

S  NINGS  
*in the* NIGHT



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JO PIAZZA O'MARA

  
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# Main Characters

Vincent Agosti and Maria Agosti  
(deceased)

Joe Agosti	Trina Agosti Lamazo	Angie Agosti Trayor	Lily Agosti Mazzona
<i>(son)</i>	<i>(daughter)</i>	<i>(daughter)</i>	<i>(daughter)</i>
Ellie Agosti	Sal Lamazo	Jake Trayor	Gino Mazzona
<i>(wife)</i>	<i>(husband)</i>	<i>(husband)</i>	<i>(husband)</i>
Anthony Agosti	Vinnie Lamazo	Kevin Trayor	Hope Mazzona
<i>(son)</i>	<i>(son)</i>	<i>(son)</i>	<i>(daughter)</i>
Sammy Agosti		Mia Trayor	Ricky Brando
<i>(son)</i>		<i>(daughter)</i>	<i>(son-in-law)</i>
Kerri Agosti		Leah Trayor	
<i>(daughter-in-law)</i>		<i>(daughter)</i>	
		Cindy Trayor	
		<i>(daughter-in-law)</i>	
		Emma Trayor	
		<i>(granddaughter)</i>	
		Luke Henderson	
		<i>(boyfriend)</i>	
		Matt Bertolino	
		<i>(boyfriend)</i>	



# Chapter 1



Joey stood, smiling to himself, as his cold, wet feet dug deep into the shifting sand. This particular expanse of coastline held special memories; many childhood experiences flitted before his eyes while his gaze remained fixed on the turbulent ocean. He couldn't explain it, other than to say the surf and sand were like comfort food for his soul. It would be impossible to enumerate exactly how many times he and his family had come to this place over the years, but this visit was different—very different.

Mama and Papa, the anchors of the Agosti family, had been gone for more than six years, leaving a personal void in each family member. Nothing on this earth could ever replace those two loving, caring parents, but this robust family was determined to move forward in the strength of their family bond, trusting it would honor their memory.

By default, Joey had become the patriarch of the Agosti family, and just as Papa had done, he would faithfully watch over and guard every single member. So now, although he moaned and groaned, it fell on him to rent a beach house for their family vacation. It was no easy task; finding a summer house large enough to accommodate this growing

tribe for an entire week proved challenging. Joey's family, plus his two sisters' families had become quite prolific; marriages and a new baby were happy events, very happy events.



Just as he yanked his feet free from the eroding sand that was sucking him down, Trina crept up behind him, covering his eyes just as she'd done countless times when they were kids. "Hey, Joey, lunch is ready. You coming?"

"Sure, I was just about to head up. Have you heard from the rest of the gang?" He turned, nearly losing his balance in the shifting sand.

Trina answered as they walked up to the beach house together, "Angie and Jake should be here in an hour with Mia and Leah in tow. I'm thinking Kevin, Cindy and the baby won't be far behind."

"Good, good. The party never really begins until our crazy sister arrives."

"You got that right, Angie surely hasn't matured with age, and honestly, I hope she never does. Watching her antics with Emma in this new *grandma* role is beyond amusing. She and Jake are bursting their buttons with pride."

"I hear ya, it's so funny to watch! Trina, I was totally lost in my thoughts down there in the surf. Do you remember our family vacation at Salisbury Beach? I think it was in 1968 or 1969."

Trina remained a natural beauty at age fifty-one. Her smooth, olive complexion and warm, brown eyes continued to be captivating. Although she often complained about her unmanageably curly hair, most women admitted to being jealous of it. Only recently, her jet-black hair began to be touched with a bit of silver streaking, giving her a rather regal appearance. With the passing of time, she had taken on a strong resemblance to their mama.



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“It was definitely 1968. I know that because I was fifteen and your old friend Lenny planted my very first kiss on these unsuspecting lips.”

“Yeah, I seem to remember you telling me that. What a sneak! He cozies up to me so he can take advantage of my little sister.”

“It was only a kiss, Joe! I hope you didn’t hold a grudge. Do you ever see him?” Trina asked as they climbed the porch steps.

“Yeah, on occasion he stops by the garage. I’ve taken to calling him *chrome dome*.”

“What?”

“He’s as bald as a cue ball, but he takes my ribbing in stride.”

Trina gave Joey a playful shove and pulled open the screen door to find Vinnie sitting at the kitchen table, Nutella smeared all over his mouth.

“Whoa, will you look at that face!” Joe exclaimed. “Someone ought to get a picture of that.”

“Sal, did your son manage to get his face stuck in that jar?” Trina chuckled.

“Hey, sweetie, it is vacation. I figured every six-year-old should be unburdened of manners while on vacation, right, Joe?” Sal couldn’t take his eyes off his son’s chocolate-covered mouth.

“Don’t get me in the middle of this; you two lovebirds are on your own.”

