

DEEP IN TIME



Karen Chalfant



Go Deep In Time with Rebecca Brousseau, a Haunted History Tour Guide in New Orleans, who in the attic of her ancestral plantation home finds an 1848 painting of a man named Maddox Devroe, and realizes it's a man she recognizes, a man she had seen only days before during one of her Haunted History Tours.

Watch her go from a life of ease with a job she loves and a relationship with a successful attorney, to a life of responsibility and huge surprises when her beloved aunt dies, only to face choices she never dreamed of facing when she meets Maddox Devroe in person.

CHAPTER 1

Rebecca pulled her long, burgundy cashmere sweater tighter around her slim shoulders and walked briskly down the familiar streets of the French Quarter.

The sun had set and it had gotten noticeably cooler since she had conducted her last haunted tour at 8:00 p.m. It was mid-October and she loved the cooler weather, greatly looked forward to it in fact. She just didn't want to be in it when it rained. She loved the rain too and thoroughly enjoyed a good thunderstorm but did not like the two together.

Five nights a week for over six years now she had led two tours of people down the dark paths of the city, visiting sights of documented haunting, ghosts and spirits where it is said that unbelievable events took place in times long past; as well as bringing them past such places as Jean Lafitte's Blacksmith Shop, actually a small, historical bar.

Rebecca was a God fearing person who had never personally seen a ghost, spirit, or apparition and doubted she ever would, but she loved the history and electricity of her city and thoroughly enjoyed leading tourists through the thrill of the past and the uncertain.

Even through the darkness that blanketed the city she had no trouble seeing her way. New Orleans was a city that never slept and with the activity of the businesses and the soft glow of the street lights she never worried about losing her direction; like she would anyway. She had lived in its seductive boundaries all of her life, just as her father and mother – God rest their souls, her father's sister – her Aunt Emma, and five generations of their

family before them. She could walk the streets blindfolded and not lose her way and she knew it.

She walked passed restaurants and clubs, taverns and shops, the lively music and smells of good cuisine greeting her, just as it did every night. She loved the night time and never felt alone on her walks home. The streets were never empty. She didn't own a vehicle and only took the streetcar when necessary. That was one of many reasons she loved her job so much. She was out at night and could walk home and enjoy the liveliness of the city. Sometimes her boyfriend, Alex, would meet her for coffee then walk her home but most nights she was alone, as she was this night.

As she entered Jackson Square and walked beneath the softness of the street lights, a dark, familiar figure came into sight. He sat on a bench, hands jammed firmly into the pockets of his ragged coat for warmth. His dark green ski cap was pulled down tightly over his ears allowing only bits of long, ragged dark hair to hang out. His long dark beard hung wildly down to his chest, hiding a great deal of his face. The only thing that stood out was his sparkling hazel eyes. Rebecca wondered what he'd look like washed up and clean shaven but dismissed the thought almost as quickly as it came. That would never happen. As she approached he noticed her and smiled.

"Hello, Miss Becka," he said through teeth in amazingly good condition for a homeless man.

"Hello, Jim. How are you tonight?"

"Good, Miss Becka. I'm good." Jim was the only one who called her Becka. She never liked it but for some reason when he said it, it didn't bother her.

Rebecca looked at him with her usual concern. Although she knew no details of Jim's life, she was aware of his situation and in considering this, his sunny disposition never ceased to amaze her.

"Have you eaten today, Jim?"

"Yes, Miss Becka. I ate. I ate some chicken this mornin'."

"That's good, but here, I have something for you." Rebecca pulled a small paper bag from her sweater pocket and handed it to him. He opened the bag and smiled broadly. As she looked at him Rebecca would have bet that under better circumstances Jim would actually be a handsome man.

"Sweet bread... Thank you, Miss Becka! Thank you!"

"It's ok. I stop there often. It's on my way home." That's what she always told him and wouldn't dream of telling him the truth, that she actually walked a block out of her way to get the bread for him. "I'll see you later, Jim."

"Good-night, Miss Becka. Thank you!"

Rebecca continued the walk to her Pontalba Building apartment, one of two, four-story red brick structures on either side of Jackson Square; the Square itself lying in the heart of the French Quarter. The buildings had been constructed in the 1840's by the Baroness Micaela Pontalba who put her European touch on them, including cast iron work on the balconies. On the first floor of each building were commercial shops with the top three floors all apartments, where modern renovations had been added over the years. Rebecca loved the old buildings and felt their historical significance was as deeply ingrained in her as the city itself. She often wondered about the people who long ago lived in the city and lived in these old buildings. She was fortunate to be living there. The apartments were in high demand.

