—and long before the crow's feet descended upon her face.

He pointed toward a dark booth. "Would this be good, ma'am?"

She frowned. "I was rather hoping for that corner table, over there."

He followed her wrinkled, pointy finger to the small table tucked near two windows. "Of course. I was worried that corner spot might give you a chill."

"Can't escape Mother Nature," she said. "Even inside. And it's a special place to me."

"Then that shall be yours," he said, and he carefully laid out a heavy cloth napkin, silverware, and filled a wine glass with water.

She sat down, wincing a bit when her hip decided to talk back to her. *Tonight is the night. You have to do this.*

"May I get you something to drink? We have a wine list—"

"No wine, but I do have a request." She cleared her throat. "I'd like sparkling grape juice, but bring it in two champagne flutes. You must bring two."

True to form, the waiter's face remained stoic. She braced herself for the inevitable question that all waiters asked.

"Why two?"

She'd been asked that question every year for a decade. Every time, she'd burst into tears when she'd given an explanation.

But something different was in the air tonight. This young man only smiled and repeated her order, then left to fetch what she wanted.

Her entire body seemed to exhale and relax. Maybe she wouldn't have to explain. Maybe tonight she could just sip the sparkling juice and reminisce.

While she waited, she turned to admire the Midtown Manhattan scenery. Glassy buildings reached for the sky, each one competing with the other to be the tallest. Random strangers clutched their coats as they braced against the cold winds. A middle-aged man in medical scrubs prodded his way down the street, without so much as a coat! He must be freezing. What a strange thing. He seemed clean-cut, and if he wore med scrubs he must be a doctor or nurse of some sort. Why would he not wear a coat?

The azure-blue sky held fat clouds that looked as if they were ready to burst, and then spill a heavy snowstorm upon the Big Apple.

Instinctively, she pulled her worn-out mink Stoll tighter around her. After fifty years, there were patterned bald spots and tiny holes, but she always wore this on December 16. Her best flowered dress, with a sweater and mink Stoll.

Outside, the characters of New York scurried along, running their errands and weaving every-which-way to get last minute shopping done. Young children with thick coats and hats tossed snowballs. Taxis honked and wove between obstacles to get to their destination, a cacophony of New York. Seconds later, a man covered in silver makeup—even his hair and face, he must be a street performer—rode past on a bicycle.

"Hello, silver man," she whispered with a smile.

People watching had been her and Sonny's favorite pastime. They'd come here every December 16, always for the early-bird dinner and watched the passersby with fascination.

A sharp pang struck her heart, and a tiny tear crawled out of her eye and dribbled over the powdery makeup on her cheek.

She sniffled and dabbed her eyes. "Ten years you've been gone, Sonny."

Footsteps grew closer, and she glanced up to see the waiter with a tray balanced perfectly on his hand.

"Here you go, ma'am," he said, and he carefully set down the two flutes. "Is there anything else?"

She shook her head. "No thank you."

He stepped away and she reached for one flute. Holding it in her hand, she clinked the glass against the second flute.

"Happy anniversary. I miss you every day," she whispered, the words barely escaping her lips without falling tears. She reached for a tissue in her pocket and blotted her eyes.

The juice tasted sweet and tart at the same time. Not as good as champagne, but she and Sonny had given up alcohol once they'd encountered old age. Too many medicine interactions, and juice was less expensive anyway.

After she finished her glass, she left the remaining glass untouched.

“Ma’am,” a male voice said.

Knocked from her reverie, she glanced up. The waiter stood there, his eyes gleaming with concern.

“Yes?”

“I...I can’t help but ask, ma’am,” he began. “Are you okay? You seem so sad this evening.”

“Thank you, young man,” she whispered. He seemed different than the others in years past. Was he? More willing to listen? To care?

“Today, December 16, is my wedding anniversary,” she whispered, doing her best to ignore the lump in the back of her throat. “My dear Sonny’s been gone for ten years, but we always came here for the early-bird dinner. Best steak in the city.”

“That it is, ma’am. I’m sorry to hear about your husband.”

Nodding as she blotted her eyes once more, she said, “Thank you. It does get easier over time, but I can’t stop coming here. This was our place.”

“It’s a very sweet tradition,” the waiter said.

She shrugged, returning her gaze to the people ambling the streets of New York. “I should be getting home before it snows.”

“Should I...I mean...you’d like the check?”

“Yes, please.”

He paused a moment, then glanced toward the back.

“Ma’am, I’d like to say thanks for making this your place where you can remember him. Tonight’s beverage is on the house.”

“Oh, no, I couldn’t—”

“Yes ma’am,” he said, “you can. Happy anniversary, and again, sorry for your loss.”

She offered him a smile before standing up. She patted his hand, smiled again, and went outside into the chilly evening.

As she hailed a taxi, a soft snow began to fall, the kind with large, fat snowflakes that she used to catch on her tongue as a child.

Manhattan gradually turned into a winter wonderland, another anniversary gone by.

Back in the restaurant, the waiter took the second champagne flute and walked back to the kitchen. He was thirsty, but he didn’t dare drink from it. No, this he would wash and then set behind the bar.

Such a sweet little old lady. He hoped she would find peace on this winter night.

When he turned around, someone new walked into the room...