“Okay then, Sal, you have the honor of washing that beautiful little face.”

“Aw, Mom, I can wash my own face,” Vinnie said with an insulted frown, sticking his hands out for Buddy to lick clean.

Buddy, her faithful golden retriever, was far and away *the* best dog Trina ever had. His graying muzzle hinted at his ten plus years, but still, he managed to muster up enough puppy-like energy to keep up with Vinnie.

“Honey, don’t give chocolate to Buddy, it’s not good for dogs—remember?”

“Oops, I forgot. Sorry.”

“Okay, okay, vacation manners are officially in effect,” Trina conceded, kissing the top of Vinnie’s head and patting Buddy’s, “but with a few necessary exceptions.”



Sal and Trina had experienced so much heartache during their first fifteen years of marriage. They both wanted children—desperately. One miscarriage after another finally caused her to accept the cruel fact—it just wasn’t going to happen, but then—a miracle! As a social worker, Trina had witnessed many foster children finding their *forever homes*, which was exactly what happened for their son. Vincent, who they respectfully named after Trina’s father, had been thrown into the foster care system as a toddler. But through a series of God-ordained circumstances, and tons of bureaucracy, he miraculously found his way into Sal and Trina Lamazo’s loving home. They were thrilled, but adopting in their forties certainly kept them on their toes, as well as physically exhausted during their entire first year as new parents. Neither Sal nor Trina regretted it one iota; they were head over heels in love with Vinnie from day one.



“Joe, how did you ever find this place? It easily accommodates all nineteen of us, not to mention that it’s right on the beachfront. That alone is impressive!” Sal continued cutting a large stromboli into sections to share.

“It wasn’t easy. It took me several months of working with a local Realtor, but voila—here we are.”

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“I’ve always thought Massachusetts and New Hampshire have *the* most breathtaking of all our coastlines,” Sal added.

“I agree and I think we should make this a yearly tradition; a week at Hampton Beach with the entire Agosti family. What could be better?” Trina declared as she grabbed her section of the stromboli oozing with melted mozzarella cheese.

“Okay with me, but first let’s see if we still *like* each other by the end of this week. Keep in mind . . . nineteen people . . . two bathrooms—for seven days. What were we thinking?” Joey laughed with his deep, rich voice.

At fifty-two, Joe was still as handsome as ever, strong and physically fit from countless hours of hard work at the family auto repair business. When people guessed him to be in his mid-forties, he humbly replied, ‘good genes’.



“So, what needs to be done before the gang descends on us?” Sal questioned.

“Not a thing. All the gals are bringing towels and bedding for their own families and we agreed to take turns with meal preparations, so we’re good until everyone arrives.”

“I wanted Ellie to drive up with me this morning, but her boss pressured her into working. She’s moving up her company’s proverbial ladder, but she’s paying a price for it; long hours with too much stress,” Joe complained.

“Well, Joe, while you’re here together, you should indulge your wife, royally. Let her sleep late, bring her breakfast in bed, give her neck massages on the beach, you know—girly stuff,” Trina joked with a twinkle in her eyes.

“Hey, don’t get carried away and don’t give her any ideas,” he laughed, then held his dripping stromboli in the air to catch the stringy cheese in his mouth.

“I was thinking . . .”

“Oh no, we’re in trouble now,” Joey razzed his sister.

“As I was *saying* . . . I think Kevin and Cindy should take the larger bedroom since it’s roomy enough for a small crib.”

“That’s a good idea, honey,” Sal agreed.

“I wish they’d hurry up. I can’t wait to get my hands on little Emma. She’s the cutest little thing and such a happy baby.”

“Yeah, remember what Pops always said, ‘happy mothers have happy babies.’” Joey smiled.

Hearing that statement cast Trina’s thoughts back to Cindy’s tumultuous childhood. By the age of six, that child had all too frequently witnessed her mom being physically—not to mention emotionally—abused by her drunken father. That abuse was on a level that no child should ever be forced to experience. In spite of her horrendous background, she had grown into a beautiful, joyful young woman, now with a child of her own. This gentle wife and mother was a miracle in their midst and the entire family had grown to love her.

Over the years, Trina came to believe it was no coincidence that she was the social worker assigned to Cindy’s family, giving her the distinct advantage of helping Cindy and her mom grow past those painful years.

Later, as a teenager, and while her dad was still incarcerated, Cindy became best buddies with Angie’s daughter, Mia. Those two young ladies became inseparable and as time passed, she was assimilated into the family, even embracing Mama as her own grandmother. And Mama, being Mama, loved Cindy unconditionally. It came as no surprise when Angie’s son, Kevin, began to pursue Mia’s best friend; he was totally smitten with this sweet, freckle-faced redhead with sad eyes who, nevertheless, always revealed her joyful spirit.

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“Hey guys, we *have* arrived!” Angie hollered from the front porch. “Wow, this place is amazing!”

