

The Point and Shoot Mystery Series: Book Two

Still Shot

N. L. Quatrano

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CHAPTER ONE

New Orleans, July 2005

As we landed at Louis Armstrong International Airport in New Orleans, I gnawed on the inside of my left cheek. My mother, God rest her soul, had left the state of Louisiana forty-five years ago, and never returned. My father was banished at the same time.

Now I was summoned to attend the wedding of a cousin I barely knew—and be present for the disclosure of some family secret I was somehow a part of.

“So, what do you think the cousins have in store for you?” my husband Travis asked as he yanked our luggage from the moving carousel.

I shrugged. “I have heard enough about this bunch from my dad over the years to think that I may not *want* to know.”

I maneuvered my camera bag onto the handle of my carry-on bag and wheeled it out of the way of the conveyer. Travis took his bag in hand and flashed me a smile.

“But you just couldn’t resist that little note on the bottom of that fancy embossed invitation, could you?”

“Well, there was that, but you know my grandmother’s death was strange. Maybe I’ll get more information on that while I’m here.”

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“I thought she lived in the swamp and was bitten by a snake? Sounds like a sad, but natural event, to me,” Travis said as we strode through the baggage claim.

“Well, at my Aunt Nadine’s funeral, there were whispers that the snake that bit Gran wasn’t from around here.”

“And Florida’s battling pythons that aren’t indigenous to Florida, too. People release exotic breeds all the time. Not right, but not necessarily sinister, honey.”

“I know, but something in my gut has always told me there was something here that wasn’t right. I can’t put my finger on it.”

The automatic doors whooshed open and humid air smacked us in the face. Our Northeast Florida home along the St. John’s River was pretty much humid-free by mid-October, but not so New Orleans.

As we waited for the shuttle that would take us to the Indigo Hotel on St. Charles, I stretched my arms way over my head to get some of the travel kinks out. I hated to admit it, but meeting these relatives who believed in voodoo and curses made me uneasy. What part did I play in their strange affairs?

“Trouble, you’re thinking pretty hard,” Travis said. “You nervous about this?”

I winked at him. “Maybe we should have stayed home and painted the house like we planned.”

He laughed that husky laugh that melted my insides. “I like this plan much better. Of course, I may change my

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mind before we catch the flight out of here on Monday.” He pointed to my right. “There’s the shuttle. Let’s get this adventure on the road.”

The driver took our bags and we settled into the cracked brown faux-leather seats, one of the three couples on the bus. Travis stretched his arm behind my shoulders and I looked out the window and sighed. He gave me a squeeze but said nothing.

My name is Antonia Jereaux Buchanan, known to and by most, as AJ. I’m a private investigator with a love for photography, justice, and my husband Travis, not necessarily in that order. I shoot over a million frames, most years. I run on an insane sense of responsibility to right social injustice, or so my loved ones tell me. Sometimes that gets me into trouble, and therefore the reason for the nickname my husband has for me.

Travis tapped me on my leg to get my attention. “This family we’re meeting are all on your mother’s side, right?”

“Yup. After Gran cursed my father and left us in Florida, she moved back into her house on the bayou. Few months later, she died.”

“When was that?”

It was almost a year after my mother had died and it was the spring that I’d gotten to go home with Papa again.

“Twenty, twenty-one years ago, I guess. My father and I flew in for the funeral. I can still remember thinking

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what a cool send-off the Cajuns give their people. Nothing like Mom's funeral."

"Music, dancing, good food, right?"

"It's amazing. They just believe that life is never over, so it's all a celebration. Unless of course, they believe evil has been involved. There's a lot of wailing, then."

"Any wailing at your grandmother's funeral?"

I thought back through hazy memories. Aunt Nadine had wailed the whole time. She'd fled the party, screaming something in Cajun that turned my father's handsome face white as cotton. He'd never told me what she said though I'd asked many times. Eight years later, she was dead, too.

"Some," I said slowly. "Do you believe in curses?" I asked him, clutching the side of the seat as we rounded the corner onto St. Charles Street and barely missed hitting the trolley.

"I don't know that I do," he said, "but I know from the years I was a cop that some people seem to travel under pretty dark clouds. Usually the result of secrets and doing bad stuff, though. It all has a way of catching up. Not a curse, maybe more like cosmic karma or something. What goes around, comes around?"

I thought about the note on the invitation. "I don't own any part of my grandmother's property. I mean, you'd think that in all these years, I'd have found out if I had, wouldn't you? And if she cursed us, why would she

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leave me anything—except maybe a doll full of pins or something?”

“She didn’t curse *you* technically, she cursed your father. You may be a secondary heir. Could be an heir-revertible trust or something.”

I laughed. “It’s so good to be married to an attorney who knows the language. I guess we’re going to find out, aren’t we?”

He nodded, then pointed at the pocket where my cell phone resided. “Did you check that since we landed? I really want to know what Flynn’s message was about.”

