

A movie poster for the film 'Die or Make Die'. The background is a dark, high-contrast photograph of a man in a black hooded jacket holding a large cigar in his mouth. In the foreground, a woman with long dark hair is holding a handgun, looking off to the side with a serious expression. The title 'DIE OR MAKE DIE' is printed at the bottom in large, bold, red and white letters.

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EDNA QUAMMIE

**DIE OR  
MAKE DIE**

# CHAPTER 1

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## The Painting

Lauren had gone to the basement to check the washing machine. It had almost finished its load. Looking for something to do while she waited for the machine to switch off, she opened the glass doors of an old, seldom used bookcase of her husbands, which stood in a corner, to see if there was anything of interest. At the back of the central shelf she found a square wrapped package. Turning the package over she found a name and an address. It read, 'For Dr. Buechel, The Orthopedic Hospital'.

She wondered why it had never been delivered. Perhaps the plan had been to hand deliver it, but Al, her late husband, had never got around to doing so. Maybe the address was inadequate and he had meant to send it later, but then it had been lost and forgotten about in the turmoil of the nuclear exchange a couple of years ago.

Those had been chaotic times when the Saudis had smuggled several nuclear devices into the US, which they had successfully exploded in New York, Dallas, and Miami. There was still a fear that there were some unexploded devices hidden somewhere, waiting to be triggered by a Jihadist. In retaliation, the US, misled, intentionally or otherwise, by their own Intelligence Agencies, had obliterated Iran, not Saudi Arabia. It had not been hard to convince the President that Iran was the aggressor, given the constant belligerence and threats from the foolish Mullahs who ran that country. In the nuclear nightmare which followed, many of Iran's largest cities had been destroyed.

Canada, having been made essentially irrelevant on the world stage

by successive Liberal government policies, by destroying the energy sector by preventing pipelines, and blocking the development of any significant ports, escaped the nuclear exchange. But nonetheless, the almost collapse of the food chain, caused by the closure of the US / Canadian border had led to shortages, especially of food, and riots across Canada, mainly in the major cities like Vancouver, Montreal, and Toronto.

Lauren had been out of the country at that time, but her husband, Al Campbell, had managed to secure enough food for himself, their little child, and the live-in amah. The rioting in Toronto had been essentially community based and had never reached the quiet enclave where their house stood. In consequence, he never needed to use the weapons she had stored in her gun safes hidden around the house. Just thinking of those times evoked in Lauren a sudden overwhelming sense of loss.

Al, her husband, was gone. A man who had waited patiently and unquestioningly for her. He was the only other man she had ever cared for. He had never replaced Carlos, the man she still dreamed of, dead at her hand all these years ago. Her heart still broke when she thought of Carlos, that bold bad man, who had rescued her from a life of misery, probably drug addiction and prostitution in the barrio of East L.A. where she had been born. The man who had shown her the world and given her everything, paying ultimately for her freedom with his death.

Since Al, the only other man she had loved, had died, the nightmares which she had had for years and had finally almost gone away, had come back. It was always the same. A badly wounded Carlos, sitting, leaning over a table, looking up at her.

“It is over! If I try to come with you we will be caught. I will be tortured and killed, and you also, after they have finished raping you. Kill me now and escape.” He put his Walther in her hand and pointed to the back of his head. “Do it now. We have had a good run. I will love you forever. Vaya con Dios.”

Recognizing finally that she had no choice, that he was right, that it was over, their luck had run out, she put the gun to the back of his head and fired. He fell forwards, face down on the table. Trembling with tears she put the barrel of the gun in her mouth, intending to follow him, hand in hand, into whatever future there was.

And then she would wake up, with a half scream, trembling. She was grateful that Campbell had never asked her about that recurring nightmare. When she married Campbell and had a child, that nightmare

had gradually retreated. But since Al had died, it had come back, as sharp, and bitter as ever.

Turning the package over in her hands, she thought sadly. "They are both gone. The only two men I have ever loved. What the hell do I do now? I guess I should deliver the package in Al's memory."

After emptying the laundry machine and filling the dryer, she went upstairs and sat at her computer. She Googled the Orthopedic Hospital and found that there was indeed a Dr. Buechel, an orthopedic surgeon who practiced there. She phoned his office, and a receptionist picked up.

"My name is Lauren Chen. My husband Al Campbell, has recently passed away and on going through his things I found a package addressed to Dr Buechel."

The receptionist checked her computer. "We never had an Al Campbell registered as a patient. Perhaps he was a friend or acquaintance of Dr. Buechel. The Doctor is in the office just now. Let me transfer you. Stay on the line."

A moment later a male voice with a heavy accent came on the line. Lauren thought it was Irish or Scottish.

"Dr Buechel here. A package from Al Campbell? Refresh my memory. Wasn't he the man whose son got into trouble in England? The boy who was with Jasmine Webster?"

"Yes. That was him."

"Do you know Rose, Jasmine's mother? I haven't seen her for some time. She needs a recheck of her knees."

"Rose has also passed on, but she left some stuff with us. Maybe the package with your name on it is from her."

"It's not a painting is it?"

Lauren squeezed the package, "well it is square and it seems to be wrapped in bubble wrap, so maybe."