“Hi, Angie, let me give you guys a hand,” Joey pushed open the screen door and saw their baggage. “What the heck? Is all that stuff coming inside?”

“Well, big brother, it’s not going next door and before you ask . . . *yes*, it’s all necessary,” Angie smirked, firmly planting her hands on her hips.

“Sheesh, maybe I should run out and buy us a storage shed,” Sal joked.

“All right, enough with the wise cracks you two, now go and make yourselves useful. It’s not as much as you think,” Angie countered.

“Yeah, right,” Leah groaned as she stumbled into the kitchen, her arms laden down. “I could hardly move in that backseat and I think we flattened Mia. You guys better check to see if she’s still breathing!” She dramatically flipped her long black hair back over her shoulder and plopped down in a chair.

Leah, the youngest of Angie and Jake Traylor, was definitely more precocious than her siblings; this young lady was vivacious and as witty as they come. The apple doesn’t fall far from the tree; Angie and Leah’s personalities and temperaments were carbon copies. At nineteen, she was following her longtime passion for photojournalism at Boston University. Like her mom, Leah had always been in love with cameras, the art of photography and—*getting the story*. The family had begun to compare her to a pit bull; there was no letting go once she got her teeth into a story.



“Ugh, I’m so ready for this vacation,” Jake whined, opening all four car doors. “Well, come on out of there, Mia,” he chortled, as he stared at his buried daughter.

“I would, if I could,” she grunted. “Would someone *please* get this stuff off of me?”

“I will, I will,” Vinnie excitedly yelled, frenetically jumping up and down. “I’ve missed you, Mia. You said you were coming over last week.”

“I know, honey, I’m sorry. I had to work late every night; I almost missed the last train home—twice. But, I *should* have called you,” Mia admitted while tightening her red ponytail scrunchie around her thick, dark hair. Mia favored her dad’s family; she was tall and willowy with the Trayors’ signature dimples—adorable!

Mia appeared to have it all—beauty, brains and a winning personality. Immediately after graduating from college, she accepted a fabulous job as a computer programmer with a large Boston firm. Angie and Jake weren’t always happy with her long days or the train commute, but Mia loved the opportunity to catnap on the ride home, leaving her refreshed and free for the evenings. It worked for her.

“That’s okay,” Vinnie conceded, “but you have to take me to the boardwalk while we’re here.”

“I will. I promise, but first can you help get me out of here—*please*?”

With that desperate plea, everyone broke into laughter, teasing Mia unmercifully while working together to free her from the backseat. Leah was right, her sister was indeed packed like canned anchovies in the backseat.

“You guys are *not* funny, I was getting claustrophobic in there!” she exclaimed, finally breaking free.

After unloading the car and piling everything in the parlor, Mia, Leah and Vinnie made a wild dash for the surf. Even though Mia and Leah were twenty-four and nineteen, respectively, they loved spending time with their younger cousin; he brought out the kid in them. Trina and

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Angie smiled as they watched the girls swinging the little guy between them. Yanking off their sandals, they waded into the cold, Atlantic surf; Buddy was frantically circling them, barking and jumping, as they jokingly threatened to toss their little cousin into the ocean.



“What a magnificent view,” Angie said. “These French doors are wonderful, and that porch is fabulous. This is nothing short of perfection. It suits us to a tee; let’s book it again for next year.”

“We already talked about that, but Joey thinks we should wait to see how we manage with nineteen people and two bathrooms,” Trina reiterated.

“Oh come on, where’s your pioneer spirit?” Angie gaily countered. “Remember when we were kids, Daddy rented that little cottage at Salisbury Beach? We managed just fine then; seven of us, including our two friends—and only *one* bathroom.”

“How could I forget, it was Polly’s Villa,” Trina offered. “But Angie, we were hardly ever in the cottage. I seem to remember we spent most of our time on the beach or at *the center*, roaming around the kiosks, checking out the other kids.”

“Trina and I were checking out the other teens. *You*, my dear little sister, were just a baby,” Joey tweaked Angie’s nose.

“What! I was twelve, hardly a baby. But, I do remember you two ditching me more than once when you went to the boardwalk with your friends. *But*, I’ve forgiven you!” Angie self-righteously proclaimed.

“Hey, Joe, she’s forty-nine years old and she’s *finally* forgiven us.” Trina sniggered.

“I don’t mean to change this very sensitive subject, but how about a proper tour of this place?” Jake asked.

“Sure, come on, I’ll show you around. Grab those suitcases,” Sal suggested. “We’ll start with the upstairs.”

“This place is right out of an AARP vacation magazine—*not* that I’m ready for any of that yet,” Angie chuckled as they climbed the elegant staircase. “I for one am maintaining my Peter Pan mentality, *I won’t grow up, I don’t want to go to school!*,” she sang.

“Well, you can deny it all you want, Ange, but we are both fast approaching fifty and you *will be* returning to school in a couple of weeks,” Jake teased.

