



A. A. King

Diamond in the Rough

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Chapter One

The phone rang shrilly, cutting through the night like a hot knife through butter. Just hours before, Brian Russell had been wasting away another night watching television and drinking whiskey. Most nights were spent like this for the thirty six year old detective. He was married to his work and had no time for the finer things in life.

What the fuck? He complained to no one in particular. Many a good night's sleep had been interrupted by his career.

Pushing the covers roughly from his body, he threw his legs over the side of the bed and snatched the ringing phone from its cradle, "Russell." He growled into the receiver.

"I will be there in thirty...tape off the scene and don't let anyone in." He ordered.

Brian rubbed his eyes and blinked furiously, trying to clear the feeling that they were full of sand. He threw on his clothes and grabbed a soda out of the fridge before leaving for the crime scene.

The night air was cool and Brian rolled down both windows of his truck and enjoyed the cool air

on his skin. It helped to wake up the still sleepy detective. Coffee was what he really needed but he knew that it would be a while before he could get a cup.

The scene was littered with people in uniforms walking around trying to look busy. The media had gathered outside the doors of the stately office complex and Brian had to push his way past them to enter the building. Microphones were thrust into his face as reporters shouted out questions that he didn't yet know the answers to. Brian forced his way through the crowd and walked through the double door as he flashed his badge to the officer guarding the entrance. "Keep them out!" He demanded as he pointed backward with his thumb. There was no question that the young rookie knew what he was talking about and nodded as he squared his shoulders toward the entrance.

"Jones, tell me what we have here." Brian barked at the sergeant standing behind the yellow tape.

A white male in his late sixties who appeared to be working late. There does not seem to be much evidence around here but the scene is all yours. I am happy to not have to babysit the tape anymore."

"Thanks Jones. Can you see if you can find me a cup of coffee around here anywhere?"

Russell ducked under the tape and walked through the door of the office. On the door was a name tag for Charles Wingate.

Goddamn, this is going to be huge, Brian thought to himself. Charles Wingate was the owner and patriarch of Wingate Drilling which happened to be one of the largest independent drilling companies in the South. He was a millionaire several times over and that tended to complicate things.

Brian Russell's brows furrowed together as he contemplated what lay ahead of him. Any murder brought upheaval into the lives of the detectives investigating them, but the murder of someone wealthy added a whole different twist on an already difficult situation. Everyone who knew the victim became a suspect because everyone had a common motive; money.

"Jones, where's my coffee?" Brian called out. The sergeant walked briskly toward the detective

with a Styrofoam cup in his hand. Brian reached for it as steam billowed from the top of the cup. Putting it to his lips, he took a sip and quickly pulled the cup from his lips. It had burned him but was worth it considering how badly he needed the hot liquid.

“Have you found anything of use so far?” Sergeant Jones questioned.

“I have not walked past the door yet. The name on the entry caught my attention and I knew that this wasn’t going to be cut and dried. We are going to need a photographer and finger print specialist in here ASAP. This is going to be huge and we need to make sure that all of our I’s are dotted and our T’s are crossed.”

“I can get a print specialist in here now and I will get my camera and be with you in a minute.”

“Sounds good Jones. Let’s get cracking so we can get this scene wrapped up before employees start coming in for work.”

After finishing his cup of coffee, Brian walked into the office. Aside from the desk, everything in the office looked pristine. Nothing seemed out of place. The desk was a different story. A silver haired man lay with his head on it and a pool of blood soaking the papers underneath. The desk looked to be very expensive. Made of mahogany, it had ornate carvings running the length of the legs. Blood had soaked them, but Brian could tell that they were very detailed. Sergeant Jones followed behind him, snapping photographs when Brian pointed out something of interest. The filing cabinet was opened and much of its contents spilled onto the ground. A coffee cup was on the desk along with a crystal tumbler of brown liquid.

“Where is the finger print technician?” Brian said as he turned to Jones.

“I am right here.” Chirped a mousy haired woman who looked to be no more than twenty.

How did she get a job here? She is just a kid! She appeared to be far too excited to be at a murder scene for the detectives taste but he could not control who the lab sent over.

“Please lift prints from the filing cabinet first and then try to pull some from the crystal tumbler.

Also, Jones, please make sure that the contents of the coffee pot, the cub and the tumbler to the lab for testing.”

After walking through the remainder of the office building, Brian decided that the scene was contained to the office of Charles Wingate. He waited until the coroner removed the body and ordered the scene to be cleaned up. The employees would be getting there in the next two hours and Detective Brian Russell wanted to be prepared for their arrival.

Chapter Two

Jason Turner lunged across the desk. Detective Brian Russell instinctively placed his hand on his service revolver as he said, “Mr. Turner, I know emotions are running high, but I advise you to sit back down and answer my questions.” Jason slowly lowered himself back onto his chair but perched on the edge as if he were getting ready to spring across again.

“Are you accusing me of something, Detective?” He said as his eyes narrowed to mere slits on his face.

“I am simply trying to get the facts, Mr. Turner,” Russell replied coldly and methodically. A smirk forming at the corners of his mouth.

Sometime during the night, Charles Wingate had been murdered. He was the patriarch and owner of Wingate Drilling and had been found slumped over his desk with a single gunshot wound to his right temple. Once the employees had been let back in, Detective Russell had questioned all except, Jason Turner.

On this particular morning, Jason had been late to work. As the company's Chief Financial Officer, that would not have normally been an issue, but on this morning it would be catastrophic for the young executive. Jason's late arrival had drawn suspicion from the detective who was now questioning him with vigor, demanding to have a full accounting for his activities.

Both men stared each other down as though they were wild animals ready to fight. The detective's eyes narrowed and one fist was clenched by his side while the other hand rested at the ready on his revolver. Jason remained ready to pounce and so combative that he had almost bit a whole in his lip. The two seemed to be natural enemies from the start. There was an animosity that was pretty apparent, as it shimmered through the air, and the room vibrated with energy.

"How did you begin working for Mr. Wingate?" Russell growled.

Jason thought for a moment and replied, "I was a floor hand on one of Mr. Wingate's rigs when I was seventeen. He saw more in me than I did in myself and he took me under his wing. As I moved up in the company, we grew close to each other, and he soon felt that he needed me to work in the office the rest is history."

"Do you know of anyone who would have wanted to hurt Mr. Wingate?" asked Russell.

"No," Jason replied as he balled his hands in a fist so hard that his knuckles turned white.

"Mr. Turner, this is off the record, but I can tell that you want to hit me. Your fists are balled up in plain view. Anytime you feel like getting that out of your system, please let me know. I would be more than happy to oblige you. Punks like you make my job fulfilling and keeps me on my toes."

"Where were you last night between one and three a.m.?" Jason's expression grew angry again. Detective Russell sensed that he had struck a nerve.

“Mr. Turner, I will ask you again where you were.”

“I was home alone, asleep,” Jason stated.

After a moment to absorb the information, Detective Russell decided to let Jason be for now and ended the interview.

“If you can think of anything that may help us, please call me. My number is on the business card that I left with your assistant.” Brian Russell was in no mood for games. He rarely had time for foolish antics but today he was especially touchy.

“Also, do not leave town. I may have more questions for you.”

Brian was about to leave when he turned and asked, “By the way, we are trying to locate Mr. Wingate’s next of kin. Can you help us with that?”

Jason eyed the detective for a moment “No. Charles did not have any family. His parents died years ago and he was an only child.”

“Then, he never married nor had any children?” Detective Russell questioned.

“No. Not to my knowledge.” Jason added after thinking for a second.

With that, Detective Russell left. He had gotten nowhere. No one knew or saw anything; at least, nobody was telling him anything. This was the part of the job that he liked the most. He could sense that there was something that he was missing. He would figure it out. He always did.

Brian decided to take his lunch break, and then headed over to Charles Wingate’s home to search for answers. When he pulled into the driveway, the sight of the estate took his breath away. The ranch was magnificent. He drove the half mile of the willow lined drive to the home and got out. Stretching his legs, he got out and walked to the front door.

Before he could ring the door bell a petite woman appeared. She was clearly the maid; her black and white starched uniform gave her away.

“I am Detective Russell from the HPD. I ‘m sure you have heard that Charles Wingate was found

murdered in his office early this morning. I would like to ask you a few questions if you have a moment.” The maid stood at the door for a moment eyeing the handsome detective. With a look of resignation she said, “Questioning me will not be necessary.” Detective Russell eyed her intently and he had a feeling that she knew exactly what he was looking for. Introducing herself as Maria, she invited him in and gestured for him to have a seat. She quickly disappeared from the room.

So, this is how the other half live, he thought, as he sank into the velvety overstuffed couch. The maid returned with two glasses of iced tea.

She took a seat directly across from him after serving him the iced tea.

“I believe I have information that will help.” It was as if a weight had been lifted off of her small shoulders as she continued to speak. “For twenty five years I have taken care of his home and personal affairs and through the years I have also kept his secrets. Although I never agreed with keeping her away, Charles has...I mean had a daughter who would be his next of kin.”

He digested the news as she started talking again.

“However, despite me telling him to go meet his only child, Charles had never met his daughter. He never even laid eyes on her. Although he wanted to, he had a constant fear that his money would make her a target, and she would be in danger. The decision was made twelve years ago, when he told me that it would be best to never contact her. But he knew that he need to find someone to leave his company to in the event of his death. He knew that we all have to go sooner or later and he was a man who liked to always be prepared. It became a huge quest for him. He was obsessed with searching for the perfect person who could run his business in his absence and after a while he found Jason Turner.”

Brian thought it odd that a maid would be privy to Charles Wingate’s affairs and his secrets, especially one as large as this.

She has been with him for twenty five years though, he told himself but something about it struck him odd.

“You said secrets, as if there were more than one.” Brian chided. “Is there anything else that would help our investigation?”

Maria looked like the cat that ate the canary. “No, nothing that would pertain to your investigation but it may make a good novel someday.” Brian could not suppress a chuckle but quickly regained his composure.

“What led him to decide to never contact his daughter? It makes no sense to come to that decision with no reasoning behind it.”

“Her mother was the victim of a robbery. She died as a result of it. Before that, Charles was going to contact his daughter when she turned eighteen, but after the incident, he decided to not contact her at all. He thought long and hard about reaching out to her after her mother’s death, but decided that the pain and shock of losing her mother would be too much for anyone to bear, and the addition of a father who had come out of nowhere might be an even bigger shock. Especially when the father was a target of sorts thank to his wealth. He did not want to add any additional trauma to her life by showing up out of the blue. Like I said before, I did not agree with it but he was a stubborn man. He lived his life the way he saw fit and no one could tell him any different.”

“Do you have any information on her? Any way to contact her?” he asked. She reached into her pocket and removed a small piece of paper. Detective Russell looked down at the paper. Cheyenne Wingate was her name. “Can you tell me if Mr. Wingate had any enemies? Anyone who may have wanted to see serious harm done to him?” he asked.

“The only enemies Charles had were home grown. He had been receiving threats for the past year, but ignored them. I always thought that Jason Turner had something to do with the threats.” She said as she sipped her tea.

“What type of threats?” He asked.

She hesitated for a moment before answering. “Run of the mill threats, I guess. He was never

really specific about them.” After a few more inconsequential comments, Detective Brian Russell thanked her for her help and walked toward the door.

He swung his truck around in the elegant drive and headed for the office. He knew the Chief would not be happy with his progress. He was not too happy with his own progress. Grabbing a cup of coffee he walked to the Chiefs door; he was still thinking to himself before taking a drink of the stale coffee and made a face as the taste hit him.

“Great, spend half the morning trying to decipher a crime scene and no one had the decency to brew a fresh pot of coffee,” He grumbled to himself.

The Chief did not look pleased as he hung up the phone. “Russell, please tell me you have something. The mayor is breathing down my neck on this,” The older man exclaimed as he popped two aspirins in his mouth.

Detective Russell informed him of all the current developments, some of which made the Chief’s eyebrows rise up in wonder, and then he broached the subject of Charles Wingate’s daughter.

“I feel like she should be notified in person. I could drive there and be back before my next shift. I think she might be instrumental in piecing this together,” he said as he took another drink of the stale coffee. “I would like to run a check on her before leaving though. The maid said that her mother had been murdered and you know how I am. I like to know the answers before I ask the questions.” The Chief gave a knowing nod as Brian left the office to get to work.

Hmmm...five foot five, one hundred and thirty pounds, blonde hair and green eyes. No speeding tickets, no record criminal record. Cheyenne Wingate was squeaky clean; however, her mother’s criminal history was littered with petty crimes. According to the report, she had moved over fifty times during Cheyenne’s childhood. Her murder case was still unresolved but had been classified cold in the last five years. Something caught the curious detective’s eye. Cheyenne apparently had a younger brother. He was stunned that the maid, who seemed to know everything about everyone, had failed to mention him. Feeling confident with the amount of information he was able to gather, Brian tied

up his loose ends at the office and left to find Cheyenne Wingate.

Brian Russell was a loner. At thirty-four, he was on track to advance in his career, which was all that he had at this point. He had no family to speak of and preferred it like that. In his line of work, he figured the less collateral damage the better. He could do his job freely without worrying about anyone else. His last relationship had been six years before and did not miss the constant pull to leave the force. Not many women could handle the stress that comes with a job such as his. He was content with the solitude of his life and planned to keep it that way.

Detective Russell arrived in Slidell, Louisiana, right at three o'clock. He quickly found her address. Looking down, he noticed that his knuckles had turned white against the pressure of his grip in the steering wheel and his stomach was doing somersaults. He realized that within the next few minutes he would be unraveling this poor woman's life. Any stability she had known previously would be gone. With words that would cut like a knife, he would inform her of her father's death. He would take something away from her that she never even had. Brian Russell searched in vain for a delicate way to tell her. Deciding that sticking to the facts was the only way to go, he exited the truck and approached the front door. He knocked on the screen door and waited for a response from inside. Movement out of the corner of his eye caught his attention. He saw her at the barn and walked back toward his truck to get a better view.

Cheyenne Wingate was at the barn saddling her favorite horse when he first saw her. He watched as she swung onto the back of the paint pony and tore out across the field, clearly loving the feel of sheer power between her legs. The freedom that came with riding complemented her. It looked as though it would help anyone forget their troubles, temporarily at least. She did not seem to have a care in the world when she was on his back. Detective Russell watched in amazement. She was the most beautiful creature he had ever seen. Temporarily forgetting his grim duty, he absorbed the sight of her in her natural environment. Her long hair was pulled through the back of her cap and bounced down her back as she rode with wild abandon. He could tell that she was an experienced horsewoman. The sight of seeing her astride this large beast turned him on. He had not felt this type of a stir in his body for quite

a while. *Focus Brian! You aren't here for a sightseeing trip, you have to inform this poor girl that her father has been murdered, he coached himself.*

Cheyenne and her horse galloped through the gate toward him. She slowed her pony to a trot as she approached the stranger. He was about six foot tall and definitely wore his Stetson well. As she got closer, her brow furrowed and it was clear that he had piqued her curiosity. His boots were scuffed but that only added to his rugged charm. She slid to a stop in front of him and asked, "Can I help you with something?" Her accent drove him wild. It was a mix of a sexy southern drawl with just a hint of Cajun dialect.

"I am a detective from the Houston Police Department. My name is Brian Russell." Cheyenne looked perplexed. He was sure that her mind was reeling and he wanted to calm her fears, but he was at a loss for words as he was confronted head on with her stunning beauty as she stood in front of him.

"What can I do for you?" she asked cautiously. Russell started out slowly and chose his words carefully.

"I come bearing bad news. I was called to the scene of a homicide this morning."

As he spoke he noticed her blonde flowing hair, falling in loose ringlets down her back now that she had taken her cap off. The smell of sweet pea lotion in the air drove his imagination wild and he could imagine how soft her skin would be against his calloused palms.

"Did you know a man named Charles Wingate?"

Cheyenne shifted in the saddle in stunned silence as the blood appeared to drain from her face.

"Detective, I have never seen my father. Of course I know the name, but that is where my knowledge stops. I am sorry but I don't know what I can do for you. I have not even heard his name spoken aloud in over fifteen years. To be honest with you, I could have gone another fifteen without hearing it."

"He was the victim of the homicide this morning." Detective Russell said.

He watched her features closely to see any glimpse of loss forming and realized that he was not going to find any sympathy from Cheyenne.

“My mother told me that he left us before I was born and he never looked back. After my mother died when I was eighteen, I always hoped that he would come for me, save me.” Her voice trailed off.

“My mom left me penniless with a little brother to try and raise, but I couldn’t handle it. After six months I had to send him to live with my mother’s best friend Edna, who adopted him. I found a job as a floral assistant and have been there every since. If you are watching to see if I suddenly develop a sense of longing for the father I never knew, you will be disappointed. Can you tell me what happened to him, Detective?” She asked as she dismounted her horse.

“He is being autopsied in the morning so we should have more answers when it is complete, but I can tell you what I do know, Miss. Wingate. I was called out this morning around four- thirty to the scene. I found your father slumped over his desk with a single gunshot wound to his right temple. I have interviewed everyone at his company and no one seems to know anything.”

“What company are you talking about?” She asked with curiosity in her voice.

“Miss. Wingate, your fathers was one of the wealthiest men in Houston. He owned Wingate Drilling.” he explained. “As soon as you can, I would suggest you come to Houston. You have a lot of affairs to handle and it would be much easier to do with you there. You can even ride with me.” Brian Russell stated. “I will call Maria and let her know that we will be on our way if you would like for me to do so,” he offered. “Who is Maria?” she questioned.

“I’m sorry. Maria has been his maid for the past twenty five years. I got the impression that she runs the house. Would you like for me to call her?” he asked again. Cheyenne looked perplexed for a moment.

“Miss Wingate, I don’t mean to rush you but Houston is a long drive. Will you come with me?” he asked in his most understanding tone.

“Detective Russell, I see no reason to lie to you. I feel like I need to go with you, but I don’t like the idea of riding with someone I have only just met. At the same time, I don’t feel like I have a choice. My truck is not dependable enough to make the trip alone. Also, part of me resents the hell out of having to take care of his affairs. He never bothered to take care of me!”

“I understand your reservations but I can assure you that you will not find someone safer and more reliable than me.” He replied with confidence.

“As for your last concern, I can’t answer to that. I can only sympathize with what you have been through.” Her honesty was refreshing but Brian knew that there was much more that she wasn’t saying. Anyone who carried the pain and resentment that was evident upon her face did not walk away without some scars.

“That would be helpful. We can leave right away.” she said as she walked inside to pack her bags.

Brian waited on her front porch for her return. She did not take long, which surprised him. Most women he knew would have taken forever to get packed and back out of the door. As she locked the front door, he began loading her bags in his truck. Once she stabled her horse, they were on their way. The detective called Maria, and they were expected later that evening. Brian watched her closely as they drove out of Slidell. Studying her, he learned several things rather quickly. The trip to her father’s was evoking strong emotions. As she sat in the passenger seat, she bounced her leg nervously while she chewed on her bottom lip. Her lifelong expectations for meeting her father were not being realized it seemed. And through the short time he had known her; it was obvious that life for Cheyenne Wingate had not been an easy one.

