

CHAPTER 1

PLODDING wearily out old Telegraph Canyon Road, unbearably alone, the fierce-blowing desert wind parched her throat and made it difficult to breathe.

Privacy assured in the darkened ambience of an unlit country road, unaware of approaching danger, the young woman unfastened the top two buttons of her plain white blouse. Her slender fingers darted within to unpin and remove the scarf-like undergarment which encircled her torso and protected her modesty.

Her blouse neck parted revealing a delicate rosewood crucifix, lovingly handcrafted in exquisite detail. Hanging from a simple silver-alloy chain around her neck, the minisculpture dangled loosely between her generous breasts.

Timid fingers trailed down her blouse front until they met the next small button. For a brief lingering moment, they paused, constrained by a powerful morality born of strict, virtuous upbringing.

The stifling Santa Ana wind demanded concession. Overcome with physical distress, unmindful of danger, necessity prevailed. Quickly, urgently, she undid the remaining buttons of her blouse, sighing in relief as gale-force air currents swept over her sweaty skin.

Blouse front open, breasts swaying with each footstep, she ran her open fingers through a dark, wavy hairline. Arms upraised, she felt wickedly naked and exposed. She bit her lip nervously and dropped her hands to her side. Josefina's crucifix chain flashed a warning—a twinkling reflection from distant flickering headlights. Absorbed in secret thoughts, it went unnoticed.

Trudging out the last half-mile to her rented roadside cottage, the isolation of the old highway reminded her again tonight of her own unbearable aloneness. The two years since the war ended seemed like twenty.

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Daily, now, Josefina saw virile young former servicemen walking the streets of San Diego as civilians. Often as not, on their arms would be the waiting women of wartime, now married and proudly displaying their fertility.

There was no mistake about it. Since the war, everyone was getting married. Three coworkers at the cannery recently married. Little Shirley Temple, married. Princess Elizabeth of England about to marry. It seemed everyone was getting married and raising a family. Everyone but Josefina. Plodding along in deep thought, the flickering headlights of the oncoming car were seen but not perceived.

Tears of inner pain trickled down Josefina's cheeks. *Poor Mama*, she thought. God had taken Josefina's mother too soon. Took her before she could realize her dream of seeing her first-born daughter married in St. Michael's Parish with fancy clothes and all the family and family friends sharing the joy of God's blessing.

Young Josefina Maria Camarillo was resolute. Her solemn promise to Mama on that last night together would be fulfilled. Mama said it was part of God's plan for her and that God would send her the man. For Mama's sake,

somehow she would find the man.

Oh, if only Mama could see me getting married in St. Michaels, she dreamed. She'd be so happy, so proud!

For two years, Josefina prayed daily for God's man to come. Now, still unbearably alone, her desperate need moved her closer to fulfillment. *Find a place for yourself*, Papa had said. *Make a life for yourself*.

The authority of Papa's words flooded her mind.

That's it, she thought. *That's the secret! Not let life happen to you, make it happen*. And in her heart, she believed it true.

Josefina's jaws tightened, her lips thinning with somber determination.

That very moment when she disavowed God's plan for her life is when she first heard the whispered voice in her mind. *There's a dance tonight at St. Michael's. Tonight you will make a man want you. Tonight you will be irresistible!*

Suddenly, graphic, undulating images appeared in her mind. She flushed with embarrassment. Recoiling in shock, "God forbid!" she gasped, frightened by her own thoughts.

But the whispers and fantasy returned, dancing in her mind . . . tempting her . . . enticing her . . . exciting her desire, even in the face of God's certain wrath.

Unexpectedly, Josefina's foot caught in a small, jagged road rut. She lurched forward. "Holy Mother!" she cried, jolted into alertness.

Removing the old leather huarache from a throbbing toe, she held it up to take a look, mumbling to herself about her stolen bicycle and the long walk home in the dark.

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The sharp, yipping cry of a meandering coyote on the hillside unsettled her nerves and hurried her sandal inspection. Hanging loose at the toe was a thin strap torn from its anchoring in the sole. All clearly visible in the moonlight. Too clearly for moonlight.

