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**Opening Extract from...**

# 6 Rainier Drive

Written by Debbie Macomber

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Debbie Macomber

# 6 Rainier Drive

# One

Justine Gunderson woke suddenly from a deep sleep, with the vague sense that something was wrong. A moment later, she remembered, and an intense sadness pressed down upon her. Lying on her back, she stared up at the dark ceiling as the realization hit her yet again. The Lighthouse, the restaurant she and Seth had poured their lives into, was gone. *Gone*. It had burned to the ground a week ago, in a blazing fire that lit up the night sky for miles around Cedar Cove. A fire started by an unidentified arsonist.

Without bothering to look, Justine knew her husband wasn't in bed with her. Only a week had passed since the fire, but it felt like a month, a year, a lifetime. She didn't think Seth had slept more than three or four hours at a stretch since that shocking phone call.

Folding back the sheet, she climbed slowly out of bed. It was barely four, according to the digital readout on the clock radio. Moonlight filtered through a gap in the curtains, creating patterns on the bedroom walls. Justine slipped her arms into the sleeves of her robe and went in search of her husband.

As she'd suspected, she found him in the living room, pacing. He moved ceaselessly, his angry strides taking him from the fireplace to the window and back. When he saw her, he continued to walk, looking away as though he couldn't face her. She could tell he didn't want her near him. She barely recognized this man her husband had become since news of the fire.

"Can't you sleep?" she asked, whispering for fear of waking their four-year-old son. Leif was a light sleeper and although he was too young to understand what had happened, the child intuitively knew his parents were upset.

"I want to find out who did this and why." Fists clenched, Seth turned on her as if she should be able to tell him.

Tucking her long, straight hair behind her ears, Justine sank into the rocker in which she'd once nursed their son. "I do, too," she told him. She'd never seen Seth this restless. Her strikingly blond husband was of Swedish extraction, a big man, nearly six-six, with broad shoulders to match. He'd been a

commercial fisherman until soon after their marriage. That was when they'd decided to open the restaurant. The Lighthouse had been Seth's dream, and with financial assistance from his parents, he'd invested everything—his skill, his emotions, their finances—in this venture. Justine had been at his side every step of the way.

In the beginning, while Leif was an infant, she'd kept the books and handled the payroll. When their son grew old enough for preschool, she'd assumed a more active role, working as hostess and filling in where needed.

"Who would do this?" he demanded again.

The answer eluded her just as it did him. Why anyone would want to hurt them was beyond her comprehension. They had no enemies that she knew of and no serious rivals. It was hard to believe they'd been the target of a random firebug, but maybe that was the case. So far, there'd been little real progress in tracking down the arsonist.

"Seth," she whispered gently, stretching her hand toward him. "You can't go on like this."

He didn't respond, and Justine realized he hadn't heard her. She longed to ease his mind, to reassure him. Her fear was that the fire had destroyed more than the restaurant. It had stolen Seth's peace of mind, his purpose and, in some ways, his innocence. He'd lost faith in the goodness of others and confidence in his own abilities.

Justine's innocence had been devastated one bright summer afternoon in 1986, when her twin brother, Jordan, had drowned. Justine had held his lifeless body in her arms until the paramedics arrived. She'd been in shock, unable to grasp that her brother, her twin, was gone. He'd broken his neck after a careless dive off a floating dock.

Her entire world had forever changed that day. Her parents divorced shortly afterward and her father had quickly remarried. To all outward appearances, Justine had adjusted to the upheaval in her life. She'd graduated from high school, finished college and found employment at First National Bank, then risen to branch manager. Although she'd had no intention of ever marrying, she'd been dating Warren Saget, a local builder who was the same age as her mother. Then she'd met Seth Gunderson at their ten-year high-school reunion.

Seth had been her brother's best friend. She'd always felt that if Seth had been with Jordan that day, her brother might still be alive, and her own life would've been different—although she wasn't sure exactly how. It was ridiculous to entertain such thoughts; she recognized that on a conscious level. And yet…it was what she believed.