“Over the next few days, you are going to come across people who believed that your father hung the moon. Have you thought about how you would deal with that?”

“Detective Russell, throughout my life I have been disappointed many times. Some have been worse than others. My mother was an alcoholic with many boyfriends. Some were nice to me and some

weren't. Many nights I lay awake and wondered if my life would have been different if he were in it. Someone has taken that from me and now I will never know. I honestly don't know what kind of person he was. But, even if he was the best person in the world, how would that matter to me? He chose to never be anything in my life. To make a long story short, I guess that I would handle it like I have handled everything else in my life. I will smile and act as though it does not affect me. In a nutshell, I don't give a shit what other people thought of him. Their opinions will never change what I know about him."

Brian knew that it was hard to learn about a person by looks alone, but he also knew that he was a good judge of character. He had been trained to make assumptions and his talent had not failed him yet. His gut told him that the beautiful women that rode beside him had been badly hurt and it would take a long time for her to get over it.

Chapter Two

The interior of the truck was immaculate. As he turned the key, the diesel engine sprang to life. Every compartment of the buckskin interior was neatly packed with items a man may need at a moment's notice. Ear plugs, safety manuals and even a small tool set stood at the ready on the minuscule chance that they would be needed. Brian noticed Cheyenne taking in her surroundings as though she was surprised at his organization. For him, law and order went hand in hand.

The scenery passed by the windows of the large truck as if it were movie clips of a forgotten time. The crumbling buildings that adorned Main Street lent a charm of days gone by that could have only been pulled off by this small bayou town. Cheyenne's smooth voice jarred him back to reality.

"If you wouldn't mind stopping at the drive in on the right, I would appreciate it. I am thirsty," she requested as she nervously toyed with the fray of her leather purse. "A drink does sound good, what will you have?" Brian asked with a slight smile forming at the edges of his plump lips.

"I believe I will have a large sweet tea," she added.

They were back on the road quickly. The view changed little the farther west they went. It wasn't until they drove into Beaumont that the landscape took on a city like feel. As they passed the many restaurants and business scattered along I-10, Brian began looking at Cheyenne more closely. She looked as though she had never been this far west before. When he heard her gasp as they passed the sign for Spindletop, he knew that he had been right. As they rode on, his mood turned serious. He thought about the case and the menagerie of people who could easily be considered suspects. When you are firmly at the top, as Charles Wingate had been, your enemies can come from any direction.

"Detective Russell, what was he like?" Cheyenne asked, sounding like a child. Brian wanted to

scoop her up and protect her from the tirade he was sure she was about to encounter. Knowing that everyone was going to want a piece of her made his blood boil.

“Cheyenne,” he started, “I did not know your father. All I can tell you is that he was a powerful and wealthy man. Aside from that, you could Google him and know as much as I do.” Miles crept by and Cheyenne said nothing else. The ride was passing too quickly for Brian’s taste. Cheyenne Wingate was like a puzzle that was just coming together.

Being guarded with her emotions must have been a result of the distrust she had for men, he reasoned. She now lay asleep in the truck next to him, her head resting on the console as the radio hummed a slow country ballad.

This must have all been a shock to her. She was not the customary definition of a grieving daughter but in the end, how could she be? Charles Wingate had never bothered to so much as meet her. Brian could see the lights of Houston ahead. Struggling internally, he wanted to touch her...needed to touch her. Brian had never experienced a pull like this. He reached over and brushed a stray curl from Cheyenne’s cheek. He had never been so forward with a woman he had just met but he could not help himself. The urgent feeling to save her had overcome him the first moment he laid eyes on her. She stirred slightly and slowly opened her eyes.

“We are almost there,” Brian said as he changed lanes to take their exit. Cheyenne eyed her surroundings and turned her head as the lights of the city faded and they turned into a country lane. The truck began to slow down and a sprawling ranch style estate came into view. Brian watched as a scowl came across her face. He could only imagine the feelings that must be coursing through her. From what he had learned, Cheyenne did not have the best childhood. Her mother had bounced from one con game to another with a different man each week. Now, to learn that she had a wealthy father only hours away must have really pissed her off.

Brian pulled up to the security box and pressed the button, “Detective Russell with Miss. Wingate.” The gates jarred open within a moment and he drove through. Cheyenne sat in silence. Brian

parked and came around to open her door. It was obvious to him that she was not used to chivalry by the shocked look on her face. He helped her from the truck as she timidly took his hand and walked her to the front door. Once again, Maria opened the door before he could ring the bell. She instantly lost all color in her face.

“*Oh mi dulce Jesús los muertos ha aumentado,*” she exclaimed.

Brian noticed that Cheyenne looked confused and assumed she did not understand Spanish. “The dead has risen.” He thought that sounded like an odd statement to make.

He was about to make introductions, when Maria interrupted him, “I would know this lovely face anywhere. Cheyenne, I have heard of you for many years. Welcome home,” exclaimed Maria in a thick accent. Brian excused himself and returned with her bags.

“Oh, please forgive me, come in, come in. *Señor*, please set Miss. Cheyenne’s bags here and we will take them to her room in a bit,” said Maria as kept eye contact with the new house guest.

“Cheyenne, I have a wonderful meal prepared for you, and if Detective Russell will agree to join us, we can be seated in the dining room,” Maria said. He nodded his head in agreement and they followed Maria to the formal dining room. There, laid out on a lovely antique table was a feast. Tamales, enchiladas and fajita’s graced the large table.

“Maria, you didn’t have to trouble yourself. This must have taken all evening,” Cheyenne declared.

“It is nothing. I have dreamed of your homecoming for years and wanted to make it a celebration.”

Brian Russell did not have to be asked twice. He eagerly sat at the table and began passing plates of food around. After eating, Maria showed them to the poolside deck as she went to the kitchen for coffee.

“Are you holding up ok, Cheyenne?” asked Brian. His concern for her was genuine and not unwelcomed it appeared.

“I am taking it in stride and I am really happy you are here with me. I know you must have better things to do but I want you to know that I do appreciate it,” she confided in him.

Maria returned with their coffee and they all sat and sipped the hot liquid while enjoying the fire pit blazing against the darkness.

Brian stole glances at Cheyenne in the firelight. The light flickering off of her golden hair gave the illusion of a phoenix coming to life. It complimented her delicate, yet strong features. Brian knew he was blurring his professional lines but he was powerless to stop himself from fantasizing.

Cheyenne yawned suddenly, covering her mouth with her hand. Brian looked down at his watch and realized that it was almost ten o'clock.

“Ladies, it is getting late and I'm sure Cheyenne would like to get a good night's sleep. Tomorrow will be a long day,” he said as he rose from his chair. As he set his cup on the table Cheyenne caught his eye. She was looking up at him with a pleading stare. He had only known this woman less than twenty four hours and she already pulled at his heart strings.

“Maria, would you mind if I spoke to Cheyenne in private?” he asked as Maria busied herself gathering the coffee cups.

“I will be inside,” said Maria as she excused herself.

“I feel very presumptuous even asking this, but will you please take me with you and drop me at a hotel?” Cheyenne asked. “I just don't feel very comfortable staying here,” she added.

“Cheyenne, you have to face this sooner or later. Of course, I'll take you anywhere you would like to go, but if I were you I would stay here. Maria seems nice enough and this is a beautiful house.” he said compassionately.

“I understand...I just feel uncomfortable. This has been a lot to process. Will I see you tomorrow?” she inquired.

“I will see you tomorrow after the autopsy has been completed. This is my business card. It has my cell number and I want you to call me anytime you need to,” he said as he handed her the card. He felt torn leaving her here, but he knew he needed to keep a professional distance. After exchanging good nights, he left and Cheyenne trudged inside only to be met at the door by Maria.

“Did the nice detective leave already?” she asked as though she did not already know the answer. Cheyenne suddenly felt the need to justify her conversation with Brian. Knowing that Maria had been eavesdropping unnerved her.

“Yes, he is gone. I don’t mean to sound ungrateful for your hospitality, but why were you eavesdropping?” Cheyenne said as she walked past the small women and sat in the living room. Maria came to sit beside her. Placing her hand on the young woman’s knee she started,

“I know this cannot be easy but you always have a home here. Your father would have loved nothing more than for you to be under this roof.” Cheyenne interrupted,

“Then why did he die without ever meeting me. I was his flesh and blood but yet he didn’t even know me. I don’t mean to be rude but I don’t feel comfortable here and I’m not sure that I ever will. This was his world and he never care to include me in it while he was alive. Now, I feel like an intruder since he is dead.”

She instantly regretted being so harsh with the older woman, but she felt it necessary. “You still have not answered my question. Why were you eavesdropping?”

“Cheyenne, the walls in this house are thin and I have heard many things I should not have. I wouldn’t call it eavesdropping; I have always felt it was my job to know what goes on here.” Maria’s simple statement did nothing to comfort Cheyenne.

“It is uncomfortable for me to know that you are doing your job so well. In the future, when I need privacy, please make sure that I get it. I think I need to go to bed. Maybe a good night’s sleep is what I need.” She rose from the couch and began walking toward the stairs without knowing where she was going. Maria scrambled ahead of her to lead the way.

Maria showed her the room she would sleep in. “I should have told you this earlier, but tomorrow morning Mr. Crowley along with Jason Turner will arrive around nine for the reading of your fathers

will,” Maria stated as she pulled back the covers on the large rustic bed.

“Who are Mr. Crowley and Jason Turner?” Cheyenne asked.

“Mr. Crowley was a life-long friend of your fathers as well as his attorney and Jason Turner was a young man your father took under his wing about twelve years ago,” she answered. Cheyenne returned from the bathroom after changing clothes and climbed into bed. Obviously without thinking, Maria began tucking her into bed as though she was a young child. Cheyenne noticed, but said nothing.

“Why are they reading the will so quickly? The autopsy will not even be finished until tomorrow,” Cheyenne said.

“Well Mr. Crowley is the executor of Charles’s estate and he felt as though your father would have wanted everything to be wrapped up quickly. He never was one to doddle around,” She patted Cheyenne’s leg, signaling her to move over in the bed. Maria climbed up and sat on the edge with her feet dangling over the side. Cheyenne offered her a pillow to prop herself on while she spoke.

“I would like to explain a few things to you about your father. The first is why he didn’t meet you. Charles made an agreement with your mother that he would not contact you until you turned eighteen. Unfortunately, two days before your 18th birthday your mother passed away. He did not feel as though you would believe that he stayed away for all those years at your mom’s request, especially without her there to explain why she asked him to. Charles was grief stricken when he made the decision to never contact you. It was almost as if you died and not your mom. You had just lost your mother and he did not want to add to your misery by suddenly intruding into your life. He of course had Wingate Drilling and he wanted to make sure that it would be left in good hands so he began grooming Jason to eventually take over. He never gave up on you, he just did not want to make your life harder than it needed to be.”

“Did he not realize the predicament I was in? My mother passes away and left my younger brother for me to raise. I was destitute and alone. If there had ever been a time a girl needed her father, I think that was it. I stood by myself during her burial and watched as they lowered her body into the

ground. There was no one there for me to lean on or talk to. I would never have asked him for anything except his support and love. But, it makes no sense that my mom would ask him to stay away. What motive could she have had?"

"We never knew you had a brother. How old was he?" Maria asked.

"He was eleven when she passed. After about six months, I realized I could not take care of him myself so I sent him to live with my mother's best friend. It was a hard decision but I did not know how to be a mom, big sister and care giver all at the same time. She eventually adopted him and raised him as her own," Cheyenne said.

"Are you still in contact with your brother?" Maria asked.

"Yes, I speak to Matthew often. He has been in the Marine Corps for a while now and is stationed at Camp LeJeune. My little brother has really turned out well," Cheyenne said as she started to nestle into the comfortable bed. Maria took that as a signal to let Cheyenne rest.

"I can only tell you what your father relayed to me. Apparently your mom asked him to stay away to protect you. Charles had enemies earlier in his career and neither one of them wanted any of that to affect you." Maria paused for a breath and Cheyenne noticed how haggard the older woman looked. Her eyes were downcast and Cheyenne could see a hint of sadness in her wrinkled eyes.

"I will see you in the morning," said Maria as she turned out the lights and pulled the door shut. Cheyenne lay there quietly for a while. She had never had the best mother and could believe that she had asked her father to stay away. Now with both of her parents gone, she knew that she would never know the answer to that question. It would burn her for years to come but she would have to live with the fact that there would always be questions unanswered.

Part of her wanted so badly to believe what Maria had said and another part of her couldn't. She mulled everything over in her mind until she couldn't think clearly. Many things that Maria had said throughout the evening had raised red flags for Cheyenne. The first comment that had sparked interest was

Maria saying that she would know her face anywhere. Cheyenne assumed that her father had never seen her. If that was the case, then how would Maria have known what she looked like? That, coupled with the fact that Maria looked so familiar gave Cheyenne pause.

Also, what had Maria meant when she stated that “they” didn’t know that she had a brother? Who was “they” and why would they have cared about Matthew? Cheyenne thought it odd of herself to nitpick this woman and point out her discrepancies but she also knew that her stress level was high.

But, for all the mystery surrounding Maria and her odd comments, there was a bright point of the afternoon. Detective Brian Russell definitely piqued her interest. Cheyenne was not looking for a relationship and had not been with a man in years but he was someone who could make a nun think twice about her vows. As she drifted off to sleep she hoped tomorrow would be a new day.

Chapter Four

Cheyenne opened her eyes just before six the next morning. Already smelling coffee and waffles wafting up the stairs, she slipped in the robe that had been laid out on the dressing chair and walked downstairs. Her surrounding made her feel like a princess and she enjoyed the comfort of her room, even if it was temporary. Walking down the stairs, she thought back to her favorite book, *Gone With the Wind*. She imagined herself being Scarlet O'Hara, descending down the large staircase and walking into the arms of Rhett Butler. Of course, Rhett was Detective Russell in her daydream. Her daydream was interrupted by Maria.

“Good morning, Cheyenne,” Maria chirped, as she continued pouring coffee.

“I am going to look around while you finish breakfast, if that is okay,” Cheyenne stated. Maria simply nodded her head.

Walking into the living room, she noticed the simplicity of the furniture. It was all more than comfortable, but did not look exceptionally high end. The large bay windows let in the perfect amount of light to complement the sparse artwork that hung on the log walls. However, everything was immaculately kept and extremely clean and looked as though it had jumped right off the pages of *Modern Woodsman* magazine. The handcrafting was exceptional but was still simple and unimposing. Cheyenne took a mental note that there were no photographs displayed anywhere in the house. The theme of the living room carried through the entire downstairs as far as she could see. This was not just a house, it was a home. It was obvious that every detail had been thought out.

“Breakfast is ready,” Maria called from the kitchen.

Cheyenne loved exploring but knew that the rest would have to wait for later as the coffee and waffles were too much to resist.

After breakfast Cheyenne went back upstairs to get dressed for the will reading. Not knowing how to dress, she threw on casual clothing from her unpacked bag and tried to do something with her hair. Since childhood, her hair had been a source of embarrassment for her. Always overly curly, it seemed to have a mind of its own. She decided to pull it into a simply pony tail and went back down stairs.

The first to arrive was Ed Crowley. Maria met him at the door and exchanged a knowing glance with him before introducing him to Cheyenne.

“Well, I’m glad I have finally had the chance to meet you,” he said as he pulled her to him into a big bear hug. Ed was a short, well dressed man with a pleasant demeanor. The fact that he was soft spoken and outgoing were two qualities Cheyenne noticed right away about him. He was the type of man she could fondly adopt as an uncle, although he was of no relation. Cheyenne quickly realized that for the first time since arriving, she had let her guard down but one thing bothered her.

“How long have you known about me, Mr. Crowley?” Cheyenne asked, immediately regretting the question. “I only ask because I get the distinct feeling that you and Maria both knew about me.”

“You are right. We have known about you for years. We were the only two who knew about you though. Charles was proud of the young woman you turned into and never missed an opportunity to brag.” Ed replied with a hint of pride in his voice. The pride confused Cheyenne.

“Cheyenne, your father has been watching over you for most of your life. After your mother passed he held back but before then, he was watching. “He used to send Maria in to buy flowers from you while you worked at the floral shop after she passed.” Alarm spread through his face as he realized his slip.

“Ed, why don’t we let Cheyenne rest while we wait on Jason?” Maria hissed as she guided Cheyenne to a nearby chair. Cheyenne shrugged the older woman off and stepped back to Ed.

“What do you mean, he sent Maria in to buy flowers?” Cheyenne demanded with her hands on her

hips. “Had he ever seen me for himself?” She demanded with her hand on her hip.

“We should probably save this discussion for a more appropriate time.” The elderly gentleman implored as he walked off in the direction of the kitchen.

Cheyenne decided to let it go for now, but wondered why Maria had not mentioned last night that she had been sent to look in on Cheyenne from time to time.

As nine o’clock came and went there was still no sign of Jason Turner.

“It’s just like him to be late. He has no respect,” claimed Maria. This was the first clue Cheyenne had heard that Maria disliked Jason. By nine-forty five Ed Crowley began to grumble about Jason’s absence. Finally, at ten, a vehicle blasting loud music swung into the drive. Cheyenne watched as the driver pulled his Mercedes onto the manicured grass and stepped from the car. Jason was late for the will reading but Cheyenne could tell from his body language that he knew they would not start without him. He sauntered into the living room. Maria gave him a disgusted look as he passed her. It was now more evident than ever that she did not care for him, even hated him at times. No part of him seemed to care about her feelings one way or the other. His eyes settled on Cheyenne sitting in the corner. He looked her up and down and finally tipped his hat to her. She was not impressed with his bravado.

“I’m Jason Turner,” he announced to her.

Cheyenne took his presence in. He was a handsome man but his demeanor was a turn off. She could tell that this man was full of himself in the worst way possible.

“I’m Cheyenne,” she stated flatly with down cast eyes. Before Jason could continue, Ed Crowley cleared his throat in an attempt to acquire everyone’s attention.

“I would like to start out by saying that this is a very somber task for me. My dearest friend has had his life stolen and we are here to witness his last will and testament. Charles recorded his will by video and I would like to play that for you now.”

The lights were turned out and a television screen above the fireplace came on. Suddenly,

Cheyenne came face to face with her father. He appeared bigger than life, just as she had always thought that he would. They looked similar and even had the same color eyes. She would like to have thought that she would have recognized him had she ever passed him on the street.

“This is my last will and testament,” his voice echoed through the large office. It was a strong voice and not one to be ignored. “If you are watching this, it can’t be good news for me,” he joked. “Seriously though, I’ve been blessed with a wonderful life and I would like, at this time, to share my good fortune. To Maria, who has been a wonderful employee and friend, I leave my vacation home on Galveston Island. I hope you enjoy it as much as I always did. To Jason, who has been like a son to me for the past twelve years I leave forty-nine percent of Wingate Drilling. And finally, to my beloved Cheyenne,” he started.

