

Chapter One

So Mote It Be.

Bob Whitworth sat in his car staring at the blood smeared on the outside of the windshield. The red droplets danced and slithered their way down the glass from the blowing wind off of the bay, creating zigzag patterns on the glass which seemed in tune with the song that was playing on the radio, *Eye of the Tiger*, the theme song from *Rocky II*. Bob hadn't turned the radio off because he had not moved a muscle since he had tried to brake the car in time to avoid hitting the man. Right now only two things occupied every nuance of his body and mind; *he was only eighteen years old, and he had just killed someone.*

"Sir? Sir?" someone called.

Bob slowly turned his head to see a policeman standing beside his car and bending over to match his sitting position. The officer's face was lit up by the blue and red lights of the police car and ambulance, making his face appear as if it changed with each strobe of the light. The blue light was good and the red was evil came to Bob's mind. As he was faced with these two opposing forces, he wondered if the shifting faces were a reflection of his own life and the accompanying changes that were about to take place and which would last forever.

"Are you hurt?" the policeman asked. "Can you hear me?"

"No. I'm not hurt. He's dead, isn't he?" Bob said in a voice that sounded devoid of any emotion.

"Sir, I need you to step out of the car and bring your license and registration." The policeman gripped the door handle from the outside and pressed the latch. The door of the Ford Galaxy 500 creaked as he opened it. "Sir, can you please step out of the car."

Bob slowly got out of the car and stood. His entire body felt numb and unresponsive to his own commands. He wavered slightly and placed his hand on the side of the car to steady himself.

"Can you stand here or do you need to sit?" the policeman asked.

"I'm okay," Bob answered, feeling ashamed at saying it. He wished he could have said no—that he wasn't okay, that he had had a seizure or some kind of fit that could explain what had just happened. But he couldn't. Instead he used his shaking hand to retrieve his license and registration and handed them to the police officer.

"One Baker Charlie," the radio from the police cruiser blared. The officer turned in that direction, but then turned back to Bob.

"Please wait here, I'll be right back," the policeman said as he returned to his cruiser and began talking with someone on the radio.

Bob heard the sound of a zipper being pulled and looked in that direction. Less than twelve feet from where he stood, one of the EMT techs was unfolding a large black bag on the ground next to the body of the man. The body had been draped with a blanket, but dark splotches were appearing and growing larger. Bob knew it was the man's blood.

Not knowing why, Bob walked toward the body, stopping within a few feet of where it lay. Another EMT tech stood with his back to him arranging the limbs of the dead man, underneath the blanket, so that they would be able to place him in the bag. The two EMTs went back to the ambulance to get the gurney, leaving the body lying there on the ground. Bob took the few remaining steps until he was standing next to it. As if sensing his presence, the body under the blanket moved. A hand, a bloodied, flesh-torn hand came out from underneath the

blanket. It slowly moved across its body, reaching for the top corner of the blanket as if it meant to pull it off. As it moved, Bob heard a coarse-sounding voice come from beneath the blanket.

"You killed me. You killed me. I will haunt you for the rest of your life. You will know no peace...no peace for the rest of your life...no peace for the rest of your life..."

Bob wanted to get away, but he couldn't move. The bloodied hand was getting closer to the end of the blanket so that it could fling it away and come for Bob.

"No! I don't want to see it. It was an accident! No...No...No..."

Bob Whitworth awoke. His senses told him that he was in his office; another late shift, and he was in his usual chair. He was safe. *Safe*. He was amazed that after all these years the dream returned with such renewed energy that it left him shaking and exhausted. The exhaustion soon overcame the fear and he leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes. He immediately drifted off; he was too damn tired to care anymore as he sank back into darkness.

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"Come to me," a voice called to Bob.

He opened his eyes, but he couldn't see anything. It was perfectly black all around him.

"Come to me," it called again.

The voice was neither feminine nor masculine. It sounded...neutral. He tried to sense what direction it had come from, but couldn't. The darkness still refused to allow him any sight, but he smelled damp earth, a musty smell of some kind that he remembered when he had been in a damp earthen basement the first time.

Suddenly light appeared, slicing through the darkness like a piece of paper being ripped apart causing him to squint at its brightness. As his eyes adjusted, he saw the light was a narrow beam, almost spherical in shape like a large cone. In the center of the cone of light, he saw the shape of a person—a naked person.

"Hello?" he called tentatively.

There was no response.

"Are you alright?"

Bob moved nearer to the cone of light, trying to peer inside the beam at the shape that was there. As he focused his eyes on the image, the shapely curves and contours of the body took form, and it quickly became apparent he was looking at the shape of a woman, a very beautiful and naked woman. Her shape mesmerized him, and it took conscious effort to move his eyes away from the alluring parts of this lovely creature. But he wanted—no needed—to see the face that went with the captivating and alluring form in front of him. She managed to stay turned away from him no matter what angle he tried to approach her from.