I pulled it out of the pocket and checked messages. “He did, indeed.”

I returned the call and his gruff voice barked a greeting over the speaker. Travis laughed.

“Hey, Joe,” I said, “how you feeling these days? They get all the cancer?”

“I’m fine. Ready to get back to my DC apartment, I can tell you that. My sister is driving me nuts.”

I laughed. I could picture the tough Joe Flynn, Washington Post editor, being smothered by his little sister. My sympathies were with his sister.

“I’m sure she’ll be glad to see you go, too. You going to need treatments?” I asked.

The line was silent a long moment. “Some. Looks like some radiation for a few weeks, then about three months of chemo. Then I should be fine for a while, at least.”

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I nodded, which of course, he couldn't see. "I'm glad to hear there's a good prognosis, my friend. Now, you left a rather terse message at the house, but I couldn't reach you. What's up?"

"Where are you?" he asked.

"Travis and I are in Louisiana. Family business."

"Any chance you can come into Washington soon?"

I sighed. "Joe, we've been over this. I'm not coming back to help you chase phantoms. If you don't have something solid for us to go on, we're going to have to let the DEA sort out its own dirty laundry."

"I know. I'm not hard of hearing and you and Travis made that clear when I was down to see you. But I got a letter here at my sister's place. And it's about your late husband."

Damn. "I don't suppose it was signed?" I asked, rubbing the fatigue from my eyes.

"No, it wasn't. But this means someone who has information is willing to help us get to the truth. You want the truth, right, Antonia?" he asked.

Travis pointed toward the hotel coming up on our right. "Joe, this is Travis. We're going to be here for a week. Can we stay in touch by phone until we get this figured out? When you getting back to Washington yourself?"

"I should be home in another ten days. The surgeon will release me and then I can go. Maybe you two can call

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me before you head back to Florida. And don't go getting yourselves killed."

I laughed and prepared to end the call. "We're here for a wedding, Joe. No dangerous adventures."

It was Flynn's turn to laugh. "Hell, woman. Everywhere you go there's a dangerous adventure. Take care of yourself."

CHAPTER TWO

We opted for room service and cool showers. Assured that dinner would be the better part of an hour in arriving, Travis and I cleaned up first. I was towel drying my hair when the phone rang. Travis was in the kitchenette pouring us drinks, so I grabbed the phone on the bedside table and hit the speaker button.

“Cousin Antonia?” shrieked an excited female voice. I confirmed that she had the right party.

“Who is this?” I asked.

“Your cousin Juliette,” the woman drawled.

Juliette? I wracked my brain for an image, but nothing came to light. No clue who that was.

“Juliette, my goodness,” I gushed, “how’ve you been? Where are you?”

“Praise the Lord, we’re doing fine. We’re staying at the homestead cabin since Merline, the bride-to-be, is staying there in the city. We just wanted to make sure you

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arrived okay. Do you need anything?"

"Not a thing beside dinner and some sleep. Can we talk or meet tomorrow?"

"Sure thing, sugah. I'll call around nine, how's that?"

Sounded fine to me so I agreed and hung up the phone. Travis was leaning against the doorjamb, his lounging pants slung low on lean hips. He held out a glass and I gravitated toward him. I took a long sip of what tasted like scotch and water. Not my favorite, but it would do.

"That was a cousin I don't remember. She'll call us in the morning. Dinner here, yet?"

He shook his head and tugged at the towel I'd wrapped around me and tucked in at my breasts. Predictably, it came undone. Just as predictably, he bent his head and kissed me where the knot used to be.

"Hmm," I whispered, weaving my fingers through his thick black hair, "you have about an hour to stop that—"

Also, quite predictably, a knock sounded at the door, just as my knees were about to give out. Dinner had arrived.

He kissed me thoroughly on the mouth and winked as he turned toward the living room.

"We'd better dine out here or we won't be eating room service any time tonight."

I grinned at him and collected my wet towel off the floor. Since I wouldn't have my clothes on long, I decided not to put many on. I was tired, but Travis had *that* look

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in his eye.

I just adore *that* look.

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About the Author



Born and raised in small-town New Jersey, Nancy was reading Carolyn Keene's mysteries by the time she was six. While waiting for more of those, she embarked on adventures with Huck Finn, the Hardy Boys and the Bobbsey Twins. More than once she was in trouble for hiding in a tall maple tree to read instead of finishing her chores.

In 1999, she got the first "call." A short story was sold to a Virginia publisher and she's sold short stories and articles regularly ever since, with the help of her long-time critique group.

She's the owner of On-Target Words, LLC, where she specializes in content editing, copy writing, and speaking to other writers about the craft skills she knows. Her website is <http://OnTargetWords.com>.

She lives in northeast Florida with her husband and an entertaining collection of felines and can be found from time to time singing charity benefit concerts. Check her out on YouTube sometime.

She loves to hear from readers anytime, so be sure to drop her a line at Nancy@nlquatrano.com

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