Jason sat confused. The most horrible look came upon his face as though he had been tricked. Mr. Crowley noticed and paused the video.

“Jason, do you need a minute?” Mr. Crowley asked. Jason shook his head as though he were in shock. Mr. Crowley pressed play and the video resumed.

“I never got to meet you. You could call it cowardice but I truly was respecting your mother’s wishes. I can never make up for missing your entire life but I would like to try. I am leaving you everything else that I own in this world including a controlling share of fifty-one percent of Wingate Drilling. I hope that this eases your burden and you can bring yourself to forgive me one day. I have wanted my whole life to speak these words to you, I love you. Please take care of yourself and always remember that I you have never been far from my thoughts or prayers.”

The video ended and everyone sat stunned. A single tear streaked Cheyenne’s face. Jason jumped from his chair, clearly upset.

“Who was Cheyenne to Charles?” he demanded, pointing his finger at Ed Crowley. Ed did not know what to say at this sudden onslaught.

Maria shrieked, “She is his daughter you selfish man. For all of your brownnosing and conniving, this is what you deserve!”

It was obvious that she had been waiting years to explode on Jason. The arrogant man appeared stunned and Cheyenne could see it. She studied his face, trying in vain to figure out his thoughts.

“How could this happen? I have known Charles for twelve years and he had never mentioned a daughter. I did not know Charles had any living relatives. I want a blood test, immediately!” he demanded.

“That won’t be necessary, Jason. Can’t you look at her and see Charles?” Ed stated, gesturing toward Cheyenne. Jason quieted down and studied Cheyenne for a moment. The look of dismay on his face revealed that he knew she was Charles Wingate’s daughter.

“Forgive me, Cheyenne. It comes as quite a shock that Charles has....I mean had a daughter,” he conceded.

Cheyenne eyed him stubbornly. “Forgive you?” she questioned. “What should I forgive you for? Making a scene at my expense, insinuating that I am not who I claim to be, or just plain making an ass of yourself?” she demanded as she silently dared him to look away.

“Please forgive me for all of it,” he said.

Cheyenne nodded and walked from the room. She needed fresh air to clear her mind.

Maria started to follow her but Ed reached out and took her hand, signaling her to give Cheyenne a moment alone.

Outside, she walked toward the horse stables. She knew that if there were anything on earth that would settle her nerves, this would be it. The smell of hay and horse feed instantly calmed her. The first stall she came to had a beautiful stud horse inside. He was solid white and had a black star on his forehead. He moved his head toward her outreached hand and she began stroking him. His soft nose felt like silk against her palm. “You’re such a pretty boy,” Cheyenne cooed. She breathed deeply, savoring

the familiar scent of dry hay lining the stalls. As the animal nuzzled her palm, she sighed.

“Do you talk as nice to people as you do to animals?” a voice interrupted her thoughts from behind. She quickly turned to see Jason standing there.

“Animals don’t talk back,” she replied. Jason was at her side before she knew it. He gently grabbed her arm and turned her toward him.

“Cheyenne, I was completely out of line. Call it shock if you want, but I apologize. I thought I knew Charles, and was hurt that in twelve years he never told me about you.”

“I guess your lack of inheritance had nothing to do with your outburst,” she added.

“Well, I’ve got to admit that I was shocked. Charles and I had many conversations about his will and this was not what we discussed. It was his money to leave as he saw fit though, so I won’t complain. You and I need to be able to get along seeing as how we both own part of the same company,” he replied.

“Yes,” Cheyenne agreed. Jason was still holding onto Cheyenne and the feeling made her heart race. She looked down at his fingers laced around her arm. His other hand gently lifted her chin until she was looking in his eyes. Cheyenne’s lips began to tremble. She cursed herself for what she was about to do. As the tears began to slip down her cheeks, Jason looked at her in horror. It was clear that he did not know what to do. His sensitive side seemed to win out and he put his arms around her. Her body shook with sobs. He held her tighter. Her head rested right underneath his chin. He gently kissed the top of her head and inhaled the intoxicating smell of her hair. She had finally stopped crying and strangely she didn’t move. Her body seemed to exhale and snuggle deeper into his embrace. She enjoyed his masculine aroma. His muscles rippled against her cheek and she was calmed by the steady beating of his heart. Grief did strange things to people. She raised her head to look at him and instinctively he kissed her lips. So soft was the kiss, that it took her breath away.

Turning away blushing, she mumbled, “I’m sorry,” and moved toward the horse stall.

“Sorry for what? For grieving or needing a shoulder to cry on?” he asked.

“Just sorry. I don’t know what I’m doing right now,” she said. She was not really attracted to this man and she knew it but she had needed comfort and had no other alternative at the moment. Her emotions were so raw after viewing the video that her inheritance had still not registered. Knowing that she needed to get away from Jason before she did something she would regret, she began walking out of the stable. With that, Cheyenne walked toward the house.

When she walked through the front door, no one was in the living room. She wanted to be by herself for a while so she decided to take a nap upstairs. It was only noon, but she felt like she could barely keep her eyes open. Once upstairs, she crawled into the bed and melted into the soft mattress. Only moments past before she was sleeping peacefully.

Chapter Five

Cheyenne was awakened by her cell phone sharply ringing. “Hello,” she answered while wiping her tired eyes. It felt like she had only been asleep for minutes but it was already three o’clock in the evening.

“Cheyenne, this is Detective Russell. I’m sorry to wake you up,” he said.

“It’s okay. I needed to get up from my nap. I have had a long day already,” Cheyenne confessed.

“I wanted to call and see if it was a good time to come speak with you. Your father’s autopsy is complete and I wanted to go over a few details with you,” he explained.

“Sure, you can come over now,” she said. She hopped out of bed and quickly changed clothes. She donned a pair of riding pants and white linen shirt and pulled on her riding boots. After sweeping her long hair into a neat ponytail she went downstairs. Cheyenne could not explain her excitement to see the handsome detective again. She rarely allowed her temperature to rise when it came to men but this one seemed different. There was a marked difference in her demeanor and a spring in her step. She bound

down the stairs two at a time as though it were Christmas morning. Maria was sitting on the couch next to Mr. Crowley.

“Is Mr. Turner still here?” Cheyenne asked nonchalantly. “Yes, he is by the pool. Hopefully, he will spend less time here after today,” said Maria.

Cheyenne did not know what had caused the conflict between Maria and Jason but it seemed to run pretty deep. It sparked her curiosity that Ed never had anything to say when Maria was going after Jason. She mentally chalked it up to him being diplomatic and turned to go to the kitchen.

“Cheyenne, I have some papers for you to sign,” Ed Crowley motioned her toward him. Cheyenne followed him into the office. Mr. Crowley had a stack of papers for her. His drawn out explanation of each one tried her patience. Just when he seemed to be wrapping it up he produced the final paper.

“I have a feeling this last and final paper will change your life young lady,” he said as he slid it across the desk in front of her. Cheyenne was stunned. The paper in front of her represented five million dollars. Her father had never given her anything except a last name before today. Now, she was a millionaire several times over. But, no matter what he left her, nothing would ever be able to compete with his message to her in his will. The money and possessions made her happy but the video was touching. She had longed for years to hear the words *I love you* from her father. Now, she finally had that. It did not make everything better but it went a long way toward healing her hardened heart.

“Thank you Mr. Crowley for your time and the delicacy with which you handled everything.” she said as she turned to leave the room.

“Can I ask you a question?” She inquired.

“Yes you can young lady.”

“You said earlier this morning that Charles had sent Maria to check in on me after my mother died. Had he ever come himself? Did he ever see me in person?”

“He came a few times. He was at your high school graduation until your mom saw him and

ordered him to leave. That was the last time that he tried. After that, he sent Maria and relied on her to let him know how you were doing.”

“Why would my mom tell him to leave? Was she afraid of me finding out who he was?”

“Well, your mom was convinced that he would bring nothing but danger to your life. The way that I always saw it was that she enjoyed getting a monthly check from your dad but did not want to have to answer to him for her lifestyle. She wanted the best of both worlds. Charles always thought that one day she would come back to him but she never did. He was too patient for too long with her. Toward the end, he realized that he should never have left you with her. A few times that he saw you, he didn't feel like the money he was sending was being used for you. His greatest disappointment came when he realized that you had never had braces. I know that it sounds funny but he sent six thousand dollars for braces that she told him you needed. When he found out that you had never gotten them he realized that she had been milking him for money. It ate him up to wonder if you had gone without because of her. He spent many sleepless nights worrying about you but by the time that he realized all of this, you were already almost seventeen. That is when he decided that when you turned eighteen that he would come for you. He always tried to keep an eye on you and make sure that you had what you needed but your mom made it very difficult.”

If anyone had asked her a week before, she would have said that she would go to her grave without forgiving her father. Now, she was not so sure that she had the resolve to continue to hate him the way she had always done. Her resolve was being chipped away. Saying that she loved him was a stretch at this point, but she would at least admit that she did not hate him any longer.

“I think that I understand what happened Mr. Crowley. I know that my mom was greedy but I had no idea that she was turning me against my dad to hide it. It feels like my entire life has been a lie in one way or another. I know what my mother was; there is no disillusion in my mind where she's concerned. I did love her though and I wish that things could have been different.”

Cheyenne went to the kitchen, found a bottle of wine and poured herself a glass. “Is there another

where that came from,” asked Jason.

“You are going to have to stop sneaking up on me,” Cheyenne laughed nervously.

“Why, it turned out well the last time I did it,” he teased. Cheyenne felt the heat rise to her cheeks. She had hoped he would never mention their earlier encounter. She poured Jason a glass of wine and slid it across the counter. Jason eyed her intently as he turned up the glass and drained the contents in one swallow. She could sense his intentions but had no interest in any type of relationship, not even a one night stand. Her father was not even buried yet and he was hitting on her. His attempt reminded her of an awkward school boy, fumbling for a roll in the hay.

“I think it’s time for you to go Mr. Turner. You may be joking but it’s disgusting that you are hitting on me.” She said as she downed the last of her wine.

“I guess I’ll be leaving now.” Jason stated with a knowing smirk on his handsome face.

Cheyenne decided to go for a ride while she waited for the detective to arrive.

She saddled the stud from earlier, mounted and set off on a gentle trot. Feeling the pent up energy the horse possessed, she nudged him forward as though giving him permission to get it out of his system. The horse sprang forward as if his tail were on fire. The power this animal astonished Cheyenne. He was surely of good blood. His muscles rippled underneath her body as he stretched out, gaining more ground with each extension of his long legs. The black mane flowed down his neck and gently teased Cheyenne’s hands as she held loosely onto the reins. His burst of power came to an end as she pulled him back into an easy canter. She had not warmed him up and knew it was not smart to let him tear around the pasture. As she eased back in the saddle, she noticed how beautiful the property was.

Charles must have put a lot of time and energy into this place, she thought out loud. The stables were so nice and organized. Any piece of tack a person could need was hung up neatly in the back room. She guessed that she must have gotten her love of horses from him.

Without notice, the horse spooked. He broke to the right and side stepped as though he were an

experience barrel horse. His body went rigid underneath her and his gentle gate was replaced with break neck speed that shocked her. Even when she had let him run earlier, he had not been this fast. She was not sure what was happening but was alarmed to say the least. Knowing that she shouldn't panic, she tried her hardest to remain composed and in control. Cheyenne held on and shifted in the saddle to accommodate for the sudden change in direction. Then, she heard it. At first, it seemed like she was imagining the dreaded sound, but after the second loud pop she knew that someone was shooting at her. Ducking low, she hunkered in the saddle and cursed the stiff leather horn that was poking her in the chest. Grabbing the horse's mane, she hugged her body to his as he darted for the stable. It was at least a half mile ride and the shooter had fired three more times.

Worrying that she would not make it to the stable, she nudged him sharply, urging him forward. Another bullet whizzed by but this time it passed too close for comfort. She looked down and noticed blood dripping down her leg into her riding boot.

Have I been shot and just don't feel it yet? She wondered as the horse brought her to safety inside the confines of the stable walls. She hopped down and ran her hand up her leg. Cheyenne found no wound. A sick feeling swept her body. Looking up, she saw the source of the blood. The brave horse that saved her had taken a bullet to the neck. She had no time to find out how deep it had entered as she led him up the walk to the house and hopefully to safety. He didn't seem to be in any discomfort but she knew that he needed vet care. Barging into the house's entryway she yelled for Maria but Detective Russell appeared first.

"What in the world...." He said as he took in the sight in front of him. "Are you hurt?"

"I was in the back pasture and someone was taking shots at me from the tree line. They missed but one of the bullets hit the stud I was riding. I don't know how bad he is hurt but I need to get a vet out here."

Before Cheyenne knew what was happening, Brian darted past her through the door and pulled his weapon. As he ran to his truck, Cheyenne heard him calling for backup. He started the vehicle and drove

quickly down the driveway.

Just then, Maria walked into the room. “I could not help but hear. I called Doc West. He will be here in a few minutes. Which horse was it?” She inquired.

“He’s right here.” Cheyenne said as she held the door open and the horse nudged his head over her shoulder. Maria gasped.

“Cheyenne, you were riding this horse?”

“Yes, I was. Is there a problem?” Cheyenne asked.

“You are lucky that he didn’t kill you. He has not been ridden in over three years and was a rodeo horse that Charles bought to breed. It is not safe to ride him.” Maria explained.

“Did you hear what I said? I was shot at and he saved my life. I don’t care how long it has been since he has been ridden. He did wonderful with me. I would say that I am lucky that whoever was shooting at me did not kill me. How long will it be until the vet gets here?” Cheyenne demanded.

Before Maria could respond, a large Ford truck pulled into the drive way. A stocky older man jumped from the driver’s door and ran to the wounded horse. As he began to work he said, “I am Doc West. Maria said this horse was shot. How did it happen?”

Cheyenne explained what had transpired as Doc began to work on the animal. Shaking his head, he filled the gash with salve, before giving him an injection and began stitching the wound.

“We are lucky, the bullet just grazed him. Flesh wounds on a horse bleed pretty badly though. We just need to watch him for infection for the next week.”

“Doc, aren’t you going to say something to her for riding him?” Maria asked with a knowing look.

“I figure that she is a grown woman and can ride just about anything that she sets her mind to. If she was able to ride him, then I guess he is good with her.” The doctor shot back.

“Thank you Doc.” Cheyenne said gratefully as she rolled her eyes in Maria’s direction.

Maria walked back into the house and shut the door behind her. Cheyenne led the injured horse back to the stall and put the salve Doc had left with her into the tack room.

“That woman is spiteful. Charles was too old to try and ride Blaze, but that did not make the horse unable to be ridden. She pushed him to put the horse down many times. It was almost as if she was jealous of him.” He said.

“Charles fell just short of moving him into the house when he first bought him.” Doc laughed as he ran his hand down the muscular flank, admiring the animal. “He sure is a fine horse.”

After Cheyenne got the horse settled, she changed pants and sat at the table to eat lunch. She was clearly shaken up but was determined to keep her composure. She wouldn't tolerate another break down like she had earlier. Cold cuts and cheese were laid out but Maria was nowhere in sight. Just as she was taking a bite of sandwich there was a knock at the front door.

“Come in!” Cheyenne screamed from the table. Detective Brian Russell entered the room looking as handsome as he had the night before. Today, he wore starched jeans and a button up western shirt. Cheyenne had not had time to notice his appearance earlier during all of the commotion.

“I was just about to have lunch if you would like to join me...” Cheyenne asked hopefully. Brian was stunned, but the thought of sharing a meal with her brightened his day.

“Yea, that's sounds great.”

“Did you find anything?” she asked hopefully. The look on his face told her that he had not.

“Patrolmen are still searching the tree line, but I think that whoever shot at you is long gone. Has anything weird or out of place happened today?” He asked.

“You mean something weirder than someone shooting at me?” Cheyenne exclaimed. The sarcasm was not intended for Brian but his face flinched none the less.

“Every since the will reading this morning I have had an uneasy feeling. I can't explain it but it

is overpowering.”

“It’s way too early to have a will reading. The autopsy isn’t even complete. What are these people thinking? Anyway, what happened at the reading?” he asked, full of concern. Cheyenne recounted the video to Brian as he sat, hanging on her every word.

“Five million?” he questioned.

“That doesn’t sound right. Charles was worth far more than that. Were there any provisions for the rest of the money?” he asked as he pursed his lips together.

“No, but that was not what made me feel on edge,” she explained. “I went to the stable after a confrontation with Jason and he followed me there. I completely lost my composure and he comforted me but I still had the feeling I was being watched,” she stated, making sure to avoid the details of her breakdown. It made her feel weak and vulnerable and that did not set well with her.

“Now that I think about it though, I had the same feeling last night when we spoke on the patio. It was like someone was watching every move I made. I confronted Maria after you left. She actually told me that she felt it was part of her job to eavesdrop. It was bizarre behavior, but I did let her know that I expected privacy.”

“Well, to be honest with you, the chief asked me if I thought you needed a guard. At the time, I told him no, but now, I know that I was wrong. Whoever killed your father is still out there and we don’t know why he was murdered; now you’ve been shot at.” He explained. As he spoke, Cheyenne was mesmerized by his full pink lips. With every word he formed the shape of his lips changed making them pucker occasionally and her imagination ran wild. Realizing what she was doing, she looked away, embarrassed but full of lust.

“If you like, I can take the assignment but it would need to start no later than tomorrow morning.” The thought did not completely throw Cheyenne off. She knew that something about this place gave her the creeps and she would rather be protected than not. The idea of having Brian around

for a while was comforting and even a bit exciting. She had only known him for a little over twenty four hours but she already felt like she had known him a lifetime. The ease with which she could talk to him amazed her. If anyone would have to babysit her she would rather that it be him.

“I think your right Brian and I would prefer if you were assigned to do it.”

“For the night, I will post guards at your door and I will move in tomorrow morning.”

“The results are back from the autopsy. The toxicology report will not be back for a week or so but the physical exam states that the cause of death is from a single gunshot wound to the temple. At least we know that is was from a nine millimeter.”

She took all the information in. Sitting silently, she stared into his eyes. “Do you have any leads?” she inquired.

“None that I am at liberty to discuss at this point, but as soon as I can talk freely about it, you will be the first to know,” he informed her.

Both sat making small talk as they ate their lunch. She enjoyed hearing about his career. Cheyenne noticed how his eyes brightened when he talked about it and she knew that he truly loved it. It was refreshing to see someone enjoy their profession so much. She had never loved her job and it had become a place she was forced to go in order to pay the bills. Now that she had five million dollars, she had not thought much about what she would do for a living. Knowing that the corporate world was not her cup of tea, she was sure that she would not be stepping into her father’s company. Her thoughts were suddenly interrupted by someone coming into the room.

“I hope I’m not interrupting anything.” Ed Crowley said as he shuffled to the table.

“Where have you been Ed?” Cheyenne asked.