"Come to me," the voice called again this time the tone revealing the feminine origin. "I am the Earth, I am Fire, I am the Wind, I am Water—I am the everything."

"Who are you?" he asked, still slowly moving to try and attain a position where he could see her face. But she still evaded his questioning gaze. However, he could now tell that her hair was black or dark brown. "Who are you?" he repeated. "Why am I here?"

"Come to me! Partake of the All and be fulfilled. Walk the line that separates the light from the dark. Reap the rewards or suffer the punishment if you stray too far. Follow your destiny...pleasure or death awaits you. You must heed the calling or perish within your own lust. Follow your destiny..."

"I don't understand? What does that mean?"

"Follow your destiny..."

Ring-Ring, echoed in his mind.

"Pleasure or death awaits you..."

Ring-Ring, the sound returned and everything around him began to fade away.

"What does it mean? Wait..."

Bob jerked awake in his chair. He opened his eyes and was greeted with bright sunlight coming through the windows of his office. He raised his hand to block the light that poured into his. Instinctively he checked the time, it was almost seven AM. *Damn—fell asleep. I must have—strange dream—what is—*

Ring-Ring.

The telephone was ringing. He reached for the phone. "Hello?"

"Bob Whitworth?"

"Yes."

"Tony Schuster from World Realty in Norwich, Connecticut. I hope you don't mind me calling you at work. I tried your home number and thought maybe you were an early to work kind of guy. Are you?"

"Ah...yes," Bob stumbled the words out as he tried to remember who the hell Tony Schuster was. He said he was from where? World Realty? Any remnants of the dream quickly left his mind as he struggled to place the man.

"Well that's an admirable trait," Tony continued. "I'm kind of like that myself. That's why I'm calling you at this hour. I wanted to let you know about a great deal I came across because it won't last long. You are still interested in the antique shop?"

"Oh...yes. The antique shop." Now Bob remembered. A couple of months ago, he had sent some email queries out to realtors when he thought he could get the financing he needed. But the banks ended up not being as enthusiastic as he thought they would be. The financing deal fell through like a—

"I found you a beauty," Tony Schuster said. "Just what you asked about," he continued on not letting Bob get a word in.

"Mr. Schuster, I—"

"Call me Tony."

"Okay. Tony. I appreciate what you have done for me, but the financing deal didn't work as I thought it would. I'd love to get into a shop, but the money is a problem. I'd hate to mislead you and let you believe I could afford it right now. I'm sorry, I should have—"

"I understand what you're saying, Bob, but at least hear me out. Come on, what could it hurt? It's my dime."

"Okay," Bob conceded. "I guess you may as well tell me about what you found."

"A nice shop in Putnam, Connecticut, that's near Rhode Island. The town makes their living off the tourist industry. A lot of New Yorkers and New Jersey folk migrate up that way during the warmer months. Ever heard of it?"

"No."

"Anyway, the shop is not too big, about 1500 square feet and is located right on the main street through the town. Storage and display areas like you requested. It even comes with stock attached, a complete package deal."

"Sounds sweet, but—"

"And another 1200 square feet on the upper level used as living quarters."

"Hmm," Bob murmured. Now he knew he couldn't afford it. It was too perfect and exactly what he had thought of when he was looking. He could live upstairs above the shop, no need for a separate apartment or house. *It was perfect.* However, he couldn't help but start seeing the numbers in his head. The stock alone would be worth a nice penny if it were anything decent. But he had let Tony get this far; he might as well let him finish telling him about the whole deal.

"I know what you're thinking," Tony said. "Can't afford it. Am I right?"

"Right on the head," Bob shot back.

"You remember what price we were talking when you first asked me to look around?"

"Ballpark around two hundred fifty thousand," Bob said.

"Yes, well how does one hundred seventy five sound?"

"For everything?"

"Yes, sir," agreed Tony.

"Sounds too good to be true."

"I can make it sound even better," Tony added.

"I doubt that!" Bob added as he chuckled. He was beginning think Tony had his zeros mixed up.

"Approved financing from the local bank in the town. G-u-a-r-a-n-t-e-e-d."

"No way. It's got to be some kind of joke or something."

"No joke as long as you aren't a dirt bag."

"Define dirt bag?" Bob asked. His heart was beginning to beat hard in his chest. This was a deal of a lifetime if it was true...but what if that question showed up on the form again? *Have you ever been convicted of a felony, if yes, please explain.*

"Usual stuff. No bankruptcies, loan defaults, criminal activity in the past few years. As long as the credit check doesn't show any bizarre stuff, it shouldn't be a problem."

Past few years...would he be safe with saying no?

"How much down?" asked Bob.

"I think they want ten percent."

"You're kidding. Come on, Tony, this whole thing is just too good. What's wrong with it?"

"Nothing. I mean it's not perfect. What is? Sure it could use some sprucing up, but nothing major."

"What happened to make them sell so cheap?" Bob asked curiously.