All through high school she'd barely spoken to Seth. He was the football hero, the class jock. She was the class brain. And never the twain had met until that night nearly six years ago, when she'd run into

him at the reunion planning meeting. Seth had casually mentioned that he'd had a crush on her during their high-school days. The look in his eyes told her he'd found her beautiful then and even more so now.

They hadn't experienced an easy courtship. Warren Saget hadn't wanted to lose her and made a concerted effort to pressure her into marrying him. He'd instinctively understood that Seth was a major threat. Warren bought Justine the largest diamond she'd ever seen, promising a life of luxury and social prominence if she agreed to be his wife.

All Seth had to offer Justine was a twenty-year-old live-aboard sailboat—and his love. By that time, she was so head-over-heels crazy about him that she could scarcely breathe. Still, she struggled, unwilling to listen to her own heart. Then, one day, she couldn't resist him anymore….

"I'm calling the fire marshal this morning," Seth muttered, breaking into her thoughts. "I want *answers*."

"Seth," she tried again. "Honey, why—"

"Don't *honey* me," he snapped.

Justine flinched at the rage in his voice.

"It's been a full week. They should have some information by now, only they're not telling us. There's something they don't want me to know and I'm going to find out what. If I have to bring Roy McAfee in, I will!" He looked directly at her then, probably for the first time since she'd entered the room.

"Seth, I like and trust Roy," she said, referring to the town's only private investigator, "but the fire department's already investigating. So is the insurance company. Let them do their jobs," Justine said in a soft voice. "Let the sheriff do his."

Splaying his fingers though his hair, he released a slow breath. "I'm sorry, I don't mean to take my frustration out on you."

"I know." Justine got up and walked into his arms, pressing her body against his, urging him to relax. "Come back to bed and try to sleep," she said.

He shook his head. "I can't. Every time I close my eyes, all I can see is The Lighthouse going up in smoke."

Seth had arrived a few minutes after the fire trucks and stood by helplessly as the restaurant, engulfed in flames, had quickly become a lost cause.

"I can't believe it was Anson Butler," Justine said, thinking out loud. She'd liked the boy and had trusted him—which, according to her friends and neighbors, had been a mistake.

"You don't *want* to believe it's him," her husband returned, the anger back in the clipped harshness of his words.

That was true. Seth had hired Anson several months earlier. The teenager was paying off court expenses because of a fire he'd set in the city park. He'd had no explanation for why he'd burned down the toolshed. All Justine really knew were the few details Seth had divulged at the time he'd taken the boy on.

To his credit, Anson had turned himself in to the authorities and accepted full responsibility for his actions. That had impressed her husband, and on the recommendation of their accountant and friend, Zachary Cox, who'd become something of a mentor to the boy, Seth had agreed to give Anson a job.

At first the teenager had made an effort to prove his worth. He'd shown up early for his shifts and put in extra hours, eager to please his employer. Then within a few weeks, everything had fallen apart. Tony, another dishwasher, had taken a dislike to Anson and the two had exchanged words. From what she understood, they'd also gotten into a shoving match once or twice. As a result of their animosity, the tension in the kitchen had increased. Seth had talked it over with Justine and she'd suggested they separate the two boys. Seth decided to make Anson a prep cook. Tony didn't like the idea of Anson getting a promotion, while he'd been on staff longer and remained a dishwasher.

Then money had gone missing from the office and, although others had access to the money box, both Tony and Anson had been seen entering the room. When questioned, Anson claimed he'd been looking for Seth because a supplier had a problem. Tony insisted he needed to talk to Seth about his schedule. Both boys were suspects, so Seth felt he had no choice but to lay them both off. The money was never recovered. Seth blamed himself because he'd left the safe open, lockbox inside, while he was briefly out of the office.

A week later, The Lighthouse had burned to the ground.

"We don't have any proof it was Anson," Justine reminded her husband.

"We'll get proof. Whether he's the culprit or somebody else is. We'll find whoever did this." Seth's hard mouth was set with determination and his body tensed.

"Try to sleep," she urged again. Despite his reluctance, she led him back to their bedroom.