“I took a nap in one of the guest rooms. I wanted to speak with you before I left but when I looked up, you were gone.” Ed explained.

“Mr. Crowley, I am Detective Brian Russell with the HPD. Can you have a seat and answer a few questions for me?”

Ed Crowley sat at the dining table and reached for a slice of cheese to snack on as the detective withdrew a worn notepad from his breast pocket.

“Mr. Crowley, what was the purpose of having the will reading so quickly?”

Ed Crowley sat silent for a moment. A look of deep reflection crossed his face as his eyes drew almost shut, squinting at the young detective.

“Charles would have wanted it that way. There was no sense in delaying the proceedings once Cheyenne arrived anyway. Her lack of attendance would have been the only reason to postpone.”

“It just seems rather sudden considering that his autopsy is not even complete.” The detective quipped.

“Charles was an impulsive man Detective Russell. He would have had it no other way.”

Cheyenne contemplated his statement for a while. This man seemed to have known her father well. She felt a fondness for this gentleman even though she had only just met, but she couldn't shake the feeling that there was still so much more to find out.

“Can you get me a copy of the video?” The seasoned detective inquired of the Ed.

“I will have my secretary forward one to the precinct as soon as possible.”

“You can just messenger it here. I will be staying for the foreseeable future. Someone shot at Cheyenne today while she was riding in the front pasture.”

“Oh, my dear,” Charles began as he reached out for her hand. “Are you okay?”

“I am fine Mr. Crowley, just a little shook up. They hit Blaze though. He was just grazed, but he'll be down for a while.”

“I can't imagine who would do such a thing. Detective, I hope you catch the person.” Ed

said compassionately.

“Cheyenne, I will schedule lunch with you at another time. We can sit and talk and get to know each other properly.” He bent and kissed her cheek as he left.

Brian was staring at her when she returned her attention to him. There was no price she could put on the sense of wellbeing she felt when she learned he would be staying with her. Cheyenne knew that Brian was a special man. She had never encountered someone who could put her at ease as quickly as Brian did. Not wanting to be a tired cliché she did not try to convince herself that he was her soul mate, but defiantly someone she was interested in getting to know better.

Cheyenne dreaded informing Maria of the detective’s plans. She would surely have an opinion and Cheyenne was convinced that she wouldn’t like it. The women had already gotten off to a bad start. Maria came off as nosy, opinionated women who had no boundaries if she did not agree with the topic. At times she could be sweet but other times it was obvious she had a hateful streak a mile wide. Cheyenne decided that Maria would just have to understand, after all, this was her home now.

As the evening began to wind down, Brian left and Maria and Cheyenne cleaned from the day of company.

“Cheyenne, this is my job. I can manage by myself,” Maria insisted.

“I have never had anyone wait on me except at a restaurant. I don’t mind helping, it makes me feel useful,” Cheyenne said.

The two women made small talk for a while when Maria said, “I am going out of town tomorrow morning. The house on Galveston Island needs to be opened and I would really like to see it again, since it now belongs to me.”

Cheyenne was excited. Now, she didn’t have to explain Brian’s presence and the thought of having the whole house to their selves gave her butterflies in her stomach.

“Do you know how long you’ll be gone?” Cheyenne asked.

“Probably just a few days,” Maria replied as she wiped down the kitchen counters and turned out the light above the sink.

“I would like to talk to you about Jason also,” she added.

“I know that you have had a lot of change in the past day, but I need for you to listen to me. I think that Jason is responsible for Charles’s murder. He had been sending threatening letters to your father for the past year, although Charles did not believe me when I told him of my suspicions. You need to be careful in your dealings with him. He is a dangerous man in many ways. I would bet that he was the one who shot at you today.”

Cheyenne was stunned. She knew that Maria had a distaste for Jason but she had no idea that it ran this deep.

“Maria, do you mind me asking why you dislike Jason so much?” Cheyenne asked.

“There are many reasons that will be revealed all in good time,” she said as she flipped off the lights in the kitchen.

“So no explanation tonight?” Cheyenne pressed.

“Not tonight but maybe another time,” Maria said with finality in her voice that Cheyenne picked up on.

“Detective Russell seems to think that I need protection. He’ll be moving in tomorrow morning.” Cheyenne said, confused as to why she decided to tell Maria. Maybe it was just to ruffle her feathers a bit.

Maria stopped straightening the pillows on the couch and stood up. A strange look came over her face. Cheyenne could almost see the sweat break out over her top lip.

“Why is he doing that?” she asked nervously.

“Well, in case you have forgotten I was shot at today.” Cheyenne replied sarcastically. As she

folded the last of the dishrags from the dryer she added, “The chief initially thought that it would be a good idea even before I was shot. Brian didn’t agree at first. Then, after I told him about the encounter with Jason, the viewing of my father’s will, and someone trying to shoot me, he decided that it would be better to be safe than sorry.”

“What was it about the will that made him think that you needed protection though?” she demanded as her voice raised an octave.

Cheyenne realized that Maria was getting agitated. Not being able to help herself she pushed further, knowing that it would only increase Maria’s agitation.

“He said something about missing money but I didn’t understand what he was talking about. I’m at a disadvantage because I don’t know anything about anyone,” she said innocently. Cheyenne was well aware of what she was doing. Maria had been so negative and confrontational all day that Cheyenne thought it may be fun to give her a taste of her own medicine.

“Well, I don’t know anything about all of that but I’m sure that it will be nice to have him here,” she said quickly as she walked to her room.

Cheyenne checked on the guards who had been posted at the front door all evening. “Would you guys like a cup of coffee or something?” Cheyenne asked politely. They declined and she took that as her opportunity to go to bed.

Chapter Six

Cheyenne was awakened by the doorbell ringing. She ran down the stairs and threw the front door open, squinting against the morning sun.

“Cheyenne, I told you I would be here this morning,” Brian said with a smile on his face. He looked down and drank in the view. Cheyenne stood in front of him in one of the sexiest nightgowns she owned.

If I know what is good for me, this will be the last time he sees me in this outfit, she thought to herself. The lace cradled her breast in such a way that one would almost think they could see a nipple. It flowed down her body and came to rest right below her full cheeks. Brian’s eyes devoured her.

She began to blush, “I’m sorry. I didn’t have time to get dressed before I answered the door.”

Brian heard a commotion in the kitchen and along with Cheyenne, raced to find out what was happening. Once in the kitchen, both saw Maria frantically digging through the cabinets. Medication and spices were flying around as the older woman searched for something.

“Maria, what’s gotten into you,” Cheyenne demanded, trying to cover herself in vain.

“My medication is missing. It was here yesterday and now it’s gone. I know it was Jason. I know it,” she exclaimed sounding like a woman in the full throes of a conniption fit. Turning on her heels Maria tried to dart from the kitchen but Brian caught her by the arm and spun her around.

“What type of medication is missing Maria?” he demanded.

“Xanax!” she screamed as she ran from the home to her car.

“What has gotten into her?” he asked.

“It’s a long story,” Cheyenne said as she poured them both a cup of coffee.

“Last night she was in fine form. She started lecturing me about how dangerous Jason is. The hatred poured out of her. It was almost too much to sit and listen to. I finally got enough of it and decided to turn the tables on her. I told her that you would be moving in this morning and she wanted to know why. I told her that you thought I needed protection because of the shooting and missing money in the will. You should have seen her Brian. Her face went white and she started sweating.

You could hear the agitation in her voice and then, before I knew it, she went to her room. The next thing I knew, she was in here this morning going ballistic over some pills.”

Brian laughed as he took a sip of his coffee. “I have some news on the investigation. You asked me the other day, if I had a suspect. I am currently investigating Jason Turner. He doesn’t have a solid alibi and he owned a nine millimeter that was reported stolen two months ago.” Brian added.

Cheyenne looked puzzled.

“I interviewed him a bit ago. His story has not changed but something is not right about it,” Brian said.

“When we find the murder weapon I think an arrest is imminent. Also, Ed faxed me a transcript of the video, it was not what I asked for but it will do for the time being.” He informed her.

HE knew that Jason had already gotten to her. He had alluded to as much during their interview earlier that morning. The thought of the suspected murderer touching her made him ill. Aside from the possible danger she had been in, the mere thought was revolting. She had not struck him as a loose woman so he had chalked the incident up to grief. She truly was beautiful to look at and he could not blame any man for wanting her but Jason had rubbed him the wrong way from the start. He was the type of person that needed to conquer as many women as he could. The insult and humiliation she would feel

if she knew that he may have murdered her father would be too much to bear. She would realize that she was a conquest and that their encounter had no meaning, and when she did, Brian planned to be there to help her pick up the pieces. He would not talk to her about that though. It would be better for him to do his job and leave the gossip and hurt feelings alone.

Brian settled into the guest room Cheyenne had shown him to. He did not know how long his stay would be, but he would sure enjoy it while he was there. The room was nicer than anything he had ever stayed in before. It had a rustic charm to match the rest of the décor in the house. He busied himself by unpacking his overnight bag and placing his toiletry kit in the adjoining bathroom. Removing his boots, he walked across the plush carpet to the window overlooking the pool and saw a glorious sight.

Cheyenne had just dived in and her lean body was slicing through the water. She looked so graceful and at ease gliding through the water. Just then, she broke the surface and Brian could not help but notice that her nipples were straining against the thin material of her bikini top. He could feel himself hardening as he gazed at her from his perch above the pool. He felt dirty for peeping but it was a turn on for him. Her full ass perfectly filled out her bikini bottoms perfectly. He fantasized that they would fit perfectly in his hands. Before he knew it, he had a full erection. He had not planned on letting that happen but now he would have to deal with it.

Sitting on the edge of the bed, he breathed deeply and unzipped his pants. Brian pulled his cock out of his underwear and began rubbing the head and stroking down the length. Squirting lotion into his hand he returned his attention to his growing member. By this time, it was at full attention and staring up at him, begging to be rubbed. His thoughts returned to Cheyenne, only this time she was completely naked on the bed next to him. He reached over and pulled the string on her tiny bikini top and freed her glorious breasts. Her lips were wrapped around the monstrous head as she flicked the hole with her tongue. He could almost feel her lips actually swallowing him whole. The sordid thoughts quickly brought him to a climax and jets of warm come spewed onto his chest and stomach. Squeezing the still hard dick, he grabbed his shirt that he had removed in haste and cleaned himself. Slowly, it started to shrink and go back to its normal size and he could go on about his evening. He had learned something very important

about himself on this evening. The attraction he felt for Cheyenne could result in amazing sex that his body would be completely satisfied by.

Brian left his room and ventured to the kitchen. He had made himself a snack just as Cheyenne was walking through the patio doors.

“Brian does grilled steak sound good for dinner?” she asked as she was adjusting her towel around her body.

“Sounds good to me, do you need any help?” he offered as she walked to the refrigerator.

He couldn't help but stare as she crossed the room, painfully aware that she was wearing next to nothing. She seemed oblivious to the effect that she had on him but he was aware enough for both of them.

“If you want to man the grill, I can take care of the sides,” she said as she continued to pull out food for the meal. His thoughts returned to his solo performance in the bedroom earlier and he started to wonder if her breasts were as juicy in real life as they were in his fantasy. How he would love to suck her soft nipples into his mouth or bury his face into the supple flesh between them. Brian knew that he needed to get his mind out of the gutter but he could not help himself. As she bent to pull something from the cabinet, he strained to see if he could see the outline of her pussy through her swimsuit. Brian was not disappointed. The perfect outline of a beautiful cunt showed through the suit. Her bikini bottoms had worked their way into the crevice between her legs and gave the illusion of a perfectly tight bare pussy. The nude colored bikini left little to the imagination. He had never been a pervert but he was finding it hard to control the intense physical attraction he felt for Cheyenne. Brian knew that he couldn't deny his desire for her indefinitely. She was under his skin and he was powerless to defend against the intruder.

Once dinner was ready, they both sat outside at the patio table to eat.

“I haven't had a steak as good as this in a long time, this is amazing.” Cheyenne complimented.

Brian smiled, “Thank you. I haven't cooked for anyone recently so it's good to know that I've still

got the touch,” he laughed as he looked out over the water, watching the flickering light dance off of the surface.

“I noticed you don’t wear a wedding ring, but do you have a girlfriend at home?” she inquired almost embarrassed but hoping that he would say no.

“No, no one at home. My job isn’t very relationship friendly. I keep pretty much to myself.” he confided.

They both sat in silence for a while before getting up to clear the dinner plates. Their hands brushed while reaching for the same plate. Cheyenne felt the spark as she touched him and pulled her hand back as though she had been burned. Hoping he had not noticed she straitened her posture and looked directly into his eyes.

“Brian, I’ll get these. Why don’t you go for a swim and I’ll join you when I’m done.” He hesitated for a moment but relinquished the plate and walked toward the pool. He dove in and enjoyed the feel of the cold water against his skin. It enveloped him and washed away the stress of the past few days. His long body made quick work of the few laps he swam before deciding to lounge on the nearby steps. Cheyenne reappeared with two wine glasses and a bottle. She walked down the steps and bent down to give him his glass. He had waited all evening for the right time to make a move. Brian did not want to accost her, just touch her again; even an innocent touch would satisfy his wonder. Wanting to accidentally graze her hand or catch her eye turned out to be in vain. Brian had never had a problem with confidence nor had he ever tried to move this quickly. It all seemed insane to him but he was at a loss to explain his temptations. Her body language seemed open and inviting but the closer he looked; it became evident that her friendliness was just her way of getting through day to day life. The pressure continued to build in his body and he was sure that he would soon explode. His need was great but his want was coming in a close second. The relief he had gifted himself with earlier had been short lived. Cheyenne twirled her silky hair around her index finger and it drove him wild. The simple way that she crossed a room sent his pulse racing.

This is crazy. I have just met this girl, but there is something about her... He noticed how strong and proud her features appeared. She surely inherited those from her father. Every picture of Charles that Brian had seen had reminded him of Cheyenne. She was simply a masterpiece and as with every masterpiece, he wanted to own her, to possess her and make her his, even if only for the night.

Time flew by that evening for Detective Brian Russell. The internal war inside him raged. He felt such a strong physical pull toward Cheyenne, but mentally, he knew that he couldn't have a relationship. His career had always come first and he knew that he couldn't let anything change that.

Chapter Seven

One Week Later

A week had passed and Maria had not been seen nor heard from. Cheyenne had tried to call her several times but her phone always went straight to voicemail. Cheyenne was slightly worried that Maria would miss the funeral. Brian assured her that all was well and that there was no need for concern. She tried to put her apprehension out of her mind and carried on with her day. She knew that Maria had seemed unstable when she left a week ago and found it hard not to worry about the older woman.

Since Brian's arrival, life had really settled into a nice even rhythm and Cheyenne was enjoying it. She had never had a man around the house before and it felt good. Blaze was healing nicely and was enjoying his late evening walks through the back field along with his extra rations of hay. Cheyenne had avoided the pasture where she was shot at.

Brian was diligent, but there were no suspects in her attempted murder. The thought of that afternoon sent chills up her spine. She had come so close to death and still had no idea why it had happened.

The evening before, Cheyenne and Brian had ventured off of the property to eat at a local steak house. The food was delicious but she could not shake the feeling that it felt like a date. He had pulled her chair out for her and made eye contact throughout the evening. Their conversation had flowed easily and before either one knew, it was ten o'clock. When they arrived home he brought her a glass of wine while she sat beside the fire pit.

"Brian, why haven't you been snatched up yet?" she asked with all sincerity. The evening of alcohol had lowered her inhibitions. He chuckled under his breath and rolled his eyes. He was clearly flattered but avoided the question.

"Why haven't you?" he replied.

"Well, I haven't ever found anybody that I would let get that close to me." She explained.

"You've let me get pretty close." He said as he held his hand up to the fire to warm.

"With you it's different. There's no pressure, you're here to protect me and that has made it easy

to get close to you.” She said as she gazed up at the stars.

When Cheyenne looked back down, Brian was by her side, wrapping his arms around her. He pulled her close and kissed her soft lips. He pulled back and Cheyenne opened her eyes. She smiled at him as she snuggled into his embrace. It felt nice to be one with nature as she lay back against Brian’s chest. They had ended their night in separate rooms but both knew that the pull was becoming strong. They knew that they wouldn’t be able to ignore it for much longer. The memory of the night gave her butterflies in her stomach and had been on her mind since it occurred.

On this day, Cheyenne was looking around the house, wasting time. She had finished clearing out the office and now there was only one room left to go through. Her father’s room remained untouched and would for the foreseeable future. She couldn’t bring herself to explore it. It would wait for her until she was ready, of that she was sure. Cheyenne found many things of interest in his office but none more so than his personal notes. Written by his hand and crinkled by his reading, they were something of his that had a very personal meaning to her. She tucked them back away into the top desk drawer and knew that she would visit them later.

Her father’s funeral would be the next day. Not looking forward to the proceedings or the hoopla that surrounded events such as this, dread had overtaken her body. Cheyenne dreaded many things about the next day but there was one thing she was looking forward to.

Although, to most, it would have seemed morbid, she would finally get to see her father in person, even if it was in death. If she could bring herself to, she may even touch his hand. In all of her daydreams this had not been how the encounter was supposed to happen. She had always dreamed of being a daddy’s girl but finally she had to tuck those hopes away as now she knew it would never happen. Cheyenne knew that she would feel self-conscious around everyone in attendance almost as though she was an interloper.

Throughout her life, she had suffered from a lack of confidence. Upon entering a room of people, there was a likely chance that Cheyenne Wingate would exit quickly, unable to breathe and crying with no

explanation. Her mother had always been infuriated by this quality but despite all of Cheyenne's attempts, she had never discovered how to control that particular emotion.

"Cheyenne, we need to talk," boomed Brian's deep baritone voice. The tone in his voice told her that the conversation wouldn't be good. In the short time they had been pushed together, she had come to learn his moods and tone of voice. Her intimate knowledge had not been intentional but had innocently happened. Seated at the table, she braced herself for the news.

"Charles's toxicology report came back today. He had a minimal amount of alcohol in his system and a few other things that gave the coroner cause for concern. He had a large amount of an over the counter sleeping aid and Xanax in his system. I have checked with his doctor and he said that he had never prescribed Xanax for Charles."

"Brian, wasn't that the pills that Maria was searching for? The ones that she claimed Jason stole?"

"What does this all mean?" Cheyenne questioned. "Well, we have a theory but I'm not sure that you want to hear it," he said.

"I don't want to, but I need to," Cheyenne stated, near tears.

"We believe that he was working late at the office when someone he was familiar with came in. We know he was drugged at the office shortly before his death because the medical examiner found an undigested, partially dissolved pill in his stomach contents." He said as Cheyenne interrupted.

"Why would anyone drug him if they were going to shoot him?" she asked apparently confused by the theory.

"Whoever killed him, drugged him first to make him more manageable. His filing cabinet was ransacked and at the time we could not tell if he had done it or the murderer. Our theory is that they needed to be in control of him for one reason or another. We really haven't figured that part out completely yet. When they were finished or had given up, they shot him once in the temple."

