

ALL SIGNS POINT TO MURDER

by Connie Di Marco

EXCERPT

A young woman in her early twenties peeked through the curtain and hesitated.

“Hi, Shandra,” I smiled. “Please, have a seat.”

The girl looked terrified and sat with her hands clutched around her purse. She was dressed in overalls and a T-shirt with a scarf wrapped around her curly brown hair. She gave me her birth information and even the time. I quickly sketched out her chart.

“It looks like your progressed Moon is approaching your natal Ascendant.” I looked up. “Are you planning to get married? Or perhaps making a big emotional commitment, moving in with your boyfriend?”

“Yes,” she breathed. “That’s amazing you could tell that. We’re supposed to be getting married in a month. The wedding invitations have been sent out already.” Her voice quavered.

“I see. Well, that’s exactly what the progressed Moon hitting the Ascendant signifies in a chart, particularly a woman’s chart. But you’re having second thoughts aren’t you?”

She nodded but offered no further information.

I took a deep breath and dove in. “In your natal chart there’s a difficult aspect, one that has colored your early years, your childhood. So, undoubtedly, your fears are connected with this placement.” Shandra stared but did not acknowledge my statement. I knew I was on the right track.

I turned the pad of paper towards her. “You see, your Sun is near the fourth house cusp, the nadir of your chart and it’s next to Saturn. Opposing that conjunction is Neptune, up here near the tenth house cusp, the Midheaven. It’s just half a degree away from that axis – the nadir and the Midheaven of your chart. This axis relates to parental influences in your life, and since Saturn conjuncts your Sun, I’d say this pertains more to your father than your mother. You’ve suffered a great deal in your life because of the lack of a father figure, but you’ve been very strong. The Saturn conjunction has given you strength and you’ve been able to compensate.”

“Yes. That’s true.”

“Did he abandon you or your mother? Did he disappear in some fashion? Maybe even close to the time you were born?”

Shandra nodded. “He . . . he drowned in an accident when my mother was pregnant with me. Just before I was born. It took them a long time to find his body. It was terrible for my mother.” Her face crumpled and she started to quietly cry. I passed her the box of tissues. Neptune, I thought, the ruler of watery places. How terrible and how apt.

“I’m sorry. I haven’t thought about this for a long time.”

“And your mother raised you alone?”

“My Mom and I are very close.” Shandra blew her nose and wiped her eyes. “I’m really sorry. I didn’t mean to come here and blubber.”

“It’s okay. We all blubber sometimes. Even me . . . especially me,” I smiled.

Shandra laughed nervously.

“Let’s get back to the wedding invitations. Do you love him?”

“Yes. Very much.”

“And he of course loves you.”

“Yes,” she smiled shyly.

“Well, let’s look at his birth information. Even if you don’t have all the information now, you can always call me later with it. We can set up a very quick chart for your boyfriend and see if there are any real problems.” She gave me his birth date and I quickly sketched out his approximate chart.

“My Mom really wants to see us get married. I think she’s afraid I’ll be alone and won’t have anyone to look after me.”

I thought of my grandmother. This all sounded very familiar. “I can understand that. So what are you afraid of?”

She stared at me silently. I let the silence lag, and then asked her softly, “You’re afraid if you marry him, he’ll die. If you invest in this, you’ll be left like your mother?”

“Yeeees.” At this, Shandra burst into tears again. I passed her the tissues once more and handed her a glass of water.

“Don’t feel bad about crying. Crying’s great, it gets all the demons out into the light of day.”

“It sounds so stupid when you say it like that, but I guess that’s why I’m afraid.”

“Okay, now look at this.” I pointed to the monitor. “Here’s the solar chart of your boyfriend. What’s his name?”

“Rick”

“Okay. Rick seems like a pretty well-balanced guy. There are many many good connections between your charts. He balances you out very well. You’re complementary to each other in lots of ways. With the information I have, I don’t see anything negative here. It’s very positive. What does your mother have to say about this wedding?”

“Oh, she’s got her heart set on it, that’s why I’ve been so upset. I’ve been thinking of calling it off. I’ve been so scared and I didn’t want to hurt her or hurt Rick. I’ve backed out twice before, and this time, he says he can’t do it anymore. He loves me, but he says if I don’t want to marry him, he just has to go away.”

“Well, the decision is yours of course. No one should force you to do anything you don’t want to do.” I waited to see her reaction.

“What do you think I should do?”