"Last owner was hit by a car right out in front of the store, kind of a bizarre accident."

"Hit by a car?" Bob asked slowly. The image flashed through his mind of Greg Wainwright's face, the eyes wide open and looking into Bob's soul as he slid down his windshield. Bob forced it out of his thoughts.

"Yeah, some tourists passing through with their RV, one of those big ones. The shop owner, I think his name was Caruso or something, stepped right out in front of the thing. Can't figure how he couldn't have seen the damn thing."

"An RV?"

"Yeah one of those monsters. Anyway the town doesn't want the store to go empty—bad for business and all, you know, perception. The folks there, the town council, and other shop owners figure if a store suddenly closes, there's a problem. Bankruptcies are like the plague, once they start, they get kind of catchy. So they bought the place from the estate along with the stock

of merchandise. Now they want to offload it and quick. And it will be at this price. I can assure you of one thing, its not going to last long."

"If it is as you say, I couldn't agree more," Bob said.

"How soon can you get up here?" asked Tony.

Bob looked at his desk calendar. It was Friday. "I can be there...say...by tomorrow afternoon, say between three and four?"

"Fine. I'll let them know so they have to give you first right of refusal as long as no other offers have been received. I'll fax you the floor plans and layout of the place along with a map of the local area."

"Thanks, Tony. You can't imagine how much I am looking forward to seeing the place. It just sounds so perfect."

"Yeah. You know what they say when something like this comes your way. It's destiny."

Destiny. For the first time since he had answered the phone, Bob thought about the peculiar dream he had. *Follow your destiny.* Hadn't she, the woman in the dream said the same thing? The woman. The gorgeous woman whose face he had not seen. He quickly decided that she could replace his usual nightmare of the accident as often as possible. He shook his head from side to side. *Man that was the craziest dream I've ever had.*

"Bob, you there?" Tony asked.

"Yeah. I'm here. Sorry, ah...just thinking about the place already. Well I don't know about destiny and all that. If you really want to know, I still think it's too good of a deal. I bet as soon as we walk into the place, the floor collapses or walls cave in or something."

"Think positive, Bob. I'll see you on Saturday."

"Okay Tony and thanks—a lot. You can't imagine how much I am looking forward to getting out of here. Take care—bye."

Bob hung up the phone and looked out the window. The morning sunshine had been replaced with angry looking red-colored clouds. A storm was coming, Bob thought. Probably rain the whole trip, but right now, he didn't care. He would go tomorrow to Connecticut with a glimmer of the possibility of the chance for a clean start.

He kicked his feet up on the desk and folded his hands behind his head.

Hell—it can rain all it wants, but nothing is going to mess with me—or my destiny.

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"World Realty, Tony Schuster, can I help you?" he said as he picked up the ringing phone.

"Did you call Mr. Whitworth?" the woman's voice asked.

Tony immediately recognized the voice of the mysterious woman who called him yesterday. He still wondered if this whole thing might be a crank call, but it was a win-win scenario for him and he would have been crazy not to accept. If things didn't work out as planned, he wasn't out a thing and would still make some money.

"Yes. I called him earlier. He'll be coming up this weekend just as you asked," he said confidently. "If your details are correct, it sounds like you're giving the place away, and he'd be a fool not to buy it. But with that kind of deal, you'll have quite a few people showing up."

"There will be a few, but not many. You have done well."

"Well thanks," Tony said, "did you take care of the financial matter we agreed upon?"

"Yes. The funds have been transferred to your account. A bonus will be sent if Mr. Whitworth decides to buy the property."

"Could you hold on please? I have an emergency call on the other line."

"Yes."

"Thanks. Be right back." Tony put the phone on hold and pressed the numerical keys on the computer keyboard for his bank account. When his account came into view, he scanned the deposits. It was there, five hundred dollars. This was the easiest money he had ever made. All he did was place a phone call to tell someone about some property. Cool.

He picked up the phone and released the hold button. "Back again. Sorry for that interruption. I have a big deal I'm working and—"

"I trust you're satisfied that the money has arrived and that you are prepared to sell the property?"

"Ah...yes." Tony felt his temperature rise. He didn't like being transparent, and this woman had just read him like a child who got caught with his hand in the cookie jar. "Rest assured that I can sell anything to anyone. He'll buy it all right."

"We will see," she answered.

He thought he heard skepticism in her voice. He kicked his feet up and placed them on the corner of his desk. "So...what gives? Why have you gone through all this trouble to get this guy to come to town?"

"Mr. Schuster," the woman's voice began in a tone that sounded impatient, "our deal does not require that kind of information to be exchanged. I hope you will honor our agreement and be very discreet about what has just transpired. If you can't, the money can still be withdrawn."

"Lady, forget I even asked. Was there anything else I could do for you?"

"Not for the moment. Just ensure that Mr. Whitworth arrives as you have promised."

"I'll do my part. It's been a pleasure. Goodbye." Tony hung up the phone. "What a bitch."