She went into the building and as always bypassed the elevator; choosing instead to take the winding stairs to her fourth floor apartment. She was beginning to feel tired, it had been a long day, but she took the stairs anyway. With exception to the sound of her boot heels on the hard stairway surface it was quiet, almost too quiet - and suddenly very cool. She pulled her sweater tighter and continued her climb.

When she got to her apartment the phone was ringing. She quickly unlocked the door, secured it behind her, and flipped on the light, nearly tripping over her cat in the process. She scolded him lightly but could never be mad at him. She had found him on her way home one night a couple of years back; his weak cries had led her to where she found him, a little stray black kitten with a white tummy, alone and hungry, crouched in a corner by a restaurant she was passing. She had never wanted a pet but he came right to her, rubbing on her legs like a long lost friend. He took her heart right away, so picking him up she brought him home, gave him a bath and a can of tuna and he had been her faithful companion ever since. Now she didn't know what she'd do without him.

When she finally picked up the phone she knew who it was, who it always was at this time of night.

"Hey, Alex."

"Hey, Baby. Did you just get home?"

"Yeah, just walked in and just about killed myself trying to get to the phone. Sebastian tried to trip me again."

"He just loves you and wants to greet you."

"Yeah, I know. He can love me without tripping me though," she said as she reached down to rub his soft head. Sebastian purred softly in appreciation.

“Now what kind of love is that?”

“Funny... it’s really your fault you know. You barely give me enough time to get in the door when you call. You miss me when you’re not with me or what?” she teased.

“You know I do. How was your walk home?”

“Good, a little chilly. I saw Jim on the way into the Square.”

“Good ole Jim. Will that guy ever get a job?” Alex knew Jim and often wondered if he was really as destitute as he wanted everyone to believe.

“Don’t count on it. I think he thinks his job is security for the Square.”

“Some security, he never moves from the bench. The cops can’t even get him to move with a threat of arrest. I think the only time it worked was when they threatened to hose him down.”

“Very funny, he moves. Sometimes he’s nowhere to be seen.”

“Did you feed him again?”

“Just a sweet bread from the bakery.”

“You’re such a softy but that’s why I love you.”

“I love you more.”

“Then prove it. Go to dinner with me.”

“Oh, Alex, I’m really tired. Can we go tomorrow? Or ...can you pick up some Chinese food and bring it over here?”

“Chinese, are you sure? You *are* in New Orleans you know.”

“Yes, I know. Thank you for the reminder.” Alex was such a Smart-Alec sometimes. She could just see his broad smile on the other end.

“Chinese it is then...anything for my lady. See you in about forty-five minutes.”

“Not a minute longer, I’m starved!”

“Yes, Madame...”

Rebecca hung up the phone then went to take a quick shower and change clothes. She had thought he would be working late with a client tonight on a land settlement and didn't think to ask him about that. Oh well, attorney's schedules were never set, especially his. She had learned that. He worked in family law as well, and was often sought out to help with child custodies and divorces. Court dates often got changed for one reason or another. Over time she had gotten used to it.

She went into the bedroom and opened her closet to pull out fresh clothes. It was late so she chose her favorite navy blue sweater which was loose and comfortable and had matching stretch pants. Suddenly she felt a chill that went right to her bones and Sebastian, who had followed her in and was at her feet, fled the room. *Silly cat*. His bursts of energy hit at the strangest moments sometimes.

She went to check if she had left the air conditioning on. A quick look at the thermostat told her she hadn't. It was much too chilly for the air to be on anyway. *What's with this building today?* She looked at the clock on her nightstand and knew Alex would be there soon, so pushing it out of her mind she went to the shower.

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Arriving on time, Alex let himself in with his own key. Sebastian greeted him warmly, rubbing against his legs enthusiastically. Knowing that the friendly feline would be leaving a souvenir of dark hair on his clothing,

Alex had deliberately worn black pants. He leaned down and rubbed the soft ears. “And hello to you, Sebastian.”

Rebecca walked out of her room and smiled. Even after all the time they’d been dating it never ceased to amaze her how at ease she was with him and how much she enjoyed his company, just the way it was the first time she saw him in her favorite coffee shop in the French Quarter. But, he in fact had noticed her first. Walking in, briefcase in hand, he took in the attractive young girl with light freckles and waist long blond hair, sitting alone at a corner table, engrossed in the newspaper, sipping her coffee. He ordered his own and still intrigued walked over to her. His shadow hit the table causing her to look up. Her gasp was audible, causing his broad smile to get even broader.

“May I sit down?” she heard him ask.