The monotonous headlight glare of the distant oncoming car had been hypnotic. Engrossed in forbidden thought, Josefina had been unaware of the car's proximity. Now, focused on the reality of her torn shoe, frightened, she realized the car was no longer moving. It was stopped on the side of the road. Her side.

Josefina's heart began to beat wildly, her body electrified with adrenaline.

She scrambled to button her open blouse, fingers groping clumsily.

Unsuccessfully.

She watched in panic as the car's headlights faded and died. "Holy Mother!" she whispered.

The sudden shift from glaring light to near blackness left Josefina's pupils constricted and unseeing. She felt blind and helpless. She saw no place to run to escape. *Stay calm*, she told herself, stoking her nerves.

Clutching her open blouse fronts together with grasping, white-knuckled fingers, she moved hurriedly to the opposite side of the roadway, putting distance between herself and the car. It was all but hidden from view by her impaired night vision, but she knew it was there.

The clicks and groans of the still-running motor of an old blue Ford echoed through the deserted countryside. Only the car's dim parking lights remained on to signal unknown peril, reminding her she was alone in the

dark of an isolated road.

Eyes widened in fear, holding her breath, Josefina quickened her pace and scurried past the hulking metal frame. *Ten steps past. Twenty steps. Thirty.* Her heart pounded, thundering in her ears, drowning out the crunch of approaching footsteps on loose gravel. *Forty steps. Fifty steps.*

Finally, lungs bursting in short, tight gasps, she reached safety beyond the car.

Fingers tingling, flesh pink with pulsing blood, Josefina stopped and bent over, hands on her knees. She inhaled deeply to calm her runaway heartbeat. Gradually, her breathing slowed. Only then did she feel the wetness in her underpants, the warm streams of urine running down the inside of her thighs.

"Oh, Holy Mother," she groaned.

The assault came without warning. A hard-knuckled fist smashed against her soft right cheek. Reeling sideways, she staggered, mouth open, blood flowing from a torn lip.

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The kick of a steel-toed shoe rammed into her diaphragm. Doubled over in agony, unable to breathe, she struggled in vain, her lungs paralyzed by trauma. Desperate, she sucked and strained. Chest muscles squeezing, temporal arteries bulging, she fought for air.

A second crushing blow to the face twisted her backward onto the ground. Spatters of red liquid gushed from her mouth and nose as the back of her head cracked the roadbed.

In the spinning gray twilight of stuporous daze, Josefina felt herself half-lifted, half-dragged. Sharp edges of coarse gravel scraped her bare legs. A dipping down then up marked the crossing of the empty drainage ditch. Brittle ends of dried brush snagged her blouse and held on, raggedly tearing the garment from her limp body. Numbed from violent trauma, she felt nothing as her assailant threw her body onto the hard ground. Big rough hands tore at her cotton skirt and underpants, ripping them from her small frame.

Josefina fought back fiercely. She thrashed back and forth, kicked wildly, twisted and lurched from side to side to free herself from thick, powerful arms. Terror-stricken, she screamed, her shrieks and cries swallowed by windblown, deserted hillsides.

A huge shadow-figure grabbed her long dark hair and yanked. She groaned with pain as her head whipped back, neck stretched, mouth open and bloody. Eyes bulging, fighting for her life, Josefina exploded in convulsive kicks and jerks.

"Hold still, ya bitch!" a gritty-edged voice barked. He slammed a burly knee down on her bare chest. The sudden crushing weight on her diaphragm whooshed all air from her lungs. Blue-lined arteries on her face and neck protruded, threatening to burst. She tried to breathe. Tried again. And again.

Clamping her wrists together, the attacker jerked her arms above her head, elbows next to her ears. In quick, practiced motion, he twisted a wide leather belt tightly around her arms and head, ensnaring the limbs. Steel-hard fingers gripped her pubic hair, pinning her naked pelvis against the ground.

His thick knee pressed hard against her head as he stuffed her wet, urinesoaked underwear into her mouth, gagging her.

Josefina lay helpless, unable to breathe as her assailant brutally smashed all resistance from her battered body. The full weight of his massive torso crushed down on her chest. Slowly, consciousness faded to gray and turned to black and nothingness.

A time later, eyes still closed, Josefina became aware of an alien sensation in her nose and an odor that grew in intensity. The unmistakable smell
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of gasoline. Its pungent fumes stung her nostrils and raised her level of awareness.