“Yeah, yeah, yeah, there’s a killjoy in every crowd,” Angie grumbled.



Angie’s lighthearted, slapstick sense of humor made her the life of every party and a joy to be around. She and her sister shared a strong family resemblance. While their personalities were distinctly different, they were similar in so many important ways. Angie’s carefree demeanor was starkly different from her sister’s propensity to worry and fret. Still, it was undeniable that they were best friends.

“Holy moly, I was expecting something a bit more—rustic. This is lovely and I’m guessing it was quite elegant in its day,” Angie moved around, taking in the beautifully appointed rooms. “Hmm, a posh Victoria home, right on the beachfront, wouldn’t you just love to know its history?”

“I wonder what the taxes would set you back on a place like this,” Sal commented.

“Now if that isn’t a fitting comment from our resident C.P.A.?” Joey said. “And what does our family’s social worker have to say?”

“Me, I’m just enjoying the scenery and praying everyone else arrives safely.”

“Yup, a perfect social worker response.”



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As they were finishing their second floor tour, voices drifted up the staircase. “Hey, where is everyone?” came from somewhere in the sunroom.

Angie was the first to make her way down the steps, gently nudging past everyone else. “Okay, guys, hand over that little lady,” she crooned, opening her arms to Emma. “Oh, darlin’, how’s my sweet girl?”

“Oh boy, there goes the gusher,” Joey mocked.

“Humph, I can’t wait to see how you and Ellie behave when Anthony or Sammy give you a grandchild.”

“I won’t hold my breath until Sammy finds the right girl and as for Anthony and Kerri, they had better get busy; they’re both closing in on twenty-nine years old.”

They all cooed over the precious one-year old; even the macho men didn’t attempt to hide their love for this newest addition to the Agosti family. The poor little one was confused, sticking out her pouty lower lip as she was being passed from one adoring relative to the next.

“All right you guys, she needs to be changed,” Kevin gave his mom a peck on the cheek. “Cindy, where are her diapers?”

“Still in the car, I’ll grab them, but first I need to hug everyone.”

“Noo—first you need to *destink* that adorable little munchkin,” Joey joked. “Phew, some smells you just never forget.”

Mia, Leah and Vinnie appeared at the screen door, clamoring to play with the baby. “Hold on, guys, she’s got a—load,” Kevin cautioned.

“Whoa, I guess so,” Mia choked out, withdrawing her arms. “I’ll wait,” she firmly stated while fanning her scrunched-up nose. Laughter erupted, but everyone did manage to hug Cindy before she ran to retrieve the diaper bag.



“Where are we sleeping, Aunt Trina? I want to unpack and get my camera; there are so many great shots around here. I don’t want to miss a single one of them,” Leah said.

“Oh, Leah, you have an entire week—pace yourself.”

“I wouldn’t mind taking over that cute little bunkhouse out back. Has anyone claimed it yet?” Mia asked.

“Actually, it’s a playhouse, but it’s not really little. It can easily accommodate four people. Believe it or not, it has two separate bedrooms, each with a queen-size bed. But, sweetie, I thought it would be perfect if Lily and Gino took one bedroom; Hope and Ricky could bunk in the other bedroom.”

“That makes sense. I’m sure that Hope would be more comfortable with her mom next door.”

“Good thinking, Aunt Trina. So, where do you want us to crash?” Leah asked again.

“Come on, girls, I’ll show you.”

Not wanting to be left behind, Vinnie came rushing toward his mom. “I’m coming too,” he grabbed Mia’s hand.



Trina led them up the classic Victorian staircase, pausing to allow her nieces a minute to peek into the four bedrooms, each lovelier than the previous. They came to the end of the hall and there in the corner was a narrow staircase, almost hidden from view in the hallway. The poorly lit staircase was obviously skipped over when the rest of the house enjoyed a facelift. The well-worn stair treads and dingy walls prompted Mia and Leah to raise their eyebrows at each other, obviously skeptical about what they’d find behind the badly chipped wooden door.

“Hmm, now this is intriguing,” Leah whispered, trying not to sound too negative.

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When they got to the top of the staircase, Trina pushed the door open to reveal a beautifully decorated attic bedroom. The far wall and the ceiling were a warm, honey-colored wood that gave off a light scent of cedar.

“Wow, what a surprise! This is gorgeous. And it looks newly decorated, so fresh and clean. I’m guessing the bedspreads and curtains are also brand-new,” Mia said.

“This is perfect for us, Aunt Trina. I actually like it better than any of the other bedrooms; it’s so quaint. Mia, come here, look at this ocean view!” Leah stood before one of the unusually tall windows.

Turning back to her aunt, Mia asked, “Do you think this was once used for servants’ quarters?”

“It’s possible. It wasn’t uncommon for these old Victorian houses to be used as summer homes for New England’s rich and famous. It might be fun to research this particular place; maybe the locals would know some of its history.”

