

Your Cheatin Hearts

PROLOGUE

The warm cup of coffee that Sarah Donovan had been holding crashed onto the table of Clancy's Drug Emporium. Instantly, the creamy Colombian blend flooded the counter top, spilling over its edge like a miniature Victoria Falls. Sarah and her companion began pulling the almost invisible sheaths of white napkins out of the dispenser in an ill fated attempt to stop the flow from reaching their purses, their laps and the floor of the luncheonette.

"Here, let me!" Rachel Cunningham, Clancy's only waitress, offered with a frown. Glaring down at both women, she deftly began cleaning up the spill taking great care not to spoil her starched pink uniform.

With her clinched hands resting squarely on her broad hips, she glared at Sarah, "I suppose you would like another cup?" "Well," Sarah said, staring down at her empty cup, "if you don't mind."

The soaked towel, in the waitress's hand, was seeping, oozing, dripping with brown fluid as if carried blood from a CSI murder scene. Rachel gave Sarah a look of unadulterated contempt before slowly sashaying back behind the lunch counter. Sarah watched her go knowing full well the story of the spill would be repeated oft times in the next several days to anyone who would listen.

"I don't know why that woman has a job here when she hates waiting on people." Sarah said turning back to her friend of almost fifty years. Remembering why she had dropped the stupid cup in the first place she leaned across the table and in a hiss, whispered to her companion, "Now, Maggie Colter, tell me you are not serious."

"Yes, I am and don't you dare look at me that! I'm the only woman left in all of Western North Carolina without grandchildren!" Maggie wailed utter defiance glittering in her eyes. She knew full well her faint-hearted plea for sympathy would not fool her long time friend.

Rachel Cunningham returned to the table interrupting further comment. "Your coffee," Rachel Cunningham said unceremoniously placing a fresh cup on the table. Rachel scowled at Sarah one last time as if daring her to spill the new cup. Sarah offered Rachel a weak smile. With a look of pure contempt, Rachel turned and walked away.

"Maggie Colter," Sarah said directing her attention back to her friend, "we've been best friends since we were in pigtails. I've been with you on every crazy adventure you've had but this one takes the cake!"

"Oh hush up!" Maggie said seething with fresh fury, "Everyone I know has grandchildren. And I want one!"

"What about that nice Jenny Fields that Jack has been seeing?" Sarah asked, "What happened with that?"

"Nothing, Jenny was just a friend and she is engaged to some boy from Marshall. Jack was just coaching her son in baseball."

Sarah looked sympathetically at her friend.

“Everyone has grandchildren,” Maggie said pointedly, “Everyone! The women at the Guild, Sunday School, all our friends, YOU!”

“Jack just hasn’t met the right girl yet,” Sarah offered trying to keep pity out of her voice.

“The right girl! The right girl! That boy of mine is 31 years old! And I am tired to waiting! It’s high time I take matters into my own hands. Whether you think this is a fool plan or not I’m going to see this through!” “Maggie, really, I wish you would rethink this. I have known your son since the day he was born. He’s good looking man, Maggie, always was. You might lead him to water, but he ain’t going to drink!”

With a glint in her blue eyes, Maggie raised her chin “I don’t care. I have waited for him long enough to make up his mind. Now it’s up to me.”

Sarah shook her head. “Well do you have anyone in mind?”

Maggie brightened prettily. “As a matter of fact I do. I saw my attorney, you know Emmett Smith, don’t you? Well just the other day I saw him talking to a pretty girl at the courthouse about two weeks ago. Just Jack’s type.”

“Outside the courthouse? Heavens to Betsy, Maggie! She could be a murderer, a criminal for all you know.”

“I’m not going to listen to another word from you Sarah; I thought you of all people would be helpful.” Maggie sniffed as she took a sip of her coffee,” besides, but I know my son, and Jack will find her attractive. She’s smart and she has her own business. My future daughter-in-law is a Private Investigator!”

“That poor boy,” Sarah said shaking her head. “I remember how hurt he was when he found out his college sweetheart was cheating with another fella. Maggie, I wonder if Jack is ever going to trust a girl again no matter how pretty she is.”

“Good grief, Sarah, that was years ago. Now I am going to find out more about her, then I have to come up with a way to get her and Jack together. Once I get them together, I’ll let nature takes its course. And Miss Sarah,” Maggie assured her friend, “whether he likes it or not, this time next year, Jack Colter will be married! And, he will be happy! I’ll have my grandchildren! Sarah, you and all you grandmothers of this town just watch me. This time next year, I will be holding my first grandchild. Wait and see!”

