

**FLIRTING**  
with the **MOON**

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## **Flirting with The Moon**

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# Prologue

**D**etectives and uniformed police officers filed into the crime incident room and took their seats.

I glanced over my shoulder at the gruesome gallery of victims. Eleven young people, each murdered and left in a public place, their bodies mutilated beyond recognition. Beside this, was a projector screen showing a map of LA. Next to that a whiteboard covered in newspaper clippings. A front-page headline of the *LA Times* blared: "Is Detective Joe Dean Flirting with The Moon?" The press and I shared a mutual loathing. And it was they who had coined the phrase, The Moon, due to the killer's penchant for striking on the first night of the new moon.

My partner, Detective Jacqueline Sanchez, handed out copies of the latest profile report.

Being old-school, I had mixed feelings regarding the presence of Doctor Charles Dudley, aka Chuck, our in-house FBI profiler. The fact that he looked like a freshman didn't help but I figured at least he'd be able to field some of the questions.

When everyone was present I began. 'As we know, tonight is the start of the new moon.' On the overhead projector, I drew a circle on the map, its

diameter covering East LA to Santa Monica, North Hollywood to Inglewood. All the killings had occurred within this relatively small area, and all over the last eleven months.

A detective at the back of the room thrust his hand in the air.

‘But it’s New Year’s Eve and we’ve got just about every cop this side of Texas in town, surely—’

Chuck stepped forward and stood beside me. ‘We can’t assume that he won’t strike. The pattern is unlikely to change. If anything I believe the added risk will spur the killer on.’

‘We have to be extra vigilant.’ I interjected. ‘Look for anything out of the ordinary.’

You all have your assigned areas; it’s going to be a wild night.’

I placed a second slide on top of the one already on the projector lens. Sanchez had marked the position of the previous murder scenes. ‘According to the profile it’s unlikely that the killer will return to any of these spots, but we also can’t rule it out. Going by...shall we say his past creativity, if a killing does take place tonight, it’ll be staged in a way that’ll be completely different to the others. Are there any questions?’

‘Yes.’ A burly, balding detective with the face of a prize-fighter lumbered to his feet. ‘Can whoever gets to nail this bastard have some time off?’

I knew where he was coming from. Unshaven, red puffy eyes, shirt hanging out the back of his pants, were all signs that he too had been working around the clock. The rest of us didn’t look any better.

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‘How’s a week in Vegas sound for the cop who catches The Moon?’

Sanchez raised a questioning eyebrow.

I needed to solve the case and put this psychopath behind bars. I needed to get my life back. At this point I’d promise anything to achieve this.

‘Woo hoo!’ the detective cried. ‘Vegas here I come!’

The room erupted with applause.

After the briefing, Sanchez and I made our way to the communications room.

‘I’m sure the LAPD won’t be springing for no trips to Vegas, Joe.’

‘I know, but I will, and gladly!’ I stopped mid-stride as if I’d had a sudden thought. ‘I’ll catch you up, just got to get something from my office.’

The little crease between Sanchez’s eyes, the clamping of her lips and the subtle shake of her head told me she knew exactly where I was going.

‘It’s okay, I’ll just be a minute.’

Grateful that my office had no windows, I closed the door behind me, strode to my desk and pulled out a bottle of Jack Daniels from the bottom drawer. Once you’ve descended into the gutter of addiction one of the first things you lose is a need for ceremony. I twisted off the bottle top and gulped down bourbon like a marathon runner at the last water stop.

There was a knock and before I could answer, Sanchez was poking her head around the door.

I fumbled the bottle back into the drawer. ‘What is it?’ I snapped.

She gave me her usual knowing look. ‘You got visitors.’

‘What? Who?’ I rustled among the piles of papers on the desk, found what I was looking for and scooped a mint into my mouth.

Sanchez opened the door fully and stepped aside. My wife swept into the room carrying Johnny, our three-year-old son.

‘Kathy?’

‘Seeing as you haven’t been home since God knows when I thought I’d catch you here. I reckoned at least here we’d be able to talk while you were sober. She looked at my mouth working on the mint. ‘I see I was wrong.’

Ignoring her I reached out for my son. ‘Hey Sport.’

Johnny frowned and pulled away as if he didn’t know me.

‘It’s okay.’ Kathy comforted him. ‘Go with Auntie Jacky. I won’t be long.’