Leah sat on one of the beds, then began bouncing up and down like a little kid. “I have dibs on this bed!” she loudly proclaimed.

“Yeah, yeah, I knew you’d stake a claim sooner or later.”

“Well, I’ll leave you two to battle it out. I volunteered to prepare tonight’s dinner, so I’d better get started on it.”

Trina smiled as she and Vinnie closed the door behind them, but not before hearing Leah say, “This is going to be a blast. I wonder if there are any interesting guys around here.”



“Well, your daughters seem happy with their accommodations,” Trina mentioned, as she entered the parlor where her sister was sprawled out on the floor, playing with Emma.

“Oh good, so exactly where *are* they staying?”

"In the attic bedroom, it's darling."

"Terrific, so where are Jake and I sleeping?"

"How about the tree-house?" Trina joked.

"Hey, that's perfect for my monkey-mom," Kevin snickered.

"You two are just too funny."

"Kevin, I gave you and Cindy the large master bedroom. Angie, you and Jake can take the blue room. Joe and Ellie can bunk in the yellow room. And since the sage-green room already has a cot in the corner, Sal, Vinnie and I will sleep in there."

"Wow, I'm impressed with your organizational skills," Angie admitted.

"Oh, yeah, I'm so very impressive! Come on, help me get dinner started."

"Only if you'll help me when it's my turn," Angie retorted, as Vinnie quickly took her place on the floor, anxious to play with Emma.

Trina gave her sister a good-natured nudge toward the kitchen. "So, are you looking forward to heading back to school?" Trina asked.

"Sort of, but you know how my life spins out of control when I start back teaching. I'm in a different stage of my life, my priorities are different now. My heart's desire is simply to spend more time with Emma."

"I understand. Maybe you should mark your calendar before the school year even begins, *Emma-Grandma* dates. Time will slip away otherwise. Who else is going to control your commitments if you don't?"

"You're probably right. Yeah, I'm sure you're right, but let me just say it will take all the discipline I can muster. You know how it goes when September rolls around: a meeting here, a parent-teacher conference there, blah, blah, blah. So, when we get home, the first thing I'll do is pencil in some special days with Emma."

"Of course I'm right. You remember Mama saying, 'time with family is everything.'"

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“It sure is. So, what’s for dinner tonight?”

“Pulled pork on toasted buns, baked beans and cabbage salad. I wanted to keep it simple, since everyone is arriving at different times.”

“That’s smart. Guys, did I just hear a car door slam?” Angie yelled to the boys. But before they responded, Ellie was already climbing the front steps.

“Ellie, you’re here early.” Joe met his wife on the porch steps, pulling her into a warm embrace.

“Yup, I wanted to be with you, not my boss,” she spoke in a hushed voice, but loud enough to evoke a chorus of *awws* from the rest of the family.

“How sweet! After all these years, you guys are still gushy.” Angie couldn’t resist throwing exaggerated kisses in their direction.

“So, tell me, does the Agosti clan approve of your choice?” Ellie asked Joey, while looking around the kitchen.

“Yes, this place is awesome and we all agree it more than meets our needs. He did a great job.”

“Well, I have to ‘fess up. Ellie also worked with the Realtor,” he admitted. “She really deserves most of the credit; she fielded all the phone calls. Thanks, sweetie.”

“*No problemo!* By the way, Lily called as I was leaving the office. She and Gino are driving with Hope and Ricky,” Ellie said. “They should be here shortly.”

“All right, let the party begin!” Trina loudly declared.

Trina absolutely loved it when her family spent time together; their affection for one another is enviable. Over the years, however, Trina fought tooth and nail to keep them from destroying their close bond. But when the dust settled, they remained fiercely protective of one another, and an even stronger family bond arose from the ashes of their conflict.



Joey couldn't help but ponder the abundant blessings that had been showered down on this family. He reminisced, with shame, about how his unwillingness to forgive could have thwarted God's ultimate plan; it would certainly have affected the entire Agosti family.

*Thank you, Lord,* he silently spoke to God. *You intervened and softened my hard heart. You revealed my rotten attitude before I made a mess out of everything.*

Thinking back to those dark days before Pops died, he still couldn't believe he'd held such bitterness and anger, not speaking to his father for three long years. At the time, Joey felt completely justified in shunning him. After all, Pops' ugly secret threatened to tear his *perfect* family to shreds. The most difficult pill to swallow was the harsh reality that he'd always held his dad up as the moral standard—his idol. They were so close, inseparable, except for those years of emotional torment.



Joe was abruptly pulled back from his gloomy reflections by his sister's voice, "I gave Hope and Ricky one of the bedrooms in the playhouse; Gino and Lily can take the adjoining bedroom. It seemed to make sense for mother and daughter to be together."