CHAPTER ONE

“Mrs. Colter,” Shelby MacGregor said trying not to sound impatient, “on the phone you said this was urgent, a matter of life and death.”

“Did I say that?” Maggie Colter stammered almost as if taken by surprise. The older woman leaned back against her seat at Denny’s Restaurant. She seemed a bit confused and quiet as though she were contemplating her reply.

Shelby remained silent. Meeting a private investigator for the first time made a lot of people nervous. In three years of heading her own agency, Your Cheatin Hearts, she knew she could learn a lot by nervous chatter, gaining valuable insight into her client’s personalities. This was crucial for if their spouse was found cheating, it was imperative she know how her clients would react.

Maggie Colter was different, she had no spouse. She did, however, need her help. Her call came just this morning. It was a matter of life or death she had pleaded. Now Maggie Colter sat hesitant and unresponsive.

Moments passed. Shelby sat patiently.

Despite her casual attire, the woman before her was probably one of the well-to-do women in this small western North Carolina mountain town. In her fifties, Maggie Colter’s face was just beginning to wrinkle. Her brown eyes were soft and kind.

She nervously took a sip of coffee. Shelby noticed her hands. Though manicured, they looked used. Shelby suspected, Maggie loved to garden. This was a woman who no doubt enjoyed living life on her own terms. Sensing a kindred spirit, Shelby smiled and shifted slightly. This was Maggie’s cue to talk but she didn’t take it.

Shelby wondered what had prompted this woman to make her frantic call. She was hiding something. What? Why?

Suddenly Maggie Colter’s eyes widen, her round face lit with delight. “Yes! That’s it! My son is in definite danger, Ms. MacGregor.”

The image of Jack Colter flashed in Shelby’s mind. She had seen him around town. Though she had never been formally introduced, she concluded the ruggedly handsome Jack Colter hardly appeared a man that needed protecting.

“Your son is in danger?” Shelby repeated. She heard the doubt in her own voice and she had the nagging suspicion that Maggie Colter was making her story up as she went along.

The waitress returned with their order. She placed a diet coke in front of Shelby, and a large slice of the praline pecan pie in front of Maggie.

“Would you like some more coffee?” the waitress drawled in a soft southern accent. With her eyes totally focused on the dark rich slice of praline pie, Maggie didn’t bother to look up as she answered, “maybe in a minute.”

The waitress smiled and glided away to take an order from a couple who had just arrived.

“Are you sure you don’t want anything besides that diet coke, dear?” Maggie asked lifting up her fork.

Shelby shook her head. Maggie turned her attention back to the pie. With the dexterity and grace of a matador, Maggie removed her napkin from the table and folded it across her lap. Whatever was troubling Maggie Colter seemed momentarily forgotten as she slid the fork into the thick dark pie?

“Mrs. Colter,” Shelby said, “If your son is in danger, perhaps you should be talking to the police?”

“Oh no! I can’t!” she protested. “Jack would be furious. By the way, my friends call me Maggie, please do as well. And, may I call you Shelby?”

Without giving her a chance to respond, Maggie immediately turned her attention back to the pie.

“Hum,” Maggie cooed, “this is so good. You know, Denny’s always has the best pie. Did I mention my son is not married?”

“Mrs. Colter,” Shelby began, then softened her voice and expression, “Maggie, you said your son is in danger?”

“Tell me more about yourself, my dear.” Maggie mumbled between bites. “Being a private investigator and all must be very dangerous profession, does your boyfriend mind?”

Shelby shook her head no. “There’s no gentleman in my life. No child. Nothing that would distract me from your son’s welfare.”

Maggie stopped eating her pie. She took her fork and with great care laid it across her plate. Her jaw tensed and her eyebrows arched as she asked, “But you do like children, don’t you?”

“Yes, Yes, I like children very much, Mrs. Colter,” Shelby assured her noticing the visible look of relief on the older woman’s face.

“Maggie, if you believe your son’s life is in danger, you need to be having this conversation with the police. Not with me. My firm, Your Cheatin Hearts specializes in spousal infidelity.”

“Your brochure said you were with law enforcement for a while.”

“I was,” Shelby explained in a voice that was cool and calm, “but I didn’t go to four years of criminology, and specialized training to write parking tickets.”

Shelby continued, “I do all sorts of investigate work, Maggie. I work with large companies, doing background checks on their employees. However, my primary business is devoted to husbands and wives who suspect their partners are cheating.”