I have such a hard time biting my tongue. “I really can’t tell you what to do. But I can give you some good advice. I think this is a very positive relationship. You’re good for each other and frankly, with his Saturn return coming up this year and your Moon progressing to your Ascendant, this is the right time. The Saturn return is considered ‘the astrological coming of age.’ Usually happens sometime between the ages of twenty-eight to thirty. That’s the time we are most free to make decisions that will affect our path for the next twenty-eight or so years. It’s a terribly significant time. And your progressed Moon on your Ascendant . . . well, you may not be fully aware as yet . . . but you’ve already made the commitment.”

Shandra was quiet.

“I also think it would help you to see a therapist for a little while, to sort out your father’s death and separate that event from your current life. I can give you a few names of good psychologists, if you like.” I thought about my therapist, Paula. Maybe I should give her a call soon myself, but it wouldn’t do to recommend her to an astrology client. I’d hate to bump into one of my clients in a waiting room. They’d wonder why astrology didn’t answer all my questions and doubts. Astrology can offer a lot of support, but it’s still no substitute for dredging through your own, very illogical emotions.

“Now that it’s on the front burner this would be an excellent time. There’s no need for you to carry these old wounds and fears into a very promising future.”

“Maybe I should give that a try. I’ve been so stuck and so scared to make a move, but I’m really terrified I could lose Rick.”

“That’s it, my dear. I’m afraid our time is up.”

“Oh, thank you. I can’t thank you enough.” She mumbled. “Can I come back and see you again?”

“I’m not always here, but let me give you one of my cards if you need to see me, okay?”

Shandra took my card and stared at it. She looked up at me. “You’re . . .”

I didn’t respond. I knew what was coming next and I dreaded it.

“You’re the astrologer who rescued that woman from the crazy religious cult, aren’t you?”

I sighed. I had hoped all the notoriety from months ago had been forgotten. I took a deep breath and smiled, “That’s me, all right.”

“You’re famous!” Shandra’s eyes grew wider.

I shook my head. “No, really, I’m not. It’s just that they printed my name in the paper.”

“Ohmigod, I had no idea!”

“Well, please don’t hold it against me,” I laughed.

“Wait till I tell my friends that I had a reading with Julia Bonatti.”

I groaned inwardly. The events of last winter still haunted me. I don’t like the idea of being in the glare of any kind of publicity, but when my client’s sister was lured into a religious cult that had no good intentions, I really had no choice.

Shandra tucked my card into a pocket of her overalls. “Thank you so much!” She stepped through the curtain. Through the gap, I could see her two girlfriends waiting anxiously for her. One reached over and gave her a hug as they exited to the street.

I heaved a sigh. I’ve come to the conclusion it’s a universal law. We are constantly confronted with the very issues we have trouble dealing with in our own lives. If Shandra could overcome her fears, then maybe there was hope for me too.

I managed to get through five more readings in my cramped little space, one elderly woman worried about her grandson, a businessman concerned about a move, a housewife considering full-time work, a single woman worried about marriage, and a professional gambler asking about amulets

to help his luck. Thankfully, no one else recognized me or my name. Finally, I heard the bell on the closing door ring for the last time.

I peeked out. "Is that it?"

"Yes. Thank heavens. I'm beat!" Cheryl turned the lock on the front door, and flipped over the sign to read CLOSED. "If I have to smell any more patchouli, I'm gonna throw up all over my shoes. Want to get some Chinese? I need to inhale something totally different before I scream."

"Sure. I'm starving. Where do you want to go?"

"Let's leave the cars. Did you park in the back?"

"No. My car's at Gloria's. I walked over."

"Let's go to that dim sum place up the block."

"The Twin Dragons? Okay." I slipped on my jacket and grabbed my purse and the new books.

"Would you check in the back and make sure everyone's gone and the door is locked?"

I dropped my purse and books on the counter and stepped into the back room. I couldn't find the light switch but felt my way past stacked boxes to the door. A small amount of light from the alley filtered through the dusty window. I heard breathing and the skin on my arms tingled. I wasn't alone in the back room. A shadow moved across the light source from the front of the shop. Powerful hands grabbed my shoulders. My breath caught in my throat.

"You!" I heard Zora's raspy voice.

My heart was thudding wildly. I took a deep breath. "I thought everyone was gone."

Zora's powerful grip on my shoulders tightened. "Babe," she rasped at me in the half dark, "You don't know this yet, but you're in danger."

I froze. "What?"

Pressing her finger into my chest, she barked, "Don't be a do-gooder. Keep your nose out of other people's business, okay?"

She flung the back door open and stepped out into the alleyway. I watched her bulky form cross the tiny parking lot, her shawls flying in the breeze.

Cheryl appeared in the doorway behind me. "Was that Zora? What did she say?"

"Nothing. Don't worry about it." I took a deep breath. "She scares the hell out of me."