"Then don't send it through the mail. These useless post office people can destroy anything. I'll come and pick it up. Where are you in the city?"

She gave him her address. He repeated it.

"Just off Avenue Road, south of Wilson. I live around there myself. I am going to be finished by about 5.30 today. Maybe I could come around and pick it up, if that is convenient."

"About 6 pm today? That would be fine."

"Perhaps you could give me your phone number in case something comes up and I am delayed."

She did so, and then went to play with her child for a little while. The amah was preparing some food for herself and the child. It was early and Lauren was not hungry. She had been letting things slide since Campbell's death and felt out of sorts. Then the iron discipline of physical exercise to which she had been introduced all these years ago by her lover took over, and she went to the basement gym and plugged in the elliptical trainer.

Mounting the machine, she started slowly then cranking it up began to run on it, as she had for years. Initially when she met her lover, she had not been at all interested in physical fitness. She had never known what attracted him to her. As a mixed race, probably mostly Japanese with some Latina, she had the round neotenous face many men like and almond eyes, but she was nothing special, no different from hundreds of other girls. And yet Carlos had seen something in her and had taken her out of the barrio and given her a new wildly exciting life.

That seemed kind of silly, Carlos in love. He never told her he loved her until that final moment. But what he did was enough for her. She was deeply and passionately in love with that slim, strong, violent man. She knew she always would be, in spite of his death years ago. She had found a passage in one of Campbell's poetry books, which described how she thought she felt.

'As ere beneath a waning moon was haunted by woman wailing for her demon lover.'

When he died, she took his professional name, Charlotte Corday. It was in her capacity as a high price assassin, who had been hired by Campbell's former wife Qian, that she had first met Campbell.

When Carlos took her to live with him all these years ago, he insisted she exercise with him, and she grew accustomed to it, the cardio, and the endless pushups and weightlifting, and when they could, the endless shooting practice, live and dry firing. Her mind drifted, and she felt the sorrow, the ineffable loss. And now the other man in her life was gone.

Al was gone. The man she liked and maybe even loved a bit. 'A good kind man, and a good father to their child.' The sorrow rose in her and she stopped momentarily, her head bent, as the memory of the day he died came back to her.

It had been a good day. Campbell had flown back from a project in New York where his company was helping with the reconstruction after the nuclear bomb explosion in Manhattan. She had met him at the door as always, alerted by the 'ding' from the pressure plate she had had built

into the top step. A gun safe was hidden behind a picture on the wall just beside the front door and she swung it open before glancing at the camera.

She always did that because she was afraid Al's former wife, Qian, would send an assassin to kill her some day, to break the chain of linking her to various violent events better kept hidden. Not only was there a wall safe beside the front door, but there was one in the basement and a gun, which she had kept in a compartment under the bed where she slept. She had removed that gun when the child began to crawl. Every time she opened a gun safe in anticipation of trouble, she thought, 'Someday I must sneak into Hong Kong and kill Qian. But she will be expecting that.'

The front door camera showed her husband, so she closed the safe door. Al knew of her fear of Qian, which he thought was overblown, but he never criticized her for her precautions. She lifted the front door locking bar, which again Al thought was a bit excessive, opened the deadbolt lock, and the door. They embraced and kissed.

"Journey OK?"

"Pretty good. These airport security measures are ridiculous and so time consuming. We shuffle shoeless through security because of one totally incompetent shoe bomber twenty years ago. You can't smuggle in a nuclear device in your shoes."

"Jobs for the boys I guess. Someone is making big money out of these security contracts. Maybe your ex wife."

"That's an idea. Maybe I should suggest it to her. What's for dinner?"

"Whatever you want Al. The amah has made some Filipina food as always, which Sheila likes, but I have trout fillets in the fridge. Maybe that with some arugula and a Greek salad. I knew you were coming back so I got some of the Dauphin potatoes from the store, as I know you like them."

"Sounds good. Sheila upstairs with the amah? I'll go see her then have a drink and decompress in the backyard for a few minutes."

"Take your time Al. No hurry."

He had done that, seen their child, who was happy to see him, then poured himself a scotch and soda and gone out to the backyard to wander around as he liked to do, to let the cares of the day wash away. Lauren busied herself with her domestic tasks. To her surprise, after they were married, she had found she quite liked it. Not that she actually did that much. The live-in amah really did most of it.

She had been puttering around, and supper was almost ready. Campbell must have been under a lot of stress as usually he did not spend very long

wandering around the backyard, drink in hand. Lauren had a sudden premonition of doom. She stopped what she was doing. There was absolute silence. In a couple of strides she went from the kitchen onto the back deck. She could not see him. Leaning over the deck railing on one side she saw nothing, but when she leaned over the other side, she saw him. He was face down in a flower bed.

He was absolutely still. She had seen death so often she knew he was gone. She ran down the steps to him and flipped him over. There was dirt in his open eyes. She brushed it out. His pupils were wide open. For a second she considered trying chest compressions, but the futility of that was clear. The second man she ever loved was gone. Carlos and now Al.

Her heart breaking, she leaned over and kissed his forehead and gently closed his eyes. She stayed with him a long moment, then got stiffly up, and went into the house to call 911.