“Is there a lot of that going on?” Maggie said with a gasp.

Shelby couldn’t help but smile. Maggie’s innocence was genuine. “Unfortunately, yes.”

“Oh my” Maggie stammered in amazement. She looked for a moment as if she were ready to order another slice of pie.

“Maggie, perhaps you would like to see my credentials.” Shelby said changing the subject. “You can rely on my discretion. And, again I would like to suggest, you should be having this discussion with the police.”

“No, dear, they won’t help at all,” Maggie replied, her eyes filled with certainty. Several pensive moments passed before Maggie offered Shelby a radiant smile. “Emmett Smith, my attorney, recommended you. Now that I have seen you, I think you are just perfect for what I need.”

Shelby made a mental note to send Emmett a thank you card for his referral. Shelby remained quiet.

Maggie was deep in thought as if contemplating her next reply. Shelby suspected she was stalling as she placed her fork into the remaining bit of pie. When complete, she turned around to her purse and pulled out an envelope.

“Here.” she said passing an oversized brown envelope to Shelby. “This might help. Just look at this and tell me what you think?”

Shelby accepted the package and let its contents slide across the table. A full four color photo of the 6’1” Jack Colter spilled out of the envelope. Shelby lifted it.

“The advertising agency that helps us with the catalog likes to use Jack for photos,” Maggie stated beaming with maternal pride.

Shelby studied the photo. It was common knowledge that Jack and Maggie Colter were the owners of the successful mercantile and catalog mail order business in the mountains. Jack, in addition to all his other attributes was certainly photogenic.

In the layout, Jack managed a relaxed poise for the camera with one long leg rigid on the ground and the other resting on the log. His smile was captivating and his arresting good looks captured her full attention. The Blue Ridge Mountains served as a dramatic back drop.

Jack Colter was wearing a tan shirt with matching pants that fit him snug about his narrow waist and hips. The hiking boots were new, but any one looking scene could see he was a man well suited for the wilderness. Leaning against his muscular thigh, his arms even in this casual pose looked hard and powerful. From his wide shoulders to broad chest, to his firm abs, he seemed unaware of his male virility.

Shelby thought with his natural good looks and rugged physic, he could easily had a career as a male model. She found it hard to avoid the steady warm gaze of his electric blue eyes. He was tanned, no, Shelby corrected herself, bronzed and looked as if he hiked or worked outdoors without a shirt. His lips were not full, but appeared soft, and easily kiss-able. She blushed, embarrassed to find Maggie smiling at her.

Looking very pleased, Maggie’s eyes were sparkling with sheer delight. “I told you he was nice looking, didn’t I?”

Shelby drew an uneasy breathe. Drawn back the photo, Jack seemed to be teasing her now. The blue fire in his eyes warmed by his smile, making the neatly square jaw softer. His neck was strong and like the rest of his body muscular and athletic. Jack Colter’s soft dark hair was cropped and short around his ears and face. It was a style that demanded little keep and suited him well. His hands looked enormous and strong. Without meaning to, Shelby wondered what it would be like to be touched by those fingers and gathered into those muscular arms. With one more appreciative glance at the photo, she laid the picture aside. She was confident Jack Colter was a man who could take care of himself.

Seeing Maggie beaming at her, she knew she had showed entirely too much interest in the handsome Jack Colter. “Did I mention Jack is not married?” Of course, I did, well no matter. And, Shelby, you know honey; I couldn’t help but notice that picture in your brochure. You are so much prettier in person. Has

anyone ever told you that you look a bit like Jaclyn Smith? Much prettier, though I think. Your features are softer, nicer.”

Shelby gave her a half smile. They were not here to discuss her but her son. Quick to return the topic to Jack, Shelby asked, “Maggie, do you suspect your son is being followed?”

Maggie bolted upright a look of pure delight gleaming in her brown eyes. “Yes, that’s it! My son is being followed! Why didn’t I think...well, what I meant to tell you earlier. Yes, I am definitely going to need you to watch my son for several days. A week! Maybe a month or so, maybe longer, however long it takes!”

Shelby sat unmoved. Had this just occurred to her? She was not at all convinced Jack was serious danger. Again she sensed that Maggie was hiding something from her.

“All right, then, if you are serious, my fee is \$ 225 a day,” Shelby said hoping the amount would discourage any tomfoolery. “It covers 24 hour surveillance.”