Cheyenne's mind was spinning. "Could Jason really be that dangerous," she questioned herself.

"Do you still think that Jason is the murderer?"

Brian face tensed. "Yes, we suspect it but we are having a hard time tying up the loose ends. All we have right now is circumstantial evidence," he confessed.

"Do you think that you will ever be able to prove that Jason killed my father?" Cheyenne asked, catching Brian off guard.

"Cheyenne, I'm not sure, but with you as my witness I will not stop trying."

Cheyenne knew that he spoke the truth. He would continue to try but what worried her was whether he would be trying to convict an innocent man. She tried to put the conversation out of her mind and decided to check on Blaze. Cheyenne had finally gotten the courage to go to the stable alone. Before she could approach the stall she was grabbed from behind. A strong hand went over her mouth and held her tightly. She was against a hard muscular body and could not move.

Into her ear the man whispered, "Cheyenne, it's me, Jason. Don't scream and I'll let you go. Slowly, as though testing the waters, he removed his hand from her mouth. She stood still but realized that she was not afraid.

Spinning around to face him she whispered, "How did you get here?"

He looked worried and tired as he answered, "I snuck in through the pasture. I need your help Cheyenne"

"Just tell me what you need," she said as she took a step away from him.

"I'm being framed by someone and what is even worse is I think I'm being followed. My attorney told me that I'm days away from being arrested for Charles's murder and I promise you that I didn't hurt him. I couldn't have ever murdered him. He was my friend. I need to find out who did this and I need to know quickly," Jason exclaimed.

“Jason, what do you want me to do? I don’t see how I can be of any help to you. There are plenty of people convinced that you committed this murder and that you may have been responsible for trying to kill me.” she said.

He looked defeated. She felt such empathy for him but truly didn’t know what she could do for him.

“I need for you to help me prove I’m innocent. I don’t know how just yet but when I do, I need to know that you’ll be there for me. I didn’t try to kill you. Until today, I was not aware that anyone had.” He said, full of concern. Cheyenne nodded her head in agreement just as she heard footsteps coming up the walk. She turned to see who was coming and when she turned back, Jason was gone.

The footsteps turned out to be Brian. She’d been gone a while and hadn’t realized it. She didn’t share his belief that Jason had killed her father but she also knew that she would never convince him that he didn’t. When he did finally make an arrest, she wanted to make sure it would be the right person. She was a good judge of character and just didn’t see Jason committing such a heartless act although she had admitted to herself that she didn’t know him well enough to make that judgment unilaterally. Of course she knew that there was room for error in her judgment but her gut told her that she was right. Confusion sat in when she began to contemplate what she could do to help Jason. Cheyenne had only just arrived on the scene. Not knowing the people involved nor her father would prove to make his request difficult to say the least.

“Cheyenne, I heard voices when I walked up, who were you talking to?” Brian asked, already knowing the answer. She paused for a moment before blurting out the truth, “It was Jason. He said that he needed my help to prove his innocence.”

Brian stood, stone faced in front of her for what felt like an eternity but soon he started to grow red with anger.

“There are a few things you need to know about Jason Turner. Cheyenne, I interviewed him a few days ago. As convinced as you are of his innocence, I am equally as convinced of his guilt. You think that

he is some sort of a gentleman and I know for a fact that he is not. He bragged to me about having sex with you in the stable on the day of your father's will reading."

"What!!!" Cheyenne exclaimed, furious. "He hasn't had sex with me. He held me when I cried and I view that as just one person comforting another. I'm not cheap enough to have sex with someone after just meeting them. Have I rolled in the hay with you? NO! I have not. That should answer your questions regarding my virtue," she steamed with tears in her eyes.

"I could make the mistake of thinking you are crying, but I know that you are pissed. I'm sorry for repeating that, but I felt you needed to know what he has said. I personally think that he has played on your sympathy and used your grief to further his agenda," Brian stated.

He stepped close to her and gently took her face in his hands as he wiped the tears away from her cheeks with the pad of his thumb. She tried to turn her head away but he held her firmly.

"I'm sorry," he mouthed. She wasn't sure that she wanted to accept his apology, but she did realize that she had to give him credit for trying. Nodding her head, Cheyenne acknowledged his attempt and vowed to herself to confront Jason sooner or later.

Chapter Eight

The walk back to the house was quiet. Neither trusted themselves to say a word. Cheyenne was especially upset but knew that she should not take her frustrations out on Brian. After washing her hands and drying them, she turned to find Brian standing at the door. He was looking at her as if he had just seen her for the first time. She blushed under the intensity of his stare as he turned and walked back to the living room. Cheyenne was not sure if she could handle what was developing between her and Brian. She knew that she wanted him but also knew that once he had a chance to think things through, he would realize that his career had to come first. If she was going to allow him into her heart, there would have to be room in his life for her and his career and she wasn't sure that would ever be the case. Brian had made it crystal clear that his career would never be derailed by a relationship and she would not accept anything less than a relationship from him. If she could not have that, then she wanted nothing at all.

She decided to go for a cool swim to put some distance between her and Brian. After changing, she walked down to the pool and stepped in. The water felt refreshing to her overwhelmed body. Cheyenne languished in the water until her fingers began to prune. As she walked up the steps of the pool the water cascaded from her body. She got out, dried off and decided to lie in a lounge chair and take a nap. Cheyenne used her towel as a makeshift pillow, enjoying the sun warming her body. Soon, she settled into the overstuffed cushion and fell asleep.

Her dreams were vivid during her poolside nap. In her vision, Brian approached her, drinking in her outstretch body like a wolf on the prowl. He could see her nipples through her top and silently untied the top and bottoms. She was naked in all of her glory. The sun warmed her bare flesh and heated her intimate places. Brian hesitated a moment and then gently smoothed his hand from her stomach to her waiting breasts. Rubbing her nipples lightly, he kissed her full, waiting lips. With his free hand he ran down her silky tan legs until he reached the V and back to her stomach. His lips were so soft and she welcomed his advances. The intensity that came from their bodies touching had exhilarated Cheyenne's senses. She could feel her breathing becoming shallower and her pulse was racing. His lips traced a path down to her belly button and back up to her collar bone. He nibbled gently and drove Cheyenne wild. A familiar stir became intense between her legs as he reined kisses onto her supple body. She squirmed as she lay in the lounge chair, hoping for relief any way possible. Brian placed his knee between her legs and pushed them apart. He moved down onto her waiting body. His hard penis came into contact with her heated crotch and sent waves of pleasure through her quivering body. She ground herself into him, slowly at first but soon, she was humping him through his clothes. Cheyenne found his lips again and kissed him deeply. Her level of arousal was increasing with each passing moment. Unable to control her urge any longer, she reached down and pulled his shorts until his throbbing cock was exposed. Guiding him into her waiting hole, she gasped when his engorged head touched her velvety lips. He pushed through and entered her, claiming her as his own. Both of their bodies were sweating and clammy as they pumped against each other. She arched upward and met him in the middle of each stroke. The hard guttural way they sought each others' bodies seemed to only fuel their desire. She needed him and wanted more than anything to savor his lean muscular body. Never wanting to forget this image, she mentally took note, drinking the site in. Cheyenne knew that she would never be the same after this encounter and wanted to bask in the glow of their lovemaking. She arched her back as he thrust into her one final time. Both bodies came crashing down together as the moisture grew between them. A cry escaped her lips as her orgasm washed over her body. Brian held her tightly as she shook with passion. He kissed lightly as he held her close to his trembling body.

“Cheyenne! Cheyenne!” he called. Suddenly, she woke to him shaking her gently by the shoulders.

“Brian is something wrong?” she asked huskily.

“You have been asleep for an hour and when I came to check, you were moaning loudly,” he said.

She blushed, remembering her dream. She looked quickly to make sure that her suit was still intact and where it should be. The dream had been so vivid. Feeling self conscious she decided to get back in the pool. As she stepped in, Cheyenne ducked underwater and swam to the other side. She reached the side and held onto it to steady herself. Even in the water she was clearly shaken.

“Cheyenne, let’s get you inside. I think you have had too much sun for the day.” He said tenderly. He walked to the side of the pool and helped her out of the water.

She was appreciative for the assistance, although she was in need of it for much different reasons than he thought.

Chapter Nine

After her vivid poolside dream, Brian suggested that she take a warm bath. He helped her to her room and shut the door behind himself. Cheyenne undressed and laid out a towel for her bath. The hot bubble’s embraced her tired body. It had been such a long day for her and now she could finally relax. She stretched her legs out in the large Jacuzzi tub, enjoying the jets pulsating in all the right places. Laying her head back on the rim of the tub, she closed her eyes and contemplated her present situation.

Just a month ago she had been content with her life. It wasn't perfect but it was simple. Now, her life was full of stress and turmoil. The father she had never known was murdered and no one knew who did it or why. Yes, her life was upside down and no one knew that better than Cheyenne Wingate. She soaked for a while longer and then toweled off and stepped out of the oversized tub. As she did her foot slipped and she hit the hard tile floor. As she fell, she reached out to try and stop herself. A shelf near the tub spilled into the floor with a crash. Cheyenne heard banging on the bathroom door. All she could think of was Brian coming in and finding her sprawled in the floor naked. She managed to reach overhead and pull her used towel off of the rack.

She barely had herself covered when Brian pushed the door open. He immediately cursed under his breath and bent down to pick her up. The towel slipped off and she was completely exposed when he lifted her body, but quickly he pressed her against himself to offer a bit of modesty. She wrapped her arms around his neck and he carried her to her room and placed her on the bed. This was the first time they had such intense physical contact and she was definitely enjoying it. He grabbed her robe and tried his best to wrap her in it. He was so tender with her.

“Are you okay, Cheyenne?” Brian asked with concern. He frantically checked her to make sure there were no hidden injuries.

“I'm fine Brian, my pride is the only thing hurt,” Cheyenne conceded.

He felt like a complete ass for the thoughts that were going through his head. He had seen her completely naked. His expression said that he thought she had the most perfect body he had ever seen but he wished that he had gotten to see it under different circumstances.

Brian asked, “Is there anything that I can get you?”

Cheyenne shook her head no. He pulled the covers back and brought her a nightshirt from the nearby dresser. He helped her into it while she tried in vain to retain her modesty.

Once she was dressed she crawled into bed and as Brian tucked her in, Cheyenne asked, “Will

you please stay with me tonight? I just don't feel like being alone."

Without saying a word, Brian sat down in the dressing chair beside the bed. His chivalry was impressive but wasn't exactly what she had been looking for. Cheyenne lay in bed and watched him as he tipped his head back and closed his eyes. A sigh escaped his parted lips as he settled in. She could not imagine him trying to sleep in the uncomfortable chair and knew that she wanted him beside her in the bed.

"Brian, if you want, you can sleep in the bed. You can't possibly get any rest in that chair."

He thought for a moment.

"I appreciate that. Thank you." He crawled into the bed and lay beside her. His breathing was even and deep but strangely it was in sync with hers. Both minds were spinning wildly with desire but neither would admit or act upon it. It was a dance that neither would win. Eventually, sleep visited and two minds rested. Cheyenne awoke a few hours later to find Brian curled up next to her with his head on her pillow. It felt so right for him to be next to her, clinging to her like he was. His arm was wrapped around her waist, pulling her into him as though she were his. She instinctively ground into him, wanting to elicit a response but he only pulled her closer and snuggled deeper into her body.

"How are you feeling," he whispered.

"Good," she replied, groggily.

She lay still for a moment, taking in her surroundings. Brian's body felt so good against hers. Their lengths were pressed together as though the universe had created them just for each other. Cheyenne raised her head and looked at Brian's chiseled face in the moonlight. His strong arms held her protectively as she studied him. His eyes were mesmerizing and she was lost in them. She rolled over and put her head on his shoulder as she threw a leg over his waist. Her knee made contact with his swollen cock but she didn't move it. Instead, she moved a few more times to maximize the chances that he knew what she wanted. He appeared to be oblivious; all except for his cock which jerk and spasmed

against her knee. After a few movements, she decided to go back to sleep. His arms were curled protectively over her shoulders with his hand coming to rest on her rib cage. He pulled her tight and moaned slightly as she settled in to go back to sleep. Yes, she could have pushed it and forced him to respond, but she wouldn't have felt right about it. When he made her his, she wanted him to be fully awake and aware of his surroundings.

The next morning found Cheyenne sore. Her head ached but she was still clinging to Brian just as she had been the night before. She felt rested and secure. He had not fared so well. Brian was quiet at the breakfast table. He was deep in thought about the night before.

Cheyenne was as well, but she was better at hiding it. She walked to the sink to put her cereal bowl in as he stood at the counter. When she turned around she was entirely too close and bumped into him. He caught her as she smashed into his body. He held onto her and didn't let her go. He couldn't take any more. He wrapped her small body in his strong arms and held her close. Cheyenne did not try to get away. She moved into his body and raised her chin upward for his to capture her mouth with his. He kissed her delicately, savoring her taste. Her lips felt like satin pillows against his. She sucked his bottom lip into her mouth and lavished it with attention. A moan escaped his mouth as he tried desperately to devour her. She had not set out to kiss him but now that she was doing it, she realized that she enjoyed it. It felt like she was kissing her soul mate, as though their lips were made for each other. Brian took a step back and held her at arm's length.

“Cheyenne, I physically need you, more than I have ever needed anyone in my life. Lying beside you last night was torture and heaven all at the same time. But, we should not do this.”

“How can you say that? We both feel the same way but you are resisting it. It is not every day that two people find each other in the way that we have. We have so much chemistry and you are willing to throw it all away because you think that you cannot have a career and a relationship at the same time.”

“Cheyenne, we can't do this. I have to keep my head in the game to keep you safe. I can't do that if I am distracted. I'm sorry.”

“It is too late for you to decide that we can’t do this. You should have thought about that before you ever kissed me for the first time.” Cheyenne informed him. She pressed her body against his and captured his mouth again. Their devilish tongues danced together as if a symphony were playing their song. Brian gave in to his animal urge. He whisked Cheyenne into the laundry room that was right off the kitchen. Both undressed quickly as though their bodies were on fire. Cheyenne threw her left leg up, opening herself for him, and braced herself against the wall with her arm. “Fuck me Brian,” she purred seductively as she shook her ass at him. “Fuck me now,” she said.

Brian didn’t need to be told twice. His cock was so hard it felt as though it would burst. “*He’s going to come as soon as he gets inside me,*” Cheyenne thought as he covered her, crowding his body behind her. Instead she was pleasantly surprised to feel him strongly push his way into her inviting pussy.

He thrust in and out, from head to base, and then teasingly pulling out before thrusting back in.

She gasped at the pressure and the incredible size of his cock, as he fucked her steadily. “Ohhhhhhhhhh Cheyenne, this feels so good. You are amazing!” Brian exclaimed between thrust. Soon she was felt his hot sweat against her back.

Just as her leg was getting tired, and she knew that she was going to explode, he whispered in her ear, “Here I come!”

His admission drove her crazy with lust. She knew that she was about to make him come and that small fact made her wetter than ever.

“Fuck me,” Cheyenne yelled. “Fuck me! Fuck me! Fuck me!”

“Oh yea,” Brian moaned as Cheyenne felt his hot come flow into her.

He continued to thrust and squeezed her hips tightly. He was breathing so hard that it seemed as if he had been in a race. When he finally pulled out, Cheyenne removed her leg from the wall and looked at

Brian as he panted away.”

“Cheyenne, that was hot,” he said as he tried to catch his breath. She stood there with a satisfied look on her face as she moved toward him. Their bodies were sweaty and clung together when they met. Placing the softest kiss on her lips he leaned in and whispered, “I want more of you.” Brian sucked her earlobe into his mouth and flicked it with his tongue. In her daydreams, Brian and her had not come together so gutturally but when they found each other, it was primal and a need.

“Brian, as much as I am enjoying this, we need to start getting ready for the funeral.” She sweetly said. He kissed her one last time before he reluctantly released her.

Cheyenne left the kitchen and went upstairs to begin getting ready for her father’s funeral. After carefully applying her makeup she styled her hair and was ready to choose an outfit. Black was the customary color for a day such as this. Looking through her closet, she found a dress and sling backs, both black, and put them on. After two hours, she walked downstairs, ready for what lay ahead of her.

“Are you ready to leave?” Brian asked Cheyenne. She nodded as she grabbed her purse and keys. “I thought you would be riding with me?” he asked, puzzled.

“I am. I just need my keys to lock the door.” She said as she busied herself trying to find the right key. Brian opened the door and helped her into the truck. As they pulled out of the drive, Cheyenne noticed that the conversation was strained between them.

“Is something wrong?” she asked.

“No, why would you ask that,” he replied as he pulled out onto the main road.

“No reason, I guess. Things just seemed strained.” She said as she dismissed her gut feeling. Brian reached across the console and held her hand tightly.

“You look amazing, by the way.” He complemented. Cheyenne glowed as though she were going to a wedding instead of her father’s funeral. She sat quietly until they arrived at their destination.

As they pulled up to the funeral home, men were standing outside in dark suits guiding traffic. Even in October, Texas was still a very hot and humid place. Cheyenne felt sorry for them standing outdoors sweating. Brian stopped in their designated spot and opened the door for Cheyenne. They walked into the funeral home to whispers and murmurs that Cheyenne was sure were about her. Every so often, she would hear her name and felt the need to act as though she had heard anything. She wasn't shocked. Preparing herself for this had been easy, but she had known that actually suffering through it would be tougher. Brian sensed her discomfort and squeezed her hand in support.

Ed Crowley made his way to her through the crowd, "My dear Cheyenne, it's so good to see you again." As he said this, he kissed her outstretched hand.

This man is surely the definition of a true southern gentleman, she thought to herself.

"How have you been getting along," Ed inquired. She didn't dare tell him that this had all been hard on her, or that living in her father's house without him in it toyed with her emotions. No, she couldn't put that on his shoulders, he was too kind for that.

"I have been doing pretty good Mr. Crowley." Cheyenne lied.

He gently guided her to the front of the auditorium. As she neared the casket, she began to pull back slightly.

"Cheyenne, this will hurt but you will be glad that you did it. Now, come on," he coaxed.

Hesitantly, she stepped toward the casket. As she got closer, she realized that the lid was closed. Fury overcame her as she realized that she would never be able to see him in person. Knowing that this would have been her last opportunity, she pushed the pain away and touched the top of the casket.

"Why is the casket closed? I wanted to see my father." Cheyenne explained with tears in her eyes.

You are not going to cry again Cheyenne...Pull yourself together, she told herself.

"My dear, I did not even think about that. I am sorry. If you like, I can have the funeral director

give you a private viewing before he is transported to the cemetery.” Ed said gently.

“I would like that Ed. I would like that a lot.”

“The spray is from Tyler, Texas. They grow the most beautiful roses in the world and were Charles’s favorite,” Ed explained to her. He applied a gentle pressure to the small of her back, guiding her toward Brian and a waiting crowd of people.