"Sounds good to me. Hey, can I see the playhouse before they get here?" Angie asked. "We have plenty of time to pull dinner together before the mob descends on us."

Joey watched his sisters walk down the short path to the playhouse; his thoughts were again cast back to that awful day when he had uncovered the proof of his dad's illicit relationship. That was bad enough, but he then discovered that a child resulted from that one selfish act—Lily.

Three years of conflict followed that discovery. Heart-wrenching torment gripped the family until finally Joe discovered his mom had

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been aware of it almost from the beginning. She had *chosen* to forgive her husband. That revelation rocked Joey to his core.

*I'm still in awe of Mama's ability to extend forgiveness; to live with and love her husband without reservation. She was an amazing woman. We were so very blessed to have her in our lives.*

After the initial shock wore off, his sisters were quick to accept Lily into their world—their family. Joey, however, took longer. It was only when those chains that held his heart in bondage were finally broken that he could clearly see God's hand at work. His hand was extended, drawing Lily and her family into the Agosti clan.

That was the most beautiful of days and none of them had ever looked back with the least bit of regret. Lily was Pops' daughter and now she, as well as Pops' granddaughter, Hope, were part of the Agosti family. Yes, tongues wagged in town, even in church, but they were confident they had done right by her.

Mama had fervently prayed her children would enjoy the blessings that would surely flow from the act of forgiving their dad and accepting Lily. Because of Joey's and his sisters' obedience to the Lord's promptings, the entire family was now experiencing those abundant blessings.



Ellie approached her husband, wrapped her arms around him and nuzzled her cheek against his chest. “It’s so good to be here with you. I’m glad I left the office early. So, I’m assuming Ricky and Anthony closed the garage early too?” she asked. “Is business slow?”

“Actually, this month has been slow, but remember, I’ve had this week blocked off in our appointment book for months,” Joe answered. “I told them to knock off early today, if at all possible.”

After Pops died, Joey honored his father's longtime wishes and took over the Agosti and Sons Garage. Right from the get-go the business

flourished and it wasn't long before he brought on his son, Anthony, also a highly skilled mechanic.

Many residents of Lawrence, Massachusetts, were longtime patrons of the garage; switching their loyalty from Vincent to his son and grandson was an easy transition. The business was thriving; it was apparent that a third set of hands would soon be needed.

Ricky, although not a blood relative, became like a son to Joey. Initially he hung around the garage because of his friendship with Mia, but then Lily's daughter, Hope, caught his eye and the guy was hopelessly lovesick. Just before he and Hope married, Joe brought him on board as well. With three skilled mechanics, the Agosti and Sons Garage was doing exceptionally well.

"See, he's not such a hard taskmaster," Angie sauntered back into the kitchen. "I always knew you were a good guy," she chuckled, punching his shoulder.

"Hey, that hurt!" he moaned, rubbing his shoulder. "Remember, we all agreed it was important to take this time together; I'm glad we have."

"That it is, dear brother, that it is," Trina patted his back.

"They're here, guys!" Vinnie yelled from the parlor. "They're here!" he excitedly shouted again.

"Okay, okay, we hear you; the whole Atlantic coastline hears you," his mother chided.

Comically, as though on command, they all traipsed to the door, eager to help Lily, Hope and their husbands. Unfortunately, the doorway wasn't wide enough to allow the excited family to push through at the same time. Each politely made way for the other, but each desperately wanted to be first to greet their adopted family.

"Welcome!" Trina drew Lily into a warm embrace.

Vinnie gave Ricky an exaggerated high five, "I couldn't wait for you to get here. You didn't forget we're going to play football, right?"



## SONGS IN THE NIGHT

“How could I forget, buddy? And that’s not all we’re going to do; it’s going to be a fun week.” Ricky lifted Vinnie up then promptly wrestled him down to the ground.

“Joe, your directions were perfect,” Lily said. “Whoa, this place is awesome,” warmly embracing her half-brother. “Wow, look at all that gingerbread trim. Beautiful, but I wouldn’t want to paint it,” she remarked.

Joey laughed. “You’re here to enjoy the beach, not paint the house.”

“Thanks for including us.” Gino slapped Joey on the back.

“Hey, we’re family. How could we not?”

“And look at you, Hope. You’ve got a new hairstyle—I love it. It really accentuates those beautiful green eyes of yours,” Mia said. Hope responded by spinning around several times attempting to imitate a runway model.

“Come on, everyone! Grab a suitcase, a pillow, something, anything! Let’s get these nice folks into vacation mode,” Joe yelled.

“Bring everything into the playhouse,” Trina clarified.

“Playhouse? There’s a playhouse here?” Hope questioned.

“Yup, and it is absolutely adorable. Wait ‘til you see it. You four are staying there; you’re going to fall in love with it,” Angie assured them.

Together, they turned toward the garden pathway leading to the playhouse. Lily’s head shot up. “Look, Gino, the playhouse is almost an exact replica of the full-sized Victorian.”