Maggie didn’t blink. Shelby continued, “My schedule is free at the moment. I do have the time to watch your son. We should know in a matter of days whether your son is being followed or not.”

“Oh no, dear, I’m quite sure I’ll need more time than that,” Maggie protested as she reached in her pocketbook and pulled her checkbook out.

Shelby sat puzzled; perhaps the handsome Jack Colter was in danger after all.

“OK, Maggie,” she said evenly, “if I do find out someone is following your son, we may need to go the police. Agreed?”

“Oh yes,” Maggie stammered too quickly, “absolutely! I agree.”

Shelby took a long breath. “First, tell me why do you believe someone is following your son? Is he aware of this? If he’s not, then we need to discuss this with him right away.”

“He mustn’t know!” Maggie said sternly, “if he knows I’m meddling again he’ll be very angry at me.” Maggie leaned across the table and said in a low whisper, “we need to keep this between us.”

Shelby frowned. “Do you have any idea why someone would be following your son? Is Jack into gambling, drugs, any type of criminal or illegal dealings? Anything I should know about?”

“Heavens, no,” Maggie replied in a voice that was clear and exact, “Jack has never been involved in anything like that. I suppose you have to ask that sort of questions? No, no, my Jack is a good boy. Now if you look in the envelope, I brought you information about his schedule. I thought that would be helpful.”

Maggie glanced at her watch handed Shelby the check. She then placed a five and two one dollar bills on the table to cover her pie, their drinks and the tip.

“Here’s my check, dear, that should cover you for a week or so. I just need you to follow my son, and tell me what you think?”

“Mrs. Colter,” Shelby protested, “Maggie, you have given me too much for a few days work. If I conclude my surveillance before the time is up, I’ll return any unused part of the retainer to you. As I said if your son is being followed we’ll know in a few days.”

Impulsively Maggie leaned over and gave Shelby a tight hug.

“My dearest Shelby, I know all this seems confusing and a bit of a surprise for you but I will assure you. At the end of the day, it will all be well. You’ll see.”

With her last comment, she pulled away from Shelby, gave her a broad smile, turned and walked away.

Watching Maggie leave the restaurant, Shelby sat unable to shake the feeling that there was more to Maggie’s story than she had offered. With two years of law enforcement and three years in her own private detective agency, Shelby knew the woman was hiding something. What, she wondered but more important, why? Whatever Maggie was keeping from her, she would know in a matter of days. One thing she had learned in life was the truth always comes out. Always.

Watching Maggie Colter walk away she felt uneasy. In her line of work, a lot of people claimed to want to know the truth then denied it even when faced with documented facts and photos. There were a dozen reasons why any human being wanted to watch another. In the next several days, Shelby would know why Maggie wanted her son followed. And if someone was indeed following Jack Colter, she would not only find out who but more important why.

About to leave the table, she caught a faint glimpse of her reflection in the restaurant’s window. Her long sable brown hair curled in layers about her face and shoulders. She swept it over her collar thinking if she had the time later she would get it cut. The soft show of violet that had once graced her eyes as a child had gone replaced by a look that to her seemed harder. She didn’t care, or did she? Jaclyn Smith, indeed, she thought to herself. She watched as her soft full lips curled into a smile. At least through it all, she had been true to herself and her promise. She would never love again.

It had been years since she thought of Jarred. Jarred, with his movie star good looks, and his easy smile had won a younger Shelby. How innocent she must have seemed to him, how vulnerable. Well no more, she thought with a smile, no more and never again! Built on her broken heart, she now kept other women from being the fool she had been by catching cheaters her small town of Hendersonville, North Carolina. Business was flourishing.

Unlike her glamorous TV counterparts, Shelby didn’t drive a fancy sports car, or have an enormous staff to assist her. Like most PIs in America, she ran a small one man, correction, one woman shop. She had done quite well for herself in the beautiful mountains of Western North Carolina. In fact, she thought proudly, she had moved out of her house a year and a half ago to open a small store front office close to the courthouse. While the store front was mostly for show, it was close to several attorneys she worked for. It was these same attorneys who recommended her services to clients either prior to divorce, during or after a divorce. Whether it was for ‘cheating’, hiding assets from a spouse or investigating a new person in their children’s life, there was always ample need for her services. Shelby liked her little store front office, it gave her respectability in a sometimes otherwise disreputable business.

Clients, especially new ones, preferred not to be seen walking in and out of her office. More often than not, she met potential clients at the various restaurants around town. Maggie Colter, who had called her just this morning, was one of them.