“Uh, yes, yes of course!” She had quickly folded the newspaper, putting it out of the way, making room for the stranger; a gesture totally out of her nature. She met strangers every day but never invited them to sit with her.

“I’m Alex Masterson,” he quickly told her, extending his hand.

“Rebecca Brousseau.” Her eyes never left his as she took his hand in hers. His handshake was warm and firm, but not too firm, making her instantly at ease with him. And after that brief introduction they had talked for what seemed hours and then met for dinner that night.

While not exceedingly handsome he was no doubt good looking and his charm knew no bounds. Polite, sociable and well educated he was a great conversationalist. Something she learned about him that first day and enjoyed.

That had been nearly two years ago and now here they were. And she loved Alex. He was a wonderful man - with only one major flaw. He wasn't interested in marriage. Something she tried not to think about.

She kissed him affectionately and took the bag of Chinese food to carry it to her large, oak coffee table where they always sat on comfortable pillows and ate.

"This smells so good! I'm starved!"

Alex went to the kitchen to get drinks then joined her on the tables opposite side.

"How's Aunt Emma?" he soon asked. Rebecca knew he would. Ever since the doctor had given them the dreaded news, lung cancer, Alex had done everything he could to help, including coming at the elderly ladies bid to help with her final Will, nothing difficult. She was leaving the plantation and everything she owned to Rebecca, her only living relative. Still a working sugar cane plantation, one of the very few in the area, Alex had learned upon getting a total of assets together for Emma Brousseau that it's worth had far exceeded what he had expected. Rebecca hadn't seemed overly surprised. She was too full of dread at the thought of losing her aunt – the woman who had loved her, cared for her, and raised her as her own after her parents had died; a woman, with cancer, who had never smoked a day in her life. Rebecca knew that God had a purpose in everything but it just wasn't fair.

"As well as can be expected," she said grabbing an egg roll. "I'll be going over there tomorrow to sit with her and relieve the nurse for a bit. I don't have to work."

"You don't have to work on a Saturday?"

“I asked to switch days. They’ve been very understanding since they found out about Aunt Emma’s illness.”

“Do you want me to come later?”

“Sure, if you’d like. If it’s not too chilly maybe we can take her out onto the veranda for lunch – if she’s feeling up to it. Aunt Emma would like that, especially if you’re there. She adores you.”

“You know I’ll help any way I can.”

“I know, Alex, and *I* adore you for that. Right now she just wants our company.”

“...which I am happy to supply.”

They sat eating in silence for a while. Rebecca liked that they didn’t feel like they constantly had to be talking, that they could just enjoy being together. Sebastian paced back and forth over Rebecca’s lap, wanting shrimp out of the fried rice. She finally relented and gave him one. He munched on it happily.

“Hey, did the stairway seem odd to you when you came up?”

“Odd how?” he said sitting back with a full stomach.

“Cool, quiet, eerie.”

“No, not really. No more than usual. Why?”

“Because when I got home it just felt *odd*. Actually so did my bedroom. I even checked to make sure the air conditioning wasn’t on.”

“The weather’s changing and it’s late,” he reminded her.

“I know. It was different though. Oh well, I’m being ridiculous. We did just have a cool front come in.”

“Yeah, and the stairway is drafty. This is a very old building you know. Just enjoy the cool weather while it lasts.”

“You’re right,” she said trying to suppress a yawn.

“You’re tired. I’ll help you clean up.”

He got up and grabbed empty cartons. She grabbed the glasses and they headed to her small but well organized kitchen.

“I hate to say it, Alex but I think I’m going to have to cut this evening short. It’s been a long day.”

“Are you sure? I haven’t been here long. We could just watch a little TV first. You can fall asleep on me if you want. I don’t mind.”

“No, maybe this weekend.”

“All right, you’re such a party pooper sometimes,” he said trying to cover his disappointment.

“Thank you. That’s what I do best, poop parties, especially yours when I’m tired.”

He wrapped his arms around her shoulders from behind as she stood at the sink, giving her a friendly squeeze, “Yeah, I know.”

They walked to the door and he kissed her good-night, holding her tight in the process, “I love you, Rebecca Brousseau. I’ll see you tomorrow...”



About the Author: Karen Chalfant

Christian, wife, mother, grandmother and employee of the State of Texas, Karen loves to read and write is also the author of *Winter's Promise*, *Shattered Loyalties*, *Deep In Time* and *The Narrow Way: Seeking God Through Poetry*

Life has been a journey with many ups and downs but she firmly sticks to the moto Love God,

Live Life

and Write It All Down....