Pupils dilated, her half-opened eyes blur-focused on a dark, shadowy figure on its knees straddling her body. From the moon glow behind him, she saw the outline of a large naked man staring down at the blood-spattered object hanging from a chain about her neck. Like a distant echo, she heard herself begging him. "Please! Please don't hurt me again."

"Shut up, ya bitch!" The big man reached down and snatched the small wooden crucifix off its chain and held it up to his face to see. "This ain't gonna help ya none. But I got somethin' that will."

The man shoved his naked hips in front of Josefina's battered face, his distended organ in close view. "Here's what ya're gonna get, bitch. Look at it. Look at it!"

Terrorized, afraid not to look, Josefina stared wide-eyed. Pulsating and throbbing in perverse excitement mere inches from her bloodied face, its bulbous head loomed big as her fist, its shaft thick as an oak log. Sensitized by violence, the loathsome image burned into the matrix of her subconscious.

A gritty voice growled in her ear. "Now, bitch, ya're gonna get your first piece from me. An' ya're gonna get it all . . . right now!"

Frantic, overwhelmed with fear, Josefina pleaded with her attacker. "Oh, God, no! Please don't! Please don't do that to me. Please! Please!"

A wicked sneer twisted his mouth. The begging of the helpless young woman excited him, fueled his animal lust. Glassy-eyed, consumed with need, his muscled forearm clamped down across her throat. Forcing her knees up and apart, his sharp, jabbing fingernails clawed their way through delicate tissue, agonizing her flesh, searing her mind with pain.

Suddenly, the attacker brutally jammed his inflamed phallus into her.

A terrible cry of anguish and suffering pierced the night air as his invasion ruptured her maidenhead.

Impaled, unable to move, hymenal blood streaming, Josefina lay helpless as his raging passion forced its way into her private sheath, thrust-pounding her body again and again, traumatizing her psyche, shredding her soul of innocence.

Finally, her attacker shuddered in convulsive spasms, grunting pig-like as his passion erupted, spitting semen dirtily into her sacred space. For long moments, the man's body lay still against hers, full weight oppressively heavy, phallic contractions pulsing in her ravaged womanhood.

Passion spent, he pulled away, sweaty face glowering down at her.

Eyes closed, aware he hovered over her, Josefina waited. She dared not move. Silent as death, she prayed feverishly in her mind. *Holy Mother, pray for*

me. Oh, Holy Mother, save me! Oh, God! Oh, God! Oh, someone, please! Please!

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Motionless, she waited. Nothing. She waited more. *Where is he?* Cautiously, she cracked open her eyelids. *Is he gone? What's he doing? Oh, God! What's he going to do?*

Gripping a dried stick in both hands, the man pushed its dirty, jagged point hard against the flesh of her breasts. "So I'll know ya fo' sure when I see ya 'gain, bitch," he growled, dragging the edge of the stick hard and slow across her body as blood began to run, scrape-carving a large, crude sign-of-the-cross into the flesh of her bare chest.

Josefina knew her life depended on making no defense. Yet the pain was excruciating. Steeling herself, she blocked everything from her mind, somehow enduring the savagery without sound or movement.

The man's dark, sweaty face came down near her bleeding breasts, inspecting his tortuous handiwork. "Jus' somethin' to remember me by, bitch, and so ya don't talk too much . . ." The bone-sharp edge of his callused hand chopped viciously across the front of her neck. A thick red liquid oozed out her open mouth, spilling over the ragged membranes of her torn lip.

Brutally beaten, sexually ravaged, paralyzed with fear, Josefina's tortured body lay motionless in overwhelming shock. Barely alive, she escaped into the unfeeling mercy of traumatic blackout, naked on her back on the coarse dried underbrush of an isolated roadside, arms bound overhead, legs propped open, her precious rosewood crucifix jammed into her bloodied womb space.

Devout young Josefina Maria Camarillo, innocent and pure of heart, wanted only to fulfill her deathbed promise to poor Mama. Excited and seduced by wicked, whispered thoughts, marked by the wrath of God with shredded innocence and shameful cross, how could she hope to challenge the evil of Satan when next he whispered the paradise of revenge.