Together they slipped under the sheets and she moved her body close to his. Seth lay on his back, eyes open, as she slid her leg over his and draped her arm across his powerful chest. He held her tight, as if she were the only solid thing left in a world that had started to crumble. Kissing his neck, Justine purred in his ear, hoping that if they made love, the restlessness in him would ease and he'd be able to relax. But Seth shook his head, rejecting her subtle offer. She swallowed down the hurt and tried not to take it personally. All of this would be over soon, she told herself; soon everything would be back to normal. Justine *had* to believe it. Without that hope, despair would encroach, which was something she had to avoid at any cost. She fought to maintain a positive outlook, for her husband's sake and for the sake of her marriage.

When Justine woke again, it was morning and

Leif was climbing onto her bed, wanting breakfast. Penny, their cocker spaniel-poodle mix, followed him, eyeing the bed.

"Where's Daddy?" she asked, sitting upright, rubbing her hand tiredly over her face.

Her son dragged his teddy bear onto the bed, blue eyes soulful. "In his office."

That wasn't a good sign.

"It's time we got you ready for school," Justine said briskly, glancing at the clock. Quarter to eight already. Leif's preschool class was held every morning, and even though their own schedules had fallen apart, Justine and Seth had done their best to keep Leif's timetable consistent.

"Daddy's mad again," the four-year-old whispered.

Justine sighed. This was almost a daily occurrence, and she worried about the effect of so much tension on their son, who couldn't possibly understand *why* Daddy was mad or Mommy sometimes cried.

"Did he growl at you?" Justine asked, then roared like a grizzly bear, shaping her hands into make-believe claws. With Penny barking cheerfully, she crawled across the mattress after her son, distracting him from worries about his father.

Leif shrieked and scrambled off the bed, racing for his bedroom. Justine followed and laughingly cornered the boy. Leif's eyes flashed with delight as

she set out his clothes. He insisted on getting dressed on his own these days, so she let him.

After saying a perfunctory goodbye to her husband, Justine delivered Leif to preschool. When she pulled back into the driveway, Seth came out the door to greet her. The April sky was overcast, and rain was imminent. The weather was a perfect reflection of their mood, Justine thought. A sunny day would've seemed incongruous when they both felt so fearful and angry.

"I talked to the fire marshal," her husband announced as she got out of her car.

"Did he have any news?"

Seth's frown darkened. "Nothing he was willing to tell me. The insurance adjuster's taking his own sweet time, too."

"Seth, these things require patience." She needed answers as much as he did, but she certainly didn't want the fire marshal to rush the investigation.

"Don't you start on me," he flared. "We're losing ground every day. How are we supposed to live without the restaurant?"

"The insurance—"

"I know about the insurance money," he said, cutting her off. "But we won't get anything for at least a month. And it isn't going to keep our employees from seeking other jobs. It isn't going to pay back my parents' investment. They put their trust in me."

Seth's parents had invested a significant amount

of the start-up money; Seth and Justine paid them monthly and she knew Mr. and Mrs. Gunderson relied on that income.

Justine didn't have any solutions for him. She recognized that he was distressed about more than the financial implications of the fire, but she had no quick or ready answers. "What would you like me to do?" she asked. "Tell me and I'll do it."

He glared at her in a way she'd never seen before. "What I'd like," he muttered, "is for you to stop acting as if this is a temporary inconvenience. The Lighthouse is *gone*. We've lost everything, and you're acting like it's no big deal." Justine recoiled at the unfairness of his words. He made it sound as if she was some kind of Pollyanna who wasn't fully aware of their situation. "Don't you realize the last five years are in ashes?" he railed. "Five years of working sixteen-hour days and for what?"

"But we *haven't* lost everything," she countered, hoping to inject some reason into his tirade. She didn't mean to be argumentative; she simply wanted him to see that although this was a dreadful time, they still had each other. They had their child and their house. Together they'd find the strength to start over—if only Seth could let go of this anger.

"You're doing it again." He shook his head in barely controlled frustration.

"You want me to be as angry as you are," she said.

*Make time for friends. Make time for* ***Debbie Macomber****.*

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311 PELICAN COURT
44 CRANBERRY POINT
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6 RAINIER DRIVE

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