“Yeah, I’m thinking the original owners were pretty wealthy,” Sal interjected.

“I doubt the playhouse was built the same year as the main house,” Ellie was studying the structure. “Take a look at the gingerbread trim, it’s slightly different. My guess is that it was custom made at a later date.”

“You have a sharp eye, sweetie,” Joey hoisted a couple of large suitcases.

“Here, let me help you,” Trina said. “I’ll carry a pillow,” she offered.

“Gee thanks! You’re so helpful; I’m completely underwhelmed.” Laughing at that playful exchange, they continued their walk to the playhouse.

“Wow, this playhouse is something else! It couldn’t be nicer,” Hope said. Look, Mom, it has a teeny kitchen and even teenier bathroom. This is so cute!”

“Sure is, and I’m not wasting one minute. Let’s unpack and start this vacation,” Lily declared.



“Hey, Aunt Trina, I see the meat and the buns, but I’m not seeing any dessert,” Kevin whined. “Vacation is not the time for dieting,” he admonished.

“Ha, like this family could go one day without sweets!” she fired back.

“So, what’s for dessert?” he pressed.

“Oh, Kevin, it won’t kill you to do without dessert.” Cindy gave her husband a sideways hug.

“Huh, says you. Man cannot live by bread alone,” he moaned. “It says that in the Bible.”

“I’ll have you know, I spent yesterday afternoon making a huge batch of your grandma’s scrumptious angeletti cookies. I could hardly keep Vinnie’s hands off them,” Trina said with a wide smile.

“Oh man, I love those cookies,” Joey piped up.

“Thanks, Aunt Trina. Actually, we all love them. So, where did you hide them?” Kevin asked.

“Oh no you don’t, they are staying well hidden until dinner.”

“Humph! By the way, what time is the rest of the gang arriving?” he asked, while opening and closing kitchen cupboards in search of the delectably light, lemony cookies.

## SONGS IN THE NIGHT

“Ricky just said that when he was gathering up his tools, he noticed Anthony was already locking up the garage, so they shouldn’t be too much longer,” Ellie informed them. “I know that Anthony and Kerri packed their car last night so they could just head out. Sammy wanted to drive his own car; who knows when he’ll get here?”

“He told me he was bringing something from Piro’s Bakery, because after all, we need more dessert,” Trina chuckled.

“What a good man!” Kevin exclaimed. “You can never have enough dessert.”



The Agosti family happily slipped into vacation mode while waiting for the last three members to arrive. Whether lounging in the cool of the front porch or on the hot, white beach sand—it was all good. Vinnie was wired! He was intent on burying Leah in the sand, but that girl was just too quick for him. His attempts usually backfired, ending with her roughly carrying him to the surf, again threatening to toss him, which she never did.

“Here, let me help you with that,” Jake said to his daughter-in-law as she struggled down the porch steps. “These contraptions are beyond me, but I suspect every grandpa should know how to set up a portable playpen,” he weakly admitted. “I guess I need a refresher course.”

“You’ll get the hang of it after one or two times.” Cindy encouraged him. “Emma doesn’t like being penned in, but she needs a safe place. Otherwise, I’ll spend the entire week pulling fistfuls of beach sand out of her mouth. Let’s put in right here in the shade,” she suggested.

Emma played contentedly for quite a while. Watching the movement of the surf, the diving seagulls and the antics of her crazy family prompted an occasional belly laugh. It wasn’t long before she began rubbing her nose with her favorite blanket, signaling naptime.

“Look, Mom,” Cindy pointed to her daughter. “Watching all of this activity is lulling her to sleep. I may actually get some free time to relax and enjoy this week.”

“Well, honey, you certainly have lots of eager hands to help you,” Angie commented from her lounge chair on the porch. “So take advantage of that time while you have—”

“Hi ya, guys.” Anthony greeted them as he came from the side of the house. “Kerri and I have arrived and Sammy is right behind us.”

“Yess!” shouted Kevin from the screen door. “Hold on, I’m coming around to help you guys.”

“Hi, sweetie,” Ellie hugged her son and daughter-in-law. “I’m so glad you closed the shop early. You need the break.”

“Hi, Mom! He sure does,” Kerri agreed.

“Okay, now there’s the man I’ve been waiting for,” Kevin declared. Sammy wasn’t far behind his brother and he was carrying his promised bakery boxes.

“Man, is dessert all you ever think about?” Sammy laughed, shoving the boxes into his cousin’s hands.

“It’s not *all* I think about, but it’s right up there in the top ten,” Kevin admitted.

“Wow, this place is beautiful. I expected something more—earthy,” Kerri took in the picture-perfect Victorian home.

“Me too,” Anthony added. “This place is quite the find!”