Though she had never formally met Maggie Colter she was familiar with her and her son, Jack. They were the owners of Bear Creek Outfitters. Their one time general store had grown from a small town mercantile to a now successful store and national catalog sales offering its customers everything from state of the art camping equipment to fashionable LL Bean style clothing.

Both Maggie and her son, Jack, were known as generous benefactors to the town especially with children's groups and church organizations.

Shelby finished her diet coke and pocketed the check into her purse.

Less than five minutes later, she was in her Chevy Tracker headed toward town. On the drive, she began to plot how and when to start monitoring Jack Colter's movements.

With the packet of information beside her, she drove back toward her office and called Chris Thompson at the Hendersonville Police Department.

The dispatcher patched her through to her single part-time employee and former partner. Chris Thompson moonlighted with her on cases that required 24 hour surveillance. "Shelby!" Chris answered when he answered her call. "How are you doing?"

"Great, can you give me some time over the next three days? Mostly evening work."

"You bet! Who and where?"

"I'll call you later. And, you will be surprised as to who?"

"I doubt that, Shelby." Chris said with a laugh, "I'll plan on being available for you this evening."

Ending the call, she pulled onto Main Street barely noticing the charming ambiance of small town Americana. It was Wednesday afternoon and unlike her big city counterparts, most Hendersonville stores closed midday as was the custom. Still, she saw a few shoppers going door to door.

Bear Creek Outfitters was open and business was brisk with tourists and a few locals.

Slowly driving past the entrance, she noted the vehicles parked in front, but nothing seemed out of place. Taking the full drive down Main Street, she turned left at second, and circled the entire downtown area. This time, she passed Main Street, and drove down Church Street to a huge parking lot behind Bear Creek Outfitters.

Grabbing a bottle of water from her cooler, Shelby pulled out the packet of information on Jack Colter and gave his photo an appreciate glance.

No day dreaming allowed, she told herself. With a wistful sigh, she put the photo to the back of the packet. She read the itinerary but it gave no clue as to why Jack would be followed. It appeared he worked all the time and seemed to have little if any social life.

Around six, she noticed Jack Colter emerge from the store. The photo was a poor copy of the man. In real life, his shoulders were broader, his hips slim, and he looked far more muscular than the picture had offered. Shelby, who had sworn off men, couldn't help but admire the way he moved in his tight fitting jeans. At least, the young Mr. Colter was a refreshing change from the portly men she was usually assigned to watch. Do your job, she reminded herself, and Jack Colter is not for you.

He looked back at the store, waved at the older man goodbye, before he pulled his white Ford Bronco out of the parking lot.

Shelby started the Tracker and pulled out behind him, careful to leave two to three cars between them to avoid suspicion. No one seemed to be following him. When he reached home, he pulled into the driveway parked his SUV and went into the house. She watched as lights went on, following his movements through the house. Nothing seemed out of the ordinary.

It had been a long day for Jack Colter and surprisingly one that left him pensive and reflective of his life, or as he mused, the lack of one. There was a Father and Son Fishing Tournament the next weekend and it seemed every father and son in town had made it a point to come in to buy their son's first fishing pole from Bear Creek Outfitters. The activity of men sizing up the poles, showing their boys how to cast, and purchasing their son's first tackle box had gotten to him by the end of the day. Watching the parade of fathers in and out of the store reminded him all the more than he didn't have a son, a family other than his Mother and he didn't even have a woman in his life.

Unexpectedly he thought back to Celeste, his long time high school and college sweetheart. He had been just about ready to pop the question when he learned his all too perfect, all too beautiful Celeste had been two timing him with another man. He had been devastated. The only residual left being a deep distrust of women.

But, had he cursed himself when he vowed to never love again.

Well, his Mother had been on his case for several years now to find someone and start a family. The Father and Son day reminded him of what he was missing.

Humm, he thought with a long intake of breath as he pulled into his driveway. His house was big enough, he would like to see it filled with children, a son or sons to take to a fishing tournament and it would be nice to have someone waiting at home instead of returning to an empty, dark house every night.

But where was he going to find this someone, he thought turning off the Bronco's engine. Maybe he would attend the next Chamber of Commerce Meeting next month or even date one of the women his Mother had suggested. After all the girl of his dreams wouldn't just fall in front of him, would she?

Shelby looked at Jack Colter's home. It was one of the grand old stately homes built by South Carolinians who came to Hendersonville at the turn of the century to escape the heat of the lowlands.