“There is one person missing Cheyenne told herself. Maria was nowhere to be found. *Surely she would not have missed this,* Cheyenne told herself.

The service was beautiful and most of the people Cheyenne met had been exceptionally nice. Brian was by her side the entire evening and that gave her great comfort. Many people went forward and said wonderful things about Charles Wingate.

He really was a great man, Cheyenne told herself. As everyone file out, she lagged behind. Brian remained by her side even as she approached the waiting casket. The director was standing beside the pine casket waiting for Cheyenne. As she neared the box, the director reached out for her hand. She gladly accepted and was standing by his side when he raised the lid. The man who had only been a dream, a figment of her imagination for most of her life, lay in front of her. He looked as though he would sit up and ask for a glass of water at any moment. His features were relaxed and his skin had a tan glow. Cheyenne bravely reached into the casket and touched her father’s hand. She broke down in tears, her body wracked with sobs as she held onto the man who had been so illusive her entire life.

Brian was back at her side, holding her up as she cried. She turned to him and wrapped her arms around his neck, clinging to him for dear life. So many emotions were swirling around in her mind. The realization that this would be the only contact she would ever have with her father was heartbreaking. Finally, it was over and Brian helped her to the truck. She was grateful to avoid the throngs of people and their prying questions. On the ride home, she caught Brian looking at her.

“Can I help you sir?” Cheyenne feigned playfulness. The funeral had struck a nerve but she now

felt an odd sense of well being. In a weird way, she felt as though she had no need to be upset or mourn. But, at the same time a part of her felt a strong longing for the man that had lain in the casket. A voice in her head kept repeating to her that she had not even known the man.

“I am just looking. I could not have been prouder of you today if I had wanted to be. You handled yourself with such grace and dignity. I’m not sure that I could have been as strong as you were today,” he said as he reached for her hand.

His assurance comforted her, but she still felt out of place among her father’s friends and employees. The feeling was one of not belonging or being good enough. Cheyenne knew that she had a lot of emotions to work through but she also knew that she would have never made it through the day without Brian and Ed.

The truck rolled to a stop in front of the garage. This time, Cheyenne didn’t wait for Brian to open her door. She hopped out herself and moved toward the front door. She put her key in the door, but there was no resistance. The door was already unlocked.

“Brian, I locked this door when I left,” she declared. Pulling his service revolver, he pushed her back with his outstretched arm and entered the house. The door creaked on its hinges as it opened fully. Cheyenne waited on the porch for what seemed like forever but in reality, it had been no more than five minutes. He returned to retrieve her and said,” Whoever was here is gone now. Are you sure that you locked it?”

“Yes, I am positive.” She assured him as they walked through the door. The unlocked door unnerved Cheyenne. It only served to add to her growing suspicion that Brian’s presence was very necessary. After he had checked the house from top to bottom, she felt as though she could let her guard down a bit.

Once inside, she stripped out of her funeral attire and dressed in skirt and a t shirt. When she walked down the stairs, Brian let out a loud whistle. He marched up to her and his presence demanded her attention. He kissed the tip of her nose and asked,” Would you like a glass of wine?”

“That sounds great. Are you going to have one?” she asked as he walked to the kitchen and she followed closely behind him. Her answer came when he poured two glasses.

“I want to talk to you about earlier,” he said as he pulled a chair out for her at the table. Cheyenne blushed, remembering their earlier encounter.

“Getting involved with me could be a mistake. My job is dangerous and even if nothing ever happens to me, the worry can eat you alive,” he quietly said.

“I also demand a lot sexually in a relationship. Sex is important in any relationship but to me, it can be a deal breaker. If you are going to be with me, whether temporary or otherwise, you are going to have to be okay with my sexual appetite.”

What in the world is he talking about, Cheyenne thought to herself as she sipped her wine? Brian smiled a crooked curious smile and Cheyenne felt a tingle of excitement run through her entire body. “Brian, I” She was cut off in mid sentence as he closed the gap between them in two quick strides, lifted her effortlessly and swung her over his shoulder.

“Brian, what are you doing?” Cheyenne said shrilly. He cut her off with a stinging slap on her upturned ass. Cheyenne Wingate had always possessed a vitality and fiery temper that needed to be harnessed and if she was looking for someone to keep her in line, it appeared that Brian was applying for the job. As Brian strode forward and took the stairs effortlessly, two at a time, Cheyenne considered asking another question, but something stopped her.

She was breathless with excitement. She felt warmth spreading between her legs that made her want to clamp them tightly together to intensify the sensation. She was stunned but went along with his macho behavior. In no time at all he had reached the landing and turning, he booted the door to her room open and marched inside. He had been careful not to catch his trophy on the frame of the door, but thoughtful tenderness was soon countered as he rudely dumped her onto the leather couch and ordered her not to move.

Mischievously, Cheyenne struggled into a seated position and started to rise but something in his eyes made her reconsider. He stood only inches in front of her. She tried to maintain eye contact but it was impossible to avoid the fact that she sat and he stood, his crotch was invitingly close. Tight jeans stretched across an enormous bulge that strained painfully against its fabric entrapments and she found herself yearning to touch it...to set it free.

As if he could read her mind, Brian smiled and ordered her to lie back on the couch and spread her legs. Unable to believe what she was hearing, Cheyenne was slow to react, but as his eager hands guided her knees apart, she found that her body obeyed his every direction with seemingly no need to consult her mind first. This was so far into uncharted territory that it barely registered as reality and Cheyenne was largely operating on auto pilot. Her body clearly liked what was being asked of it and she was in no mood to intervene. Without waiting for her verbal submission, Brian continued to dictate and direct, forcing her back further into a reclining position and ducking his head lower and lower. She felt his hot breath move sensuously up her thighs, until his slick tongue pressed heavily against the flimsy material of her panties.

“Ohhhh!” she moaned almost involuntarily as she arched her back, pushing her pussy onto Brian’s persistent tongue as he pulled her panties aside and ran his tongue slowly from her slick cunt to the hard nub of skin that was the center of her pleasure. The flesh tingled with excitement at Brian’s touch.

He paused, making her groan with frustration, before removing his tongue completely and her annoyance became palpable...but he was far from finished. His tongue was replaced by his meaty fingers and she closed her eyes as she felt herself being spread open and exposed, the coolness of the air conditioned room blew delightfully over the slick wetness.

Brian ran his finger from her wet hole up to her clit and spread her hairless lips open. “Oh!” Cheyenne gasped again. Keeping them spread with two fingers, he attached a clip he pulled from his pocket to her swollen nub. Refusing her normal inquisitive nature, she did not ask its purpose. Cheyenne barely had time to register the device before her panties were snapped back into place as he guided her to

a seated position. Eagerly, he placed a blindfold over her vivid green eyes. Cheyenne heard his zipper being pulled and then his heavy denim jeans hitting the floor. She knew there was nothing between her full eager lips and his hard dick as a salty, hot, sticky goo was rubbed onto her lips. Hoping it was from the head of his cock she used her tongue to lap it up. Brian pushed his thumb into her mouth and she felt pressure on her jaw. The harder he pushed down, the wider her mouth opened until the head of his ten inch dick was pushed past her lips into her velvety mouth. She engulfed the entire length and was held at the base by his hand. With a handful of hair, he held her in place as he ground into her lips. His pubes tickled her nose as she breathed her hot breath onto his skin. Pumping hard, in and out, he fell into a rhythm. She was sure that he was bruising her lips with his violent thrusting, making her gag and choke on his monstrous erection. Repeatedly he pounded the back of her throat until she began to gag on his hard pole and he took his cock out of her mouth. Suddenly, her pussy began to vibrate. The purpose of the clip was no longer a mystery.

“He must have it on high,” she thought to herself as she was crippled by a wave of heat that passed through her wet slit. Her breath caught in her throat as the torture of the vibrator pulsed through her clit, delivering both pain and pleasure. Cheyenne could feel his hands groping her body as they finally reached her waiting breasts.

“Keep your hands behind your back or you will force me to cuff you,” he said. She nodded her head in agreement as he began flicking her puckered nipples. The idea of being cuffed made her pulse race. The sensation sent shivers through her already hyper sensitive body. With the vibrator still on high, making her writhe and moan, he continued to work on her breasts, circling the nipples with his fingers and his tongue and alternating between gentle caresses and painful pinches as her nipples continued to grow until they stood out firm, bruised and deliciously sensitive. This was intense...incredible and she buck and moaned at every touch and caress. The ecstasy she was experiencing was like nothing she had ever felt before and he had yet to actually penetrate her. Yet, she had no idea how much longer she could last before her body gave in to the heightening orgasm that built deep within her.

“Spread your legs,” he ordered once he noticed she had been squeezing them together to stifle and

prolong the sensation. To emphasis his point, he slapped her on the inside of her thigh and she immediately complied, although his touch had only added to the growing heat that she felt.

Her excitement had now thoroughly soaked the crotch of her panties and she was sure that at any moment it would begin to moisten her thighs, yet Brian showed no sign of giving her the release that she desperately desired. Instead, Cheyenne felt his lips graze against her abused nipples as he sucked one into his mouth and worked it with is tongue and teeth. The grating of his teeth mixed with the heat of his mouth heightened her pleasure, but she barely had time to enjoy it before she felt his hand between her legs, tearing her panties free from her body.

Her breath quickened as the fabric slipped deep inside her wetness and up the crack of her ass before it finally broke free.

“Lie back on the couch again,” he ordered and she breathlessly obeyed his obvious demand. As she lay splayed on the couch, wonderfully expectant and exposed, she was sure that she would finally put his cock deep inside her...finally he would give her what she wanted the most. Instead, she felt his knees on each side of her face....straddling her.

“Open up,” he grunted, as she felt his huge shaved balls brush against her face. This was another first for Cheyenne. No one had ever debased her in this way before, but again she did not feel revulsion...she felt excitement...deep down, filthy, dirty excitement at what she was capable of, but more importantly, what Brian was capable of. Carefully Brian dipped his swollen balls into her mouth, making sure to get them as wet as possible. They were too large to completely fit and the excess spilled out onto her nose. As he sat up a little, she began to lick the dangling sack as it swung back and forth over her mouth, unable to see the appendage, but instinctively aware of its proximity. She could smell the manly, musty smell of his cock and balls, and it was more intoxicating than anything she had previously experienced. Perhaps the blindfold was intensifying her senses, or perhaps she was merely discovering things about herself that she had previously never dared to even consider.

Her hands instinctively reached around his thighs, and pulled his ass cheeks apart as she turned

her attention from his glistening sack to his asshole. Timidly, at first she flicked her tongue tentatively across it, before becoming more confident and pressing her tongue hard and fast against the puckered skin. Brian's body shivered and she could feel his balls bumping her chin as he lowered himself further onto her face and she picked up the pace further still. After what seemed like forever, Cheyenne felt Brian rise and when the pulse of the vibrator suddenly ceased, disappointment filled her as she thought she would go wild with unfulfilled longing. However, when his hand replaced the clip and began to work her swollen lips she could no longer hold back and the orgasm crashed through her in violent pulses that made her buck and moan uncontrollably.

“Oh no you don't baby...I'm not finished with you yet.” Brian said hoarsely.

“What more can he do to torture my cunt,” she thought having barely recovered from her climax. Then she felt the head of his cock being forced effortlessly between her already wet and expectant lips and finally...FINALLY he began to pump his cock in and out of her dripping pussy.

He rammed her wildly as she bucked against him. “Ohhhh you dirty bitch,” he exclaimed as she felt him pulse thick and imposing deep inside of her. His dirty talk excited her and as the final vestiges of her restraint fell in tatters around her, she called out her desires, practically screaming with longing.

“Fuck me, please, fuck me! I need your cock so bad Brian!”

Clinging to him desperately, she felt him thrust inside her and then pause and she thought that finally he had come...but, she was wrong.

“Get on your knees,” he demanded and without question she did as she was told. Her knees were on the edge of the cushion as he pushed her head onto the couch. Her ass and pussy quivered high in the air just in front of him. Cheyenne heard him sink to his knees behind her and began to push back expectantly, hoping desperately to find his waiting manhood despite having no idea where it actually was. Brian had a perfect view of all she had to offer, yet instead of plunging into her, she felt him replace the clip and immediately the pulsing sensation coursed through her again. She whimpered out of desire as soon as he touched her but this was new...this stung...and it was as much of a turn on as everything else

that he had subjected her to. “Do not make a noise,” he ordered as he began to slap her ass hard with the flat of his right hand. The vibrations spread deep as she felt his other hand move to her ass. Brian slapped her dripping pussy instead. He stood and swatted her cheek again. Cheyenne was excited that he was spanking her again and she secretly wished he would have done it harder. As though he could read her mind, his swats increased in severity. With her ass stinging and the vibrations spreading deep between her legs, she felt his other hand move across her ass cheek and his finger traced the valley of her ass crack. She sensed rather than felt his face come close as he breathed hard against her glowing skin and spat coarsely on her exposed asshole. Barely able to contain her expectation, his finger slid into her easily and after a minute he began to work it deeper.

Cheyenne was sure that his cock would follow his finger and remembered from her previous anal experience, the feeling of being filled completely, but in a deeper sensitive and intense way. For a moment he stopped touching her completely, but soon she felt him slip into her and in no time his cock was ramming her pussy again. With each stroke her face pushed deeper into the cushion until she felt that if he didn't come soon, she would surely suffocate.

How many more times can I come? She thought as her body was yet again wracked with convulsions for the umpteenth time since Brian had begun this glorious tryst. This time however, Brian had no reserves left to call upon and with a final thrust he buried his dick inside her and threw back his head howling out his passion.

Once he had pulled out, he presented his dripping cock for her to clean. She licked up and down the length before finally sucking it into her eager and waiting mouth. Brian removed the blindfold and the first thing she saw was his smiling face. Blushing with embarrassment, she cast her eyes down to avoid his gaze. Cheyenne was humiliated and surprised that she had enjoyed and responded eagerly to his treatment of her.

“That was amazing,” Cheyenne said breathlessly. She had never experienced intimacy like this before.

He seemed to have brought out in her every fantasy that she possessed but had always been too embarrassed to ask for. Brian pulled her to him, wrapping his arm around her waist and kissed the back of her neck. She snuggled into his embrace and slowly, blissfully, drifted off to sleep, all the while being held by the man of her dreams.

Chapter Ten

The next morning found them both rested and in high spirits. Cheyenne felt like a new woman after the evening she had with Brian. She had never known that sex could be so free and uninhibited. The feelings awakened in her were primitive and unfamiliar. From the first moment she had seen him, she felt an attraction, but now he was all she could think about. Knowing that she needed time away to think, she decided that she would finally visit Wingate Drilling.

That should keep me out of this house for a while, she convinced herself.

Brian walked into the dining room with a smile on his face. He had by no means been a stranger to excitement but he had never felt a thrill like he had last night. Taking Cheyenne in the way that he had, brought out desires that he had not known existed. He had always been an attentive lover, but had never taken control of a woman like Cheyenne Wingate before. He walked past her chair and his stomach flipped when she smiled up at him.

“Good morning,” she said.

He bent and kissed the top of her head.

“I think I’m going to tour Wingate Drilling today,” Cheyenne stated as she took a bite of pineapple that had been dangling from her fork.

“What brought this on,” Brian questioned with a knowing look. She could tell that he was wondering why today of all days she would choose to do this. His actions last night had given her confidence. It was a confidence she had clearly lacked when dealing with her new life and the pushy

people in it. She finally had the self-assurance to handle Jason head on. Dealing with Jason would not be easy but she needed the distraction.

“Would you like for me to go with you?” he questioned.

“No, I need to do this on my own. I have a controlling interest in this company and they need to know that they are going to have to deal with me. I don’t think that showing up with a sexy detective on my arm would garner much respect for me,” she said with a gentle laugh in her voice. She rose from the table and straddled Brian’s lap. Sucking his bottom lip into her mouth she sharply drug her tongue across it. A moan escaped his mouth and Cheyenne felt his cock growing against her exposed cunt. He wrapped her in his arms and kissed her, showing the need that he had for her.

“Can you save that for later, lover?” she asked. Without speaking, he nodded his head and kissed her again before she got up.

Cheyenne Wingate was reinventing herself. She would walk through the doors of her company a changed woman. Never again would she know poverty or shame. She was beginning to understand that she had a legacy to live up to. Her father had left large boots to fill but she was sure she could overcome the challenge. Dressing in knee length fitted skirt and silk blouse, she rummaged in her growing closet for the perfect shoes to finish off the outfit. She picked out a pair of five inch black heels. Slipping them on her feet was like giving a warrior his sword. She felt powerful and desirable. A spray of Dior perfume finished off her prep and she walked downstairs, a bit wobbly at first but she soon got the hang of it. Brian’s jaw dropped when he saw her. She had went upstairs, a sexy delicate women and returned a daring goddess. He did not have to say a word, it was obvious that her presence had the desired effect. She could see the fire in his eyes as he looked upon the new Cheyenne and it turned her on. She felt a familiar flutter between her golden legs but she knew that would have to wait until later. She had plans for Detective Brian Russell that evening. Plans that would require him to be well rested and ready for anything. As she passed him he reached for her hand, “Cheyenne, you look amazing!”

Instead of saying thank you, she leaned in and placed a light kiss on his lips. Traces of her red

lipstick remained as she pulled away. She left him standing in the door, mouth open wondering what had just happened.

Chapter Eleven

Cheyenne pulled into the parking lot of Wingate Drilling. Her walk to the front door was a satisfying one, as every eye was on her. She had a commanding presence in her heels and she knew it. Strutting into the reception area, she noticed a young, semi attractive girls behind the desk. “Ma’am is there something I can help you with?” she questioned.

“No, I think I can find my own way,” replied Cheyenne coolly. She strode into the door marked conference just in time to see the entire board of directors sitting with Jason.

“Did you gentlemen forget to invite me to the party?” Cheyenne asked with a feigned southern drawl.

The fury that crossed Jason’s face would have caused most people to withdraw, but not Cheyenne Wingate. She grew an inch as she pulled her shoulders back and stood taller.

“Miss. Wingate, this is just a simple board meeting. I did not feel the need to bother you with menial details,” he declared.

She walked to the chair that Jason sat in, “I believe this is the CEO’s seat and you don’t look like

the CEO to me. Can you please take your seat at the end of the table?" she shamed him.

Jason seemed irate but this was not the time or place for this discussion. He gathered his belongings and appearing humiliated, walked to the end of the table and sat.

"Now then," said Cheyenne, "Who would like to tell me what is going on?" The room sat in stunned silence. Finally, a young man in the corner spoke up.

"This meeting is being held to discuss the possible stacking of a few of our rigs," he shyly stated. To their shock and amazement she asked to see the rigs output and projection models. During her time at the ranch she had not entirely loafed her days away. While going through her father's office she found material that she studied and memorized. Now, she would use what she had learned.

"Why would you want to stack these rigs with projections like these," she demanded. The same shy man spoke up again,

"We are nearing our fiscal year end. If we stack these rigs now, we can boost our short term revenue."