Sanchez quietly took Johnny from his mother’s arms and left the room.

Kathy closed the door behind her.

‘What’s going on?’

‘What’s going on?’ She threw back her head and laughed. ‘You’re the big-shot detective, surely *you* can figure it out!’

I offered a searching shrug but a feeling of dread was cooling the hot liquor in my belly.

‘Okay, I’ll spell it out for you and I’ll keep it short because I’m sure you’re just dying for another drink.’

Part of me already knew what she was going to say, but even so when she said the words they pierced my guts like a knife.

‘It’s over Joe, I’m leaving you.’

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The effects of the bourbon were now completely gone and I began to shake. 'Seriously? You're telling me this here, now? On tonight of all nights?'

'And there we have it...Joe Dean the victim. How could *I* possibly do this to *you*? Especially when you've been working *so* hard. What a *heartless* bitch I am!'

'Not now, Kathy, please.' I glanced at the desk drawer longing for the comfort and escape that lay inside. 'You know what's been happening with the case and the pressure I've been under—'

'I don't know anything. You don't talk to me. I only learn what's happening from what I see on the news.'

'That's not true. Let's get tonight over with. Then we can talk?'

'When was the last time we had a conversation? When was the last time you spent any time with your son?' Her voice rose with each word until she was screaming.

'Shhh...keep it down.' I rushed to the door as if doing so would dampen the sound from the rest of the building.

'I just came to tell you that it's over. You can pick up your things from the house but you won't be staying. I've been a single parent for a long time now, may as well make it official. We *don't* need you anymore!'

'You can't just kick me out of my home and stop me from seeing my son.' Now I was yelling.

She repeated that humourless laugh. It was as ugly as the scorn on her face. 'Your home? *This* is your home right here, always has been, and as for

your son, ha! He doesn't even know *who* you are!' She stormed out of the room.

I should've followed her, should've begged her to reconsider and promised to change. I should've fought to save my marriage. But I didn't. Instead I closed the door behind her, rushed to my desk and dived through the escape hatch.

Sanchez sat at one of the control panels in the communications room wearing headphones and a mike. She didn't look up as I entered.

There were two walls filled with monitors, each had a close-up view of a specific area in the city. Uniformed officers worked in front of consoles making the room look like NASA mission control.

I took the vacant seat next to Sanchez and put on a matching headset. Static and short radio bursts from the cruisers and mobile units on the streets filled my head. On one of the monitors there was a view of Hollywood Boulevard. 'Unit Five do you read me?' I said into the mouthpiece.

'Loud and clear.'

I watched as The Roosevelt Hotel appeared to his right, while the ever-present crowd from Grauman's Chinese Theatre spilled onto the road on his left. My God what an impossible task this was going to be.

On another monitor, Santa Monica Boulevard and the entrance to the pier were also heaving, and it was only eight-thirty. 'Unit Nine, do you read me?'

'Copy that.'

I didn't need to ask them how things were going; the monitors showed me exactly what they were



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seeing. I felt useless here; I wanted to be out on the streets, I wanted to catch this bastard myself and nail him up from the nearest wall.

By eleven-thirty the streets of LA were one big open-air party. I tried to remember the last time I had let loose and enjoyed myself. Being drunk and enjoying yourself are two completely different things—on the former I was an expert, the latter a novice.

Basically all we had done for the last three-and-a-half-hours was watch the monitors, listen to radio transmissions and, in our minds, try to piece together the jigsaw that The Moon had created. When the City Hall clock struck midnight I was damn right miserable.

‘Happy New Year!’ one of the young female cops cried out, snapping me out of my stupor.

The others rose from their seats and shook hands, slapped each other on the back and hugged. I stayed put but Sanchez leant across and wrapped her arms around me. ‘Make a resolution, Joe,’ she whispered in my ear.

‘Already have.’

‘I don’t mean catching The Moon.’

I knew exactly which way the conversation was heading. I turned back to my console and was about to put on my headset when Sanchez grabbed my arm.

‘I’m talking about the drinking.’

‘I know you are. I’m okay, it’s under control.’

‘Is it?’ Those arching eyebrows again, speaking a language all of their own. ‘So if you knew of a

detective who was drinking while on duty would you say it's okay?'