Beautiful green ferns graced the wrap around porch. The large white house gave the appearance of being recently painted. Only the blue shutters and gray roof top accented the home. The yard, except for a few azaleas, was manicured but hardly landscaped as the almost identical home next door. Both were two stories. Many of these magnificent homes had been converted to quaint Bed and Breakfasts. Beautiful homes, Shelby thought as she parked her Tracker at an empty lot across the street. She

grabbed a John Grisham novel she had been reading and settled back for what she hoped would be a quiet night.

As the hours passed she made note of the vehicles which moved about the neighborhood. She called Chris Thompson close to the end of his shift and gave him the address where she needed him that night.

"You've to be kidding," he said when he pulled up behind her around 10PM. "Jack Colter is a boy scout. Who wants you to keep tabs on him?"

"His Mother. She suspects someone is following him. Just keep your eyes open, O.K.?"

"Will do," Chris said with a sigh. "See you in the morning," Shelby promised.

A little over 7 hours later, she stood banging at Chris's window.

"Wake up," Shelby said with a laugh, "it's time to go home and get some sleep. Anything happen last night?"

"Pretty quiet" Chris said with a yawn. "Man, I must have dozed off. Last night lights went out by eleven. I did notice an old ford truck about two. Seemed out of place for this neighborhood. It made two passes before it left. I wrote down the license plate just in case. When I run the tags later today, I'll get back to you."

"Thanks," Shelby said, "now you run on home and get some shut eye."

After Chris left, Shelby glanced at her watch. Dressed in running gear she got out of her car and stretched. The store didn't open until nine am. Jack according to his Mother's never left the house before eight. The day was still quiet. Crickets chirped and birds sang softly as if not to break the still of the cool Carolina morning. Lawns and trees were thickly laid in the honeyed mist of a new dawn. The sweet fragrance of flowers surrounded with her like a loving friend, warm, comforting, and always there.

Realizing this was the only time she would probably have all day for exercise, she wasted no time in stretching before she began her daily run.

Not daring to roam far, she decided to take a fast run to the end of the long street, and returned. On the second pass, she saw a light go on Jack's house. He was right on time. It was nearly 7:30AM. She decided to take one more turn through the neighborhood.

ids were beginning to emerge from the houses, moving slowing down to the end of the street toward a bus stop. One boy pulled a skate board from his arm and dropped it to the ground before gliding past her to a neighbor's house on the other side of Jack's home.

Checking her watch, she finished the last stretch to the end of the street and decided to run back. As she neared Jack's house she noticed his white Ford Bronco driving slowly down the drive. She cursed softly under her breath, and pulled the baseball cap lower to cover her face. She kept her pace steady, her head down. As soon as she reached her Tracker, she would be able to follow him easily.

The Bronco stopped at the end of the driveway. It pulled forward as Shelby ran along side a neighbor's hedge lined sidewalk. Too late she heard the scraping sounds of a skateboard. The boy on the skateboard burst onto the sidewalk directly in front of her.

As she jumped to avoid him, her foot landed off center on the curb. She was helpless but to fall forward directly into the path of the Ford Bronco. Her small frame twisted just before her body slammed against the pavement. Her Shoulders and head took the brunt of the fall. She heard the screech of the brakes.

No, no, no, Shelby cried inside as she heard the Bronco's door open. She couldn't have fallen right in front of Jack Colter! She slowly opened her eyes to see his handsome face just inches from her. She closed her eyes. No, this couldn't be happening!

"Is she dead?" the skateboarder asked managing to sound blameless for his part in the accident.

"She's not dead," Jack said impatiently to the teen, then to Shelby, "Miss are you all right?"

"Yes, just a bump on my head," Shelby was all she could manage as she tried to rise. A sharp pain ran up the back of her neck. She fell back against the pavement.

"Should I call an ambulance?" a woman's voice rang out. The woman sounded strangely familiar. In fact, it sounded like Maggie Colter.

"No, we can get her to the Doctor's office quicker," Jack said to the woman. Speaking back to her, she felt the warmth of his breath upon her cheek. "You hit your head pretty hard. Nothing looks broken. Can you stand up?"

"I think so," Shelby said struggling to rise. For a second time, she fell back. Not wanting to, she slowly opened her eyes and focused on the deepest pair of blue eyes she had ever seen. God, he is handsome she thought with a smile. Her vision blurred.

As she faded to black, she heard the skate boarder proclaim, "Yep. You killed her Mister. She's dead."