Cheyenne could not believe what she was hearing. These men were trying to lay off sixty hard working men to satisfy their fourth quarter earnings projections. Of course the investors would be happy, but that was not the way Cheyenne wanted to run her business. She knew that it was morally wrong but in the back of her mind, wondered if it had legal implications as well.

"I don't know how my father ran this business but I can tell you this won't be the way its run with my name on the door. These rigs will not be stacked, on top of being dishonest and immoral, it is also illegal." she exclaimed. With that, she rose and walked toward the door. Just before she exited, she turned and said, "Mr. Turner, I want to see you in your office when you're done here."

Cheyenne only had to wait a minute before he stormed in. "You could've warned me that you were coming, you made me look like a fool!" he screamed. She laughed at his temper tantrum. He walked behind his desk and sat.

“I’m glad that I didn’t call first. I can’t believe you were going to allow that to happen. Hell, for all I know it was your idea,” she said as she paced, finally coming to a halt inches from the chair he sat in. Slowly, she leaned over until she was directly in front of his face. His cologne smelled nice but she could not afford to be distracted. She placed her palm on his chest and could feel his heart thundering out of control.

“You and I need to have an understanding. There will be no more secret board meetings or underhanded stunts to sully this company’s reputation. I don’t know what you have up your sleeve but you need to knock it off. And, the next time you tell anyone I have slept with you I will cut your balls off,” she forcefully but quietly stated. Lingered inches from his face made her feel powerful but he wasn’t a worthy adversary. The almighty Jason Turner sat in his chair completely defeated for the moment.

“I’ll be hiring a company to come in and audit the records here. I need to know what is going on and I know that I can’t depend on anyone here to tell me the truth. You will cooperate with the investigation or I will call in the authorities.”

Without another word she turned and walked from the room.

The drive home helped to calm Cheyenne. She felt alive. Completely alive for the first time in a long time. All of her senses felt on fire. Her body had been awakened by Brian and the feeling was intense. Putting Jason in his place had been exhilarating but she knew that by doing so, she had inadvertently drawn a proverbial line in the sand. She knew very little about running a business, much less a drilling business and Jason did own forty nine percent of the company. They would have to find a way to work together or her father’s good intentions would be doomed. She knew however that was easier said than done. The heated confrontation had caused a reaction in her body as well. Deep between her legs, she could feel the heat. It was small at first but soon gave way to an inferno. Reaching under her skirt she could feel the wetness beginning to spread to her outer lips. Regretting that she had not wore panties she could feel the moisture spreading down the valley between her cheeks and onto her skirt. “*What did Brian do to me?*” she thought as her temperature rose. Thankful for the hour long ride home,

she hoped that she would have time to calm herself

Cheyenne slowed as she finally reached her neighborhood. There were so many little shops and boutiques that caught her attention. One in particular captured her imagination. *Angie's Hair Loft*, she read aloud. The idea of reinventing herself was novel. Her excitement grew as she pulled into the small gravel parking lot. The face of the building was brick and a small neon sign flashed open in the shape of scissors in the large window. *Why not? I have not had a change in years.*

"Can I help you?" a tall blond asked from behind the comfort of her chair. Cheyenne noted that the woman's hair was down the middle of her back and looked as though not a strand was out of place. The sun glared off of the blonde locks in such a way that made Cheyenne envious. Suddenly, she felt self-conscious.

"I'm not sure, this seemed like such a great idea from the highway," Cheyenne admitted grudgingly. She desperately wanted to be the kind of woman who could make decisions without second-guessing herself. It was so hard for her to pick a side and stick with it.

"I know just what you need." Assured the woman as she introduced herself as Angie. "Sit down here and let's get to work."

As Cheyenne sat, she felt a sudden surge of confidence course through her body. *Work your magic, Miss Angie*, she thought to herself as Angie picked up her comb and started the task of pleasing a woman who had no idea what she wanted. Two hours later, Angie turned Cheyenne's chair around to reveal her work.

"I love it!" Cheyenne gasped as she ran her hand through her trimmed locks. Angie had taken just enough off that Cheyenne's already gorgeous hair now shined like a diamond. Her curls separated perfectly and cascaded around her shoulders as though they were giving her a much needed embrace.

"Now if you will let me take care of those eyebrows, you will be perfect." For the first time, Cheyenne looked in the mirror closely at her face. She had never taken much interest in the fine details of

her appearance. Now that Angie had pointed out the flaw, Cheyenne would not rest until it was fixed. Cheyenne nodded her head in agreement and Angie got back to work. Around two o'clock, Cheyenne walked out of Angie's Hair Loft feeling and looking like a new woman.

Pulling the truck into its normal parking spot, she exited and darted to the house. Her feet were killing her from the monstrous heels she chose to wear. Before making it to the front door, she kicked the shoes off and walked the rest of the way in her bare feet, carrying the shoes that had caused her such grief. Cheyenne unlocked the door and walked inside to an apparent empty house. Going room to room searching for Brian turned out to be futile; he was nowhere to be found.

Now that I think about it, his truck was not in the drive, she reflected to herself. The house was too quiet for her comfort. Since coming here, she had not had a moment alone to reflect on her situation. Before, she was always alone but now the solitude didn't suit her. The couch looked inviting as she lay down and clicked on the television. Her body sunk into the cushions as the soft velvet lulled her to sleep. Cheyenne had not been asleep for more than an hour when she awoke to a familiar name. A reporter on television was saying that Jason had been arrested. Apparently the murder weapon had been found in his truck during a routine traffic stop just a few miles from the ranch.

"Was he on his way here?" she asked herself, already knowing the answer. Cheyenne opened her cell phone and called Brian, but it went to his voicemail.

"Brian, I just watched the news and saw a report about Jason. Where are you? Please call me," she spoke into the phone. Jason was in custody but she felt shaken to the core. As she had lain on the couch sleeping, he had been on his way to do her harm. Moving quickly from one door to the next, she checked all to make sure they were locked and then sat on the couch for another hour, trembling with fear, before Brian pulled up outside.

Cheyenne ran outside into his waiting arms sobbing uncontrollably.

"Shhhhh, it's okay. Don't cry baby. We got him before he could hurt you. I told you that you would always be safe with me," he consoled her. Between sobs she said, "I was at the office and I

humiliated him in front of the board members. He was coming to kill me.” After what seemed like forever in his arms, he gently steered her toward the front door and inside the privacy of the house. They walked into the kitchen and he poured them both a glass of wine. As they sat and drank she began to leave the drama of the day behind her. She could feel the wine coursing through her body, lowering her inhibitions and erasing the fear that had occupied her mind for the past few hours.

He’s right. I am safe and sound here with him and Jason is in jail. I have nothing to worry about, she told herself. Three more glasses of wine found her light headed and Brian was not far behind her.

“Do you want to go riding?” she asked with hope in her voice. A nice ride sounded so good to her right now.

“Sure,” Brian said. They both saddled their horses and lead them to the stable opening. She mounted and took off. Brian mounted and watched intently.

HE imagined her riding right in front of him. His cock rubbing against her perfect ass with every step the horse took. Her hair flowing over his shoulder fluttering in the breeze. He could feel his cock stiffening. The horse was getting restless so he took off and tried to catch up with her. He finally caught her and galloped beside her.

Brian took her horses reins and hopped off of his. Pulling her out of the saddle he caught her in his strong arms. With her feet still not touching the ground he began to kiss her, this time passionately. She ran her fingers through his hair as she nibbled on his lower lip. She was exciting him beyond anything he had ever felt. As she slid further down his body his erection was evident. He laid her on the ground and came down partially on top of her. She looked like a goddess lying in the grass. His face gave away that he had never seen a more beautiful site. Kissing down her jaw to her neck seemed to excite her. Testing his resolve, he pulled the opening of her shirt and it easily popped loose and he licked her erect nipple through her bra. It was electric to her. He nibbled and licked for what seemed like an

eternity.

SHE could not take it anymore. Rolling her on top of his body, she straddled him just like she had the horse. If she rode him half as well, he was in for a treat. She gazed at him as he pulled her top off. With one hand he unclasped her bra like a magician. Taking her nipple into his mouth, he teased it to a hard peak.

“Tell me you want me,” he demanded. Moving to her other nipple he lavished the same attention to it.

“I want you so bad,” she cried. He licked harder. She was so wet already and did not know how much more she could take. She began rubbing her pussy on his hard cock. The friction created made her crotch not only wet but warm. The warmth made her feel like she was going to explode. He lay back and watched her grind on his dick. She pulled her hair out of the ponytail and as it cascaded down her back he grabbed a handful and pulled her face down to his. Placing another eager kiss on her full and waiting lips he pushed her gently off of him and he rose to his feet. She looked into his eyes; confused as tried to stand, but he put his hand on her shoulder and kept her on her knees. When she saw him pull his dick toward her face, she understood. It was ten inches of the tastiest looking cock she had ever seen. She tried to take the head into her mouth but he pulled back from her.

“Ask me for it,” he said as he slapped her full lips with it.

“Please can I have it?” she asked sweetly.

“Open your mouth, now,” he demanded. She did as she was told and he crammed his cock into her waiting mouth. She kissed the swelling head and then licked down the shaft. He had the most perfect blue vein that ran from the head to the base and she followed it like a road map to heaven. When she got back to the top she opened wide and took all but the last two inches into her throat. She bobbed and slurped until he grabbed a handful of her hair. He began fucking her mouth as if he could not get enough of

her then, he pushed his dick as far into her throat as he could and released his load. She gagged at first.

“You better swallow every drop,” he said sternly. “That it, that’s a good girl.” She swallowed and he pulled out of her mouth. “That was a good blow job baby. Damn that was good. You mind very well with a dick in your mouth,” he teased. He noticed that her lips were fuller than they were before. She looked so hot on her knees with her tits bare. Her nipples were still hard and looked very appealing. He helped her put her clothes back on and kissed the back of her neck. She stood before him and he reached out and ran his hands through her hair. Cheyenne started to put it back in the ponytail but he stopped her, “If you knew how gorgeous you were with it down, you would never put it up again. Leave it down for me.” She nodded and mounted her horse. They both rode back in silence. Cheyenne could not believe that this man could bring her out of her shell the way that he did. Brian had the power to lower her inhibitions. As they entered the stable she knew she had to have more of him. They dismounted and stabled the horses. After brushing the animals down, they both walked back to the house. “I’m going to change and meet you at the pool,” Brian said as he walked down the hall to the far bedroom.

Cheyenne changed into a swimsuit; noting that it was much too small but it would have to do. Brian was already lounging at the pool when Cheyenne came down. He gasped as she walked onto the deck. It was dusk; he had lit the fire pit and watched the flames as they danced on the water. Cheyenne dove in, slicing through the water like a hot knife through butter. Brian could not help but stare. Her top barely covered her large breast and her ass looked amazing in the tiny bikini bottoms. Cheyenne walked up the steps getting out of the water. He stared harder with every step she took. The wet bathing suit clung to her body perfectly and it left little to the imagination. She sat on the chair beside him and towel dried her hair. Getting up from his chair looked to be difficult for Brian. He walked down the stairs of the pool and sat down in the water.

“Are you coming back in?” he asked with a grin on his face. She knew better than to go but she could not help herself as she walked in and sat beside him. He leaned over and untied her top. It fell into the water. Grabbing her hands, he held both behind her back. Gently, he kissed her still swollen lips as he buried his face in her chest and began sucking her nipple. Tracing the areola with his tongue made her

body shudder. He let go of her hands and she instinctively wrapped them around his neck.

He put his arms around her and pulled her body closer while his other hand reached to pull down his trunks as he moved between her legs and untied her bottoms and moved them out of the way. He gripped his cock and rubbed the swelling head against her moist pussy. She bucked against him silently begging him to enter her and suddenly he plunged his growing member into her waiting slit. Cheyenne wrapped her legs tightly around his waist. Pumping wildly he kissed her neck as she buried her head in his shoulder, moaning in ecstasy. She was so tight that he would not last long. Her nails dug into his back as he pushed her to the edge. They fell over together as he came deep in her slit. He stayed in her for a bit, slowly kissing her neck and then back up to her lips. She leaned forward and kissed his closed eyelids which sent shivers up Brian's arms. She felt his cock jump inside of her when she did this. Cheyenne pulled herself closer to him and began kissing his ear, then his neck. When she nibbled on his collar bone she felt him jump again. She rocked back and forth until she felt his cock grow to full size, and then started to slowly ride him. Up and down she bounced until he could take it no more. He threw his head back signaling his release again. He held her for a while and didn't seem to want to let her go.

“Brian, will you stay in my room again?” Cheyenne asked

“So you want me to stay the night with you. What's in it for me?” he teased. She knew what was in it for him and she was sure that he was going to like it. Cheyenne blushed but felt no need to answer his question as his cock was still inside of her.

Both Brian and Cheyenne got out of the pool and showered. Brian started a fire in the fireplace and poured them both a glass of wine. Cheyenne made a snack of cheese and fruit and they curled up in front of the fire to relax. As it blazed, so did their bodies. The growing passion Cheyenne felt for Brian scared her. She had never been one to let anyone get to close to her heart, but he was working his way in. On a daily basis she could feel her resolve being chipped away and she was powerless to stop it. At times she felt like being with Brian was the most exciting thing she had ever done and other times she felt as if it was the most insane. Her life was coming together and seeing Brian day to day had become a habit

she did not want to break.

Her body felt weak from their lovemaking. The tender moments moved her heart in a way that was new to her, but the fucking was another story. It lit her soul on fire and awakened her. Her life had been mundane up until this point. But, now this glorious and beautiful man was giving himself to her and she would gladly take all she could get.

Brian moved toward her and kissed from the exquisite curve of her neck to her pouting lips. He ground his mouth into hers with a savage intensity that she had not experienced before. His tongue snaked into her mouth finding hers to be a more than willing playmate. She inhaled deeply, relishing the raw animal smell of Brian's masculinity and his musky cologne. She let it fill her senses and it made her mind reel.

The unprecedented events of her recent life had instilled within her a brazen confidence she scarcely knew existed and now she was keen to discover just how far she was willing to let herself fall with this man.

"You have been satisfying me, now why don't you tell me what I can do for you." Cheyenne said seductively.

"Hmmm...ladies prerogative," he said eagerly. "I think I can trust you to come up with something I would enjoy."

"Stay right here. Don't move a muscle." Cheyenne instructed him. Her no nonsense tone let him know that she meant business.

She ran to the kitchen and located a bottle of champagne she had seen earlier. Cheyenne remembered something she had read about it but had never tried.

"Why not?" She thought. "I will show him something that will blow his mind."

She returned slowly, concealing the bottle behind her back, she moved toward him and ran her tongue across his stomach, over his chest and up to his neck and chin. Brian trembled as she watched

goose bumps form down his arms. Cheyenne paused before biting his bottom lip, hard enough to force him to draw a breath but not hard enough to draw blood. As Brian panted with anticipation, she bent again, retracing the same slick path that her tongue had previously traveled, but this time moving beyond his navel and into uncharted territory.

Dropping to her knees, Cheyenne let her mouth linger just inches from his groin and her warm expectant breath through the thin material of his pants made him stiffen uncomfortably behind the cotton restraints. She reached up; dragging carefully painted nails across his chest and down his stomach until her hand came to rest on band of his night pants. Although she paused there momentarily, her desire was as great as his and it was not long before she had roughly stripped him of his pants and boxer briefs, leaving him naked, exposed and swelling with excitement.

Brian moaned as her hand gripped his manhood as he arched his back in pleasure as he felt Cheyenne's tongue traced a hot, wet line from the tip of his cock, along the underside of the shaft, before flickering gently against his aching balls. Releasing him momentarily, Cheyenne drank deeply from the champagne bottle, but instead of swallowing, she held the delightfully fizzing liquid in her mouth while Brian looked down at her while a look of puzzled expectancy spread across his face. Without warning, she took him into her mouth, engulfing as much of his cock as she could without choking and began to work back and forth, steadily building up her rhythm and pace.

Brian closed his eyes in ecstasy as the cool liquid fizzed and bubbled around his cock, producing a sensation that was slightly uncomfortable but definitely erotic. Cheyenne worked her mouth up and down alternating long stroked with deep, and finally swallowing the champagne. Taking another large mouthful of the bubbly liquid she engulfed him again, but this time he immediately began breathing heavy. He pumped his load into her mouth and she swallowed it along with the champagne. She was disappointed to see him spent so quickly, when she had only just begun to work on him.

Rising slowly, she ignored the look of disappointment on Brian's face as he was parted from her erotic embrace. Never taking her eyes from his, she slowly popped open the last few buttons of her

blouse so that it hung open invitingly, revealing her flawless, porcelain skin and firm large tits. Unable to restrain himself in the face of her sensual beauty, Brian slowly reached down and began to rub himself in a desperate attempt to relive the memory of her touch.

“Naughty, naughty,” she said in a stern tone, and pushed his hand away. “Whatever you have is for me and certainly not something I want wasted on the living room floor!”

Knowing that it was no longer the time for delicate teasing, Cheyenne quickly shed her nightshirt and in no time at all she stood before him in just her underwear.

“I think it is time for a little payback Brian,” she said with a wink and turned so that her back was facing him. Bending forward slightly, she rubbed her smooth ass against his straining manhood until he was desperate for something more tangible. Painfully, slowly, Brian watched as she straightened before easing herself backwards so that her entire body was pressed up against his, and he was forced to rest on the arm of the couch.

Unable to withstand any more of Cheyenne’s torture, Brian reached around, cupping her breasts roughly. He slid his fingers around her breasts and pinched her hard nipples. Leaving one hand to massage her breasts, Brian ran the other down her body and cupped her moist pussy. Already feeling the wetness of her excitement, he pushed his fingers inside of her and began to slowly moved them in and out. With two fingers fully inserted, he used his thumb to stimulate her clit and this time it was her that moaned in pleasure.

Proving himself to be equally skilled, Brian brought her to the brink of release before removing his hand. He grabbed her ponytail and spun her around with her back facing him as he pushed her over the arm of the couch. “Okay you dirty little whore...you are going to take everything I have, right here, right now and you are going to love it,” growled Brian and although she had heard him talk like this before while he fucked her, his gentle touch told her that this was nothing more than hot and dirty role-play.

Struggling with her own excitement she nodded before replying. “Y-Yes...I’m your dirty fucking

slut and I need your cock. I'll take all of it Brian.”

He entered her from behind and she savored the way his cock filled her pussy. His belly pushed against her back as he hammered her tight pussy. She was unable to form intelligent speech with his cock so deep inside of her, all that would come out was inaudible grunts. Her knees buckled as she tried to stand for leverage. Brian placed his hand in the center of her back and pushed her firmly back down. Although neither of them had much resistance left, he was simply unable to take things slow and steady, and instead began to pump his hips hard.