'I said I'm okay, goddamn it!' I'd growled at her and instantly regretted it. Sanchez was tough, not the kind of woman who'd back down from a male outburst.

'Stop drinking, sort things out with Kathy and spend some time with Johnny, no matter what the outcome of tonight.'

Well that was easy because in my mind that's exactly what I'd decided to do. 'Okay, I promise!' It might have come out as a mutter but it was a promise I desperately wanted to keep.

Over the next hour the festivities on the streets continued but were noticeably thinning out.

'Let's pray for a miracle, Joe.' Sanchez's tone was heartfelt. I suspected she still attended Catholic services but she rarely spoke of her private life.

As we watched the monitors gradually grow quiet, the churning in my stomach was telling me it was too quiet.

'You hungry?' Sanchez said.

I realised I was and nodded.

'Mexican?' She was already rising to her feet.

'Speedy's still open?'

'Yep, all night.'

Sanchez didn't need to ask me for my order. We ate takeaway from Speedy's a lot. She was more adventurous than me—she liked to try different dishes—mine was always the same, burritos and chilli. 'Anyone else want Mexican?' she yelled turning to the rest of the crew.

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Her question was met by a few grunts and headshakes.

'I need some fresh air anyway.' She strolled from the room.

Most of the monitors were now showing street cleaners going about their work and a handful of drunken revellers here and there reluctant for the party to end. There had been the usual arrests but nothing serious, which was good but still my stomach churned and the hunger wasn't helping. Sanchez had been gone a while. I checked my watch—3.00 am. I swung around to the room. 'Anyone see Sanchez come back?' I asked loud enough for everyone to hear.

There was a chorus of 'Nopes'.

I tried her cell phone. It rang until her message bank clicked on: 'This is Detective Jacqueline Sanchez of the LAPD. Leave a message. I'll get back to you.'

Speedy's could've been busy, but at three o'clock in the morning? Fresh air seemed like a good idea for me too. I'd sat at that console playing Big Brother all night. 'If anyone needs me I've got my cell.' I grabbed my jacket, made a detour to my office and downed a conservative estimate of two doubles—which in reality was probably more like four—then headed out of the building.

Speedy's was only a block away from The Parker Center off East 1st Street. It was the last establishment at the far end of a narrow alley that hosted a few other small businesses: a Chinese restaurant, a tattoo

parlour and a gym. The light from Speedy's window barely illuminated the way, it was the only place still open. The rest of the storefronts were quiet and dark. The little, middle-aged hombre with the biggest smile this side of Tijuana was cleaning the counter tops.

'Hey Detective José,' he said with a tired grin when I leaned in through the door. 'You catch el bastardo?'

'No, not yet.'

'So you steel hungry?'

As soon as he said that I knew. In fact, if I'm honest, I'd known the last time I'd checked my watch back at headquarters.

I must've suddenly looked ill because Speedy stopped cleaning and rushed to my side. 'What's wrong, Mr Dean?'

'When was Detective Sanchez here?'

'About an hour ago. She buy usual burrito with chilli for you and special New Year rice for her.'

I don't remember leaving Speedy's and heading back to The Parker; I don't know if I ran or walked. When I entered the lobby, the duty officer called me over. 'It just arrived, sir. I was about to call up to you.' He handed me a Speedy's takeaway carton.

I looked down at the unopened box in my hand and I could feel its warmth.

'Everything all right, sir?'

'Who brought this in?'

'A young delivery guy.'

'Speedy doesn't deliver. No sign of Detective Sanchez?'

'Haven't seen her since she left earlier, sir.'

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I went straight to my office, closed the door and placed the carton on my desk. ‘Sonofabitch.’ I paced the room, taking shots of bourbon, stealing glances at the carton, still pacing, pacing. In a matter of minutes the bottle was empty. I tossed it into the waste paper bin then suddenly felt the need to busy myself. I checked my watch but didn’t see the time. I glanced along the files on my shelves but didn’t see a single one. I wanted to do anything but look inside that carton. I opened the bottom drawer of my filing cabinet, knelt on the floor and reached into the back to where my stash was hidden. I was a prepared alcoholic.

When I finally sat at my desk with the now half-empty bottle of Jack Daniels, my life had changed forever. Detective Joseph Dean of the LAPD was no more. Joe Dean, husband and father was no more.

I slammed down the bottle, grabbed the carton, opened it and looked inside.



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