“We’re not so small in numbers anymore, so locating this place had to be God’s provision for our growing family,” Joey said. “Come on, you guys, I’ll give you a tour and then show you to your bedroom. So, Trina, where did you say they are sleeping?”

“Anthony and Kerri are taking the pull-out queen-size bed in the sunroom. Sammy, you have the overstuffed pull-out club chair in the office,” Trina added.

## SONGS IN THE NIGHT

“These owners knew how to utilize every nook and cranny.” Sammy’s eyes were moving from one detail of the vintage home, to the next. “Impressive!”

“For sure! As an engineer, I bet you can see all kinds of other possibilities for this house,” Sal remarked. “Wait until you see what they did with the playhouse.”

With that, the final tour of the day ended with the playhouse. The family could not have been more pleased with Joey and Ellie’s efforts to find this rental property.



“This kitchen is wonderful,” Angie remarked while helping Trina fix dinner. “It’s bright and cheerful; I love this huge work space. If we ever remodel our kitchen, something like this would be on the top of my wish list.”

“It certainly accommodates all these bodies milling around,” Trina snorted. “I used to call our family a mob, now it really *is* a mob—but not *that* kind of mob,” she smiled.

“I got ya! With a couple of married kids and the addition of our precious Emma, we are truly being blessed.”

“Honey, this pot of pulled pork will be heated through in about five minutes,” Sal yelled from his post at the grill.

“Okay, we’re good in here too.”

“Do you guys need any help?” Mia asked.

“Sure, honey, would you please finish setting the tables? We’ll just use those paper plates for tonight.”

“Leah, would you mind cutting those crusty rolls? Then, we’re just about ready.” Trina walked to the front hall closet and exclaimed, “Hey, what happened to my angelettis?”

“Ha, you really didn’t think I wouldn’t find them, did you?” Kevin teased as he jogged through the kitchen, stuffing one of Trina’s prized cookies into his mouth.

“I don’t know how your husband stays so trim,” Trina said to Cindy as she threw a wet dishcloth at the back of Kevin’s head.

“Hey, you’re messing up my perfectly styled hair.”

“Ellie, would you please yell out to the playhouse and tell them dinner is ready.”

Before she even walked to the door, “I smell food! When do we eat?” Ricky smiled, leading the playhouse guests into the kitchen.

“All right, all right, you maniacs, dinner is served; simple as it may be,” Trina announced.

In typical Agosti fashion, everyone stampeded to his or her chair, but quickly quieted down, and waited for the blessing.

Joe stood, just as Pops had done at so many family dinners. He was fully aware of the respect this family had for him as the Agosti patriarch. He became uncharacteristically serious, immediately capturing each person’s attention. “I can’t tell you how happy I am that we could spend vacation together; hopefully, it will become an annual event. I am honored to ask for the blessing on this food and this beautiful place that God has provided.” Joey and each person bowed their heads.

When Joey concluded his prayer of thanksgiving, a symphony of blended *amens* filled the dining room, including one from sweet little Emma, prompting affirming smiles from her adoring family.

A marvelous ebb and flow of conversation, laughter and teasing, continued throughout the meal. Trina cherished each and every family gathering; nothing gave her greater happiness than basking in the warmth of her family.

Later, Ellie brought the bakery boxes to the table, while Angie poured coffee. Kevin reluctantly relinquished his control of the angelettis. To his credit, only one was missing.

## SONGS IN THE NIGHT

“Sammy, thanks for picking up these cannolis,” Ellie opened the boxes.” Oh wow, we’ve hit the jackpot, guys. He brought cheese, chocolate *and* vanilla cannolis. Heaven, I’m in heaven!”

All eyes went to Emma as she stretched out from her booster seat until she reached a chocolate-filled cannoli. Quick as can be, she snatched it and shoved it into her mouth in one smooth move. “Now there’s a girl who knows exactly what she wants.” Angie laughed.

Vinnie was giggling and pointing at Emma’s chocolate-covered face when Anthony interrupted the sweet scene. “Mom, there’s still something in the oven that you should probably grab.”

“What? The baked beans were the only thing in the oven, Anthony, and they’re out,” Ellie answered distractedly.

“No, Mom, we know for sure—there is something in the oven,” this time from Kerri.

Ellie looked rather annoyed, but put down her angeletti and went to the oven. “Humph, there’s only a bun in the oven.”

Most everyone immediately caught it; laughing hysterically, followed by hugs for Kerri and Anthony.

“What?” Ellie said, looking befuddled.

“Oh, Ellie, don’t you know what they’re trying to tell us? We’re going to be a grandpa and a grandma,” Joey said excitedly. With tears in his eyes, he pulled his wife into a big bear hug. “I’m going to be a grandpa?”

“I’m going to be a grandma?” Ellie stood, dazed, with the bun in her hand—wearing a silly grin. “Hallelujah! I’m going to be a grandma!” Ellie finally shouted at the realization of what just happened.

“Well, it’s about time!” Angie added.