

~Chapter 2~

“Brains and blood! Brains and blood!”

Hundreds of parading zombies staggered and lurched along Burnside, chanting and making crazy zombie noises. Swept into the melee, Chili and Roscoe were carried along by the power of the crowd, literally unable to escape.

“Oh, Chili, you’re gonna love Portland! ” Roscoe said shouting above the cries of the crowd. “It’s so cool.”

After a few blocks they managed to work their way to the edge of the teeming mass of bodies and turned onto a side street. Chili leaned against a lamp post to catch her breath while Roscoe chuckled to himself. “Yeah, maybe this wasn’t the best way to introduce you to Portland. Since we’ve come this far, let’s walk for a few more blocks. We can go back to Powell’s Books and pick up my truck later.”

Chili looked up at the overcast sky. “Okay, Roscoe, I know I’m from Juneau and should be used to the rain, but look at those clouds. This drizzle has a really good chance of turning into a downpour. Let’s go back to your truck now. I flew over eight hundred miles to hear what you had to say, so enough of this. Whatever it is, I want to hear all about it.”

Roscoe shrugged. “Okay, you’ve got a point. I thought the bookstore would be a good place to talk, but we got waylaid. We’ll go back and get my truck.”

They watched as the last stragglers of the Zombie Walk had passed, then returned to Burnside Street and headed back toward Powell’s Books. On the way Chili stopped and tugged at Roscoe’s sleeve with one hand. She pointed to an appealing pastry shop with the other.

“Roscoe Bean, you just put me through my paces with this crazy parade. Now, I demand that you buy me something gooey and sweet to wipe out that frightful experience. I swear, I feel like one of the denizens of the undead myself.” Then she flashed a smile. “Okay, wipe that expression off your face. I admit it was kind of fun, but I really do need one of those pastries. And, I can’t wait to hear what inspired you to lure me to this—um, wacky city.”

Without waiting for his answer, she pushed open the door and popped into the shop.

The aroma inside was enough to make anyone’s mouth water, and the choices were all decadent. A poster for the Zombie Walk hanging on the wall opposite the pastry cooler featured dark silhouettes of zombies with red eyes. ‘Lurch Along With Us’ was scrawled across the top in letters that looked like dripping blood. Quite a contrast to the cozy, warm interior of Oh La La Patisserie.

Subtle flute music floated through the fragrant air while they picked out a Napoleon for Chili and a *pain au chocolat* for Roscoe. As soon as they took seats at a frilly glass-topped table by the window, huge drops from a cloudburst slammed against the glass. "Hmmm," Chili mused, "kinda reminds me of home." She took a bite of her pastry and a sip of her demitasse. "Okay, Roscoe, time to spill the beans. What is this wonderful thing that has you as excited as a kid on Christmas morning?"

Without any fanfare, he blurted out, "How would you like to be the executive chef at a new restaurant that's destined to be a five star?"

Chili looked a little perplexed, put down her cup, and said in a measured tone, "Well, I suppose that sounds great to you, Roscoe, but do you know the failure rate of new restaurants? It is huge. Surely you don't expect me to give up my job with Caesar and come tripping up to Portland on a whim. I do appreciate your thinking of me, though."

"Please hear me out, Chili. This is right up your alley." He wiped a little spot of chocolate off his lower lip.

"I suppose the owner is a friend of yours and hasn't got much money to pay a well-known chef, so you suggested me. Well, thanks but no thanks."

She glanced out the window through the rain spots. Damp and bedraggled zombies still staggered along as though it was a sunny day. "Yep," she thought. "Just like Juneau, but bigger."

Undaunted, Roscoe continued his pitch. "Okay, I can see where you might think that, and I agree that's what happens to lots of new restaurants, but not this one. And, yes, the owner is a good friend of mine. His current restaurant, Omnivore, is one of the hottest spots in Portland. People wait days if not weeks for reservations. His name is Jordan Jambon. Maybe you've even heard of him."

Chili's eyes opened wide and she took a deep breath. "Are you talking about *the* Jordan Jambon who just made *Bon Appetite's* list of the Top 20 Chefs in the country?"

"One and the same." Roscoe gave a thumbs up. "Yep, I worked for him when I first got to Portland. Washing dishes, waiting tables, that was before I set up my own business. I fix old electronic stuff, pinball machines, juke boxes, stereos—but that's another story. Anyway, we became great friends. We have a couple of more roommates and live in this big old house, six bedrooms, three bathrooms, it's even got a basement ballroom. That's where I have my workshop."

Roscoe went on to tell Chili that Chef Jambon was getting write ups in all of the gourmet and lifestyle magazines, which meant business kept growing at a fast pace. When the restaurant next door to him went broke, he worked out a deal for taking over the lease at a great price. At first he was going to expand Omnivore, but decided instead to open a sister restaurant called Herbivore, catering to all the Portlanders who are vegetarians and vegans.

"When he told me about it and said that he was interviewing some local chefs, I swear, it was like one of those cartoon light bulbs came on over my head and I thought of you. So, I casually asked him if he ever watched *Flirting with Food*. Turned out your boss was one of his inspirations."

"Really? Caesar?"

"Really. Then I asked him what he thought of you. Guess what? Turns out that you have a fan in one of *Bon Appétit's* top twenty chefs. Jordan thinks you have personality and brains. He thinks you're beautiful, too, but that's just a bonus."

Chili was floored. She forked the last bit of her Napoleon into her mouth while she digested what her friend said. He was right. If Jambon would seriously consider her, the opportunity was amazing. Or, maybe Roscoe wanted her back and this was his way of enticing her.

She quickly ruled out the second option. He was the most honest person she had ever met, completely without devious devices. "But, I'm just Caesar's assistant on the show. Why would he consider giving me such an important position?"

"Um, I guess because I told him you went to Cordon Bleu in France. That you were a genius in the kitchen, just waiting to have your true talent discovered. Listen, Kiddo, I know it's cool being on TV, but in my opinion you *are* a wonderful chef and you're sort of wasting your potential with Caesar. Jordan has agreed to give you an audition. Are you up for it?"

Outside the rain had stopped and, like an omen, the sun was breaking through the parting clouds. She had nothing to lose by meeting Chef Jambon and learning what he meant by an audition. She ventured to ask, "Do you think your friend is willing to pay a fair amount? Even though he has a reputation, it is a startup after all. I really do make good money with Caesar."

After careful thought, he replied, "I have no idea of what he has in mind, but I'm guessing it is substantial. Jordan's interviewing some good chefs who aren't going to work for peanuts. You might beat them out because you have celebrity as well as talent. My guess is the pay will be fine. The big question is: are you game?"

They ducked out of the shop and headed to Roscoe's truck.