Both lovers cried out with animal passion as the mounting sensation coursed through them, until, with a hoarse roar, Brian bucked, thrust deeply into her and stood shuddering as his cock twitched and jetted the warmth of his come inside of her. At the same time, Cheyenne's own orgasm hit her and she was unable to prevent herself from screaming out as hidden muscles contracted around Brian's cock, causing more spasms from her lover and milking him for all he was worth. A tingling heat filled her body, before centering on the area where Brian remained buried deep within her. Gradually it subsided and they both shivered and relaxed; panting and spent but blissfully content.

Brian withdrew slowly and Cheyenne turned to see him still struggling to catch his breath.

Brian stayed with her that night. They both walked up stairs, hand in hand to shower and get some much needed sleep.

Chapter Twelve

Cheyenne awoke early the next morning to an empty bed. The sun was just rising in the Texas sky as she opened her eyes.

Today will be a better day, she told herself.

With Jason in jail she had nothing to be scared of anymore. Without realizing she had begun to live her life in fear and dread. Charles Wingate's murderer running around had taken a toll on quite a few people in Houston but none more than Cheyenne. Knowing that she needed to get on with life, she decided to put it all behind her.

She tapped her fingernails together nervously as she knocked on Brian's door. There was no answer from inside. Opening the door, her heart sank. The bed was empty and his bag was gone. Running downstairs she felt her heart racing and beads of sweat formed on her forehead. As she neared the last step she saw his things by the front door and could smell coffee in the kitchen.

"Brian," she yelled as she ran into the room.

“I’m right here,” he said as he drank his coffee. His eyes looked bloodshot as though he had not slept. The look on her face spoke volumes.

“Cheyenne, I think you know what the bag by the front door means. With Jason in jail you do not need me here anymore. I came here to protect you and now my job is done,” he said with a heavy heart.

“The chief called me last night but I couldn’t tell you then. I wanted to have one more good night with you before I told you the truth.”

“Brian, are you sure you have to go? What if he gets out on bail? I need you here with me,” she pleaded. Her heart was breaking as he stood from the table and started toward the door. Cheyenne grabbed his arm and pulled him toward her. Before he could stop her she kissed him. It was not a regular kiss but one full of passion and heart. She felt his heart breaking as his lips pressed tenderly against hers. However, he broke the kiss and held her at arm’s length. Detective Brian Russell looked deeply into Cheyenne’s eyes.

“I have no choice, the chief has ended my assignment” he said.

“Will I see you again?” she asked, desperately searching for answers to her deepest fears.

“I am not sure Cheyenne. Maybe we should take this as a sign and cut our losses before this goes too far.” Cheyenne Wingate stood completely still, hoping that if she didn’t move that what he had just said would disappear into oblivion as though it had never been spoken. Her heart was breaking as he walked out the door.

“Things have already went too far, it’s too late.” she whispered as the door closed. Throughout her life many people had left her but this one hurt a different part of her heart. She had never let anyone in like she had Brian and she was sure that she never would again.

Cheyenne’s day started out bad and had not gotten any better. For most of the morning she had lain in Brian’s bed and enjoyed being enveloped by his familiar scent. After a while of wallowing in self pity, she got up and decided to try and get her mind off of him. She looked in vain for something to keep her

busy around the house. Finally, she walked past the locked door of her father's bedroom. As long as she'd put this off, it was time to go through his room. The key had never been far from her. She pulled it out of her pocket and inserted it into the lock. It made a hollow thudding sound as she turned it in the door.

The smell of leather and old spice was heavy in the air as she walked through the door. In the center of the room was a mahogany four poster bed with a bear skin rug at the foot. It was set up much like Cheyenne's room, except more masculine. Noticing a safe in the corner, she reached out and pulled the handle, curious to see if it would open. The handle did not move and she knew that it would not be that easy. It had a digital keypad on the front. Now the fun part came as she entered every combination of those numbers that she could think of. On the last set of numbers she entered took a chance and entered her birth date. To her amazement, the safe clicked and the door was ajar. The contents of it were puzzling. She could tell immediately that she was not the first person to review the contents. Cheyenne had seen how meticulous her father had kept his possessions and this safe was not meticulous. Papers were strewn about and his valuables were spilling out of the box he had kept them in. Someone had definitely been in the safe but no one should have had access to it after she locked it. No one else had a key to the room.

This must have been gone through before I arrived, she told herself. Closing the safe's door, she looked around the room.

The nightstands could hold valuable information, she decided.

Pulling the first drawer open, she saw magazines and handkerchiefs. She picked up the handkerchiefs and brought them to her nose. Inhaling deeply, she enjoyed the smell of her father. After checking the rest of the drawers, she saw that their content was similar except for the last drawer. It held a forty five caliber pistol and bullets. She removed it from the holster and found that it was already loaded. Cheyenne held the pistol in her hand and the weight of it surprised her. Placing it on the bed, she walked to the closet to have a look.

Cheyenne opened the closet door and looked through the clothes that were hanging. There were several blazers and at least twenty button up shirts. In the very back corner of the large closet, something caught her eye. The cedar slats of the closet were all uniform except for one. She pushed the clothing to one side so she could get a better look. They were certainly different and as she knocked on them, one sounded hollow. She pulled the board and it opened like a small door. Inside, she found another small safe but this one had a key. She thought for a moment and decided to try the key for his bedroom door. It worked and the door opened easily. Cheyenne reached in and pulled out a file folder. Inside, she found numerous papers. She climbed on his bed and settled in to review the paperwork. The first paper she came to was what looked to be a will and it was dated just a week before his death. Her mind was blown as she read it and discovered that everything had been left to her. Jason and Maria had been completely left out. The oddest thing about the entire document was that Ed Crowley had not been the attorney of record for this will. It also listed the additional five million dollars that Brian had questioned. His feeling about missing money had been correct.

The next papers were odd looking and the letters were cut out of magazines. They looked to be the threat letters Maria had told her about, but now some of the letters were missing and the original message was unreadable. There were several other papers in the folder but they were of no importance to her. Cheyenne sat stunned and did not know what to do. Before this morning, she would have called Brian, but now she did not feel like that was an option. Cheyenne needed to get out of the room. The walls felt like they were closing in and she needed fresh air. She walked to the top of the stair landing to go down to the living room.

She sat on the couch stunned. At this point she did not know who she could trust and who she could not.

If this is what life was like for my father, then I really feel sorry for him, she told herself. At every turn there were reasons to not trust anyone. Brian had been the only person she could depend on and now she did not know where she stood with him. After his departure that morning, she felt as if something had died between them. He would no longer be her soft place to fall and that devastated her.

Cheyenne knew that she needed to call him and let him know what she had found but she could not bring herself to dial his number. For the moment, she would keep her findings to herself.

The doorbell rang and startled her. Cheyenne was shocked and terrified when she opened the door. Jason stood in front of her and it scared the hell out of her. In shock she tried to slam the door but he stuck his foot in and the door bounced harmlessly off of his boot. “Cheyenne, I have to talk to you,” he pleaded.

“How did you get out of jail,” demanded Cheyenne as she searched in vain for a weapon, realizing that she had left the pistol on the bed upstairs.

“Please listen to me! I didn’t kill your father and I wasn’t coming over here to hurt you yesterday. I was going to apologize before I was pulled over. Think about it, why would I be driving around with a murder weapon under my seat?” he asked.

Something in his voice told her that he was telling the truth. Her brain screamed danger but her heart disagreed. Hesitantly she opened the door and let him in.

“You never answered my question. How did you get out?” she demanded.

“I posted bail this morning. I need your help. There has to be something around here that would point to why Charles was murdered. If we can find out why he was killed, I have a pretty good idea that finding out who did it will come easy.”

“I think I know what you may be looking for,” Cheyenne declared as she led him up the stairs. “Just a bit ago I finally unlocked my dad’s bedroom. I opened the first safe and it did not look right. Everything was messy and looked like it had been rifled through. Then, I found another safe hidden in the wall in his closet. There are some documents that you need to see.” Cheyenne spread the papers out onto the bed for Jason to see.

“I have to tell you that you are not going to be happy about what I have found.” She trembled as she informed him about the new will.

“Can I see it?”

“I’m sorry but I have put it in a safe place until I can get it to the proper authorities. You will have to take my word for it for now. But, I also found other papers that may explain some of the events surrounding his death.” Cheyenne explained as she opened the worn folder and handed the letters to Jason.

As he looked through the papers his mouth dropped open. It was clear that he had not known that Charles was receiving these letter.

“I hate to deliver more bad news, but Maria told me about these letters right before she left and she informed me that you had been sending them to my father.”

He shook his head as he ran his hand through his short hair. A look of worry and concern formed on his handsome face as he leafed through the papers. His hands trembled and Cheyenne couldn’t tell if that was happening out of anger or fear.

“Jason, I need for you to tell me what is going on. I am not stupid enough to think that you are completely innocent of any wrong doing. I don’t believe that you murdered Charles, but Maria hates you for a reason and I would like to know what that reason is.”

Jason sat quietly for a moment. Cheyenne patiently waited for him to open up to her. Instead of spilling his guts, he rose from the bed as if he was in a trance and walked from the room. He didn’t stop walking until he reached his car. Jason took a look back toward the house before he cranked his vehicle and drove away.

Cheyenne returned to her father’s room and continued looking through the folder. Each of the letters looked the same and had almost the same juvenile message: WATCH YOURSELF! I WILL GET YOU!

Cheyenne’s concentration was interrupted when she heard a noise from downstairs. It sounded like a stair creaked underneath the weight of someone. She reached across the bed for the gun that she had

put there. As she rose from the bed, she tucked the gun into the waistband of her jeans and pulled her shirt over it to hide the bulge.

She had stepped no more than two feet from the mattress when Maria walked into the room. It was evident that she had been crying by her red rimmed and swollen eyes.

“Where have you been Maria? You missed my father’s funeral,” Cheyenne stated in an accusatory tone. The sarcasm seemed to hit Maria square in the face.

“Get out of this room. You have no business being in here!” she demanded as she walked farther in.

“Do you think that you own this house? Is there some reason you think that you can chastise me for coming into my father’s room? You have no right to tell anyone what to do in my house!” Cheyenne demanded.

Maria looked stunned. She walked around the corner of the bed and before Cheyenne realized what she was doing; Maria pulled a gun from her purse and trained it on Cheyenne. Maria held the gun as though it was alien for a moment. Then, as though everything was moving in slow motion, she pointed the barrel at Cheyenne.

“I said for you to get out of here,” Maria demanded as she punched the air with the gun for emphasis. Cheyenne did not move. Her temper was now in control as she stood and turned on the small woman.

“I found the real will and the threat letters Maria. I don’t know what it all means, but I do know that you have a lot of explaining to do,” Cheyenne accused. Suddenly, Maria pulled the hammer back on the gun.

“Get downstairs, now!” ordered Maria.

The small woman looked odd with a gun in her hands. Cheyenne fearfully followed her direction and began walking. At the top of the stairs Cheyenne heard the gun fire. It shocked her senses and she

bolted. She made it into the dining room and found a suitable hiding spot. Peering around the corner of the large hutch she could see a limited area. To her left was nothing but to the right stood the small figured women she had suddenly come to fear. All four foot nine of the women was evil, of that, Cheyenne was sure. She had to get word to Brian before it was too late.

“I know you’re here, Cheyenne,” Maria taunted. “If you come out now, I will not hurt you.

Cheyenne knew that she could not trust her but she also knew that her cell phone was upstairs and she knew that she didn’t have a lot of time. She could see the pistol in Maria’s hand. It looked so foreign in this petite, seemingly gentle woman’s grip. She tried to think of all of her options but the only one that seemed feasible was to fight. Suddenly, Cheyenne saw her opportunity to gain a bit of leverage. Maria was mere feet from her position and Cheyenne seized the opportunity. She leapt from her hiding spot onto the older woman’s back. Both crashed to the floor and Cheyenne saw the gun fall from Maria’s hand and skid to a stop several feet from both of them. She grabbed Maria in a choke hold but the tiny woman had far more strength than Cheyenne initially thought. Maria pried Cheyenne’s arms from around her neck and pushed the younger woman off of her. She lunged for the gun just as Cheyenne crashed down on top of her again.

“Maria, why have you done this?” Cheyenne grunted as she fought for her life. Cheyenne tried to reach for the gun that she had tucked into the waistband of her jeans but just at that time Maria flipped her off of her again and the gun skidded across the floor in the opposite direction of Maria’s. Cheyenne grabbed a vase from the in table and brought it crashing onto Maria’s back. It stunned her, but did not have the effect Cheyenne had wanted. Before she could react, Maria had the gun back in her hands.

“I never wanted to kill him but he would not listen to reason. For twelve years I watched Jason weasel his way into your place. I had to put a stop to it,” Maria exclaimed.

“You killed my father to get rid of Jason?” Cheyenne said in disbelief. He was firing me and I could not let that happen. I loved him but he was about to ruin everything” Maria cried. “When he was firing me he cut me out of the will. I have worked here for over twenty five years and was not leaving

empty handed.

Cheyenne saw another opportunity and lunged yet again at the old women. This time Maria was ready and fired her gun. Cheyenne heard the shot but did not instantly realize that she had been struck by the bullet. As the pain set in though, she painfully came to terms with what had happened. Her blood poured quickly from her wound as she slipped from consciousness.

Chapter Thirteen

Brian was parking his truck when he heard the gunshot. Instinctively he reached for his service revolver and bolted for the front entrance. He peered through the window and didn't see anything. After realizing that the front door was locked, he kicked it in and immediately saw Cheyenne. Brian could smell the fresh aroma of gun powder and immediately thought the worst.

He knelt by her side and rolled her over. Crimson seeped from a hole in her chest and he heard gurgling sounds. Brian ripped off his shirt and put pressure on Cheyenne's chest as he called for backup and an ambulance.

“Please Cheyenne, baby stay with me! You have to stay with me.”

Tears rolled down his cheeks as he checked for a pulse and found a faint one.

“Thank you God!” He screamed to the room as he cradled her head in his lap.

Until this moment he had not realized the extent of his feelings for her. It took her getting shot for him to realize that he loved her.

“Oh god she has to make it....” Brian could not fathom going a single day without her in his life. He needed her, not a memory.

He called into his shoulder mic for an eta on the ambulance.

“Detective Russell it is about thirty seconds out.” The dispatcher stated crisply.

Brian heard the wail of sirens approaching the house. The paramedics rushed in and began working on Cheyenne. So many things were going on and it scared Brian. He was used to crime scenes but never with a live victim and never one who he loved. His senses were on overload and it wouldn't take much to push him over the edge.

Just then, his back up arrived and another detective approached him with a hurried step.

“Detective Russell?” The young detective asked.

“Yes.”

“I found a woman walking a few blocks from here after your call went out over the radio. She looks like she has been through hell so I detained her in the back of my squad car. Do you want to take a look?”

“Yes I would. Where is she?”

The detective led Brian to his car and when he opened the back door, Brian's eyes squinted in anger. His fist balled at his sides and for a moment he wasn't sure if he could control himself.

“Do a gun powder residue test on her hands now! Do not let her out of your site!”

With that, he ran back to Cheyenne. The medics were loading her onto a gurney and were about to transfer her to the hospital.

“How is she doing?” Brian asked as he wrung his hands together. They were covered in her blood as were his clothes. He needed to hear that she would be okay but was terrified that he would not get the answer he sought.

“She is in bad shape. The bullet pierced her lung and she has lost a lot of blood. We will do everything that we can, but she has got to get to the hospital.”

The news was not great but there was hope. He would accept that for now.

“Detective Russell?”

Brian turned to find the young detective approaching him with a GSR kit. He could see that the swab had turned colors from where he stood.

Without saying a word, Brian’s worst fears had been realized. He had left Cheyenne unprotected and she almost lost her life because of it. Hell, he wasn’t sure if she would even make it. She may have already lost her life and if she did, it would be his fault. He would never be able to live with himself if she wasn’t okay.

“Take her in and book her for attempted murder. Don’t let her out of your site until she is behind bars.” Brian ordered.

With that, he peeled out of the driveway and raced to the hospital.

Chapter Fourteen

Brian paced the halls of Mercy Hospital. It was one of the best in the country but that did little to settle his nerves. In the five hours he had been there he had not spoken to anyone except the doctors and nurses. Cheyenne had been brought into emergency surgery four hours ago and he had been given no new information. The paramedics had been correct with their assessment of her condition.

Brian took a break from pacing to grab a cup of coffee and to check in with the chief.

“Chief, this is Russell. Has Maria given any indication why she shot Cheyenne?”

“None. She had refused to speak to anyone, including her own lawyer. If anything breaks I will let you know. How is the Wingate girl doing?”

“There is still no news. She is in surgery.”

Brian hung up, disappointed and wanting vengeance.

How stupid had he been to think that he could just walk out on her that morning and never look back. It would be laughable if it weren't so heart breaking.

After another two hours, the doctors came out of the surgical suite.

“Detective Russell, Ms. Wingate is out of surgery. She is going to be touch and go so we will keep her in ICU. Is any of her family here yet?”

“Cheyenne does not really have any family. I am the closest she has for now. She does have a brother in North Carolina who is military. I will contact the Red Cross to see if we can get a notification to him. Can I stay with her?”

“Normally, we only allow family but I think we can make an exception in your case.”

For the next three days, Brian Russell sat beside Cheyenne's bed without flinching. Occasionally he would leave for a bathroom break but the nurses had begun delivering him a lunch and dinner plate. His devotion was unquestionable. Maria was still refusing to speak and the case was at a standstill. There was no question who did it, but to Brian the why was just as important.

Daily, Brian brushed and braided Cheyenne's long hair, put lotion on her hands and feet and prayed like he had never prayed before.

"Detective Russell, we have the results of the testing that we have been doing. There is really not much else that we can do until her brother gets here, but so far there doesn't seem to be much brain activity. She is being kept alive by the ventilator but her prognosis is not good."

"I won't accept that. It's only been three days, give her time. We can't give up on her; she is going to come out of this."

The tears welled up in his eyes. Brian had not truly cried since he was a child but today was the day. Sobs escaped his lips as he touched Cheyenne's hand to his face. For a moment it felt as if she caressed his cheek. Brian's heart surged with hope. He screamed for the nurse who bolted into the room.

"She moved! She responded when I put her hand on my cheek! The doctor is wrong..."

"Detective Russell, it is common for loved ones to think they see movement. Sometimes we want it so bad that we actually convince ourselves that we see it. It's only setting you up for disappointment. I know that you want it badly but test results don't lie." The concerned nurse clearly had a soft spot for him and rubbed his shoulder as he sat back down beside the bed.

For the next two hours he didn't take his eyes off of her hand. He begged her to move it, willed her to move it but nothing happened. It lay perfectly still and he began to convince himself that the nurse was right; he had imagined it. But, a small part of him knew what he felt. She was still in there and he would bring her back to him.

Suddenly, a man appeared in the doorway. As he opened the door he introduced himself as Cheyenne's brother Matthew. Brian extended his hand to shake Matthew's and both men stared at her helpless body lying in the bed.

"Has there been any improvement?" Matthew asked.

"The doctors say that there has not been but I swear to you that she caressed my face today. As sure as I am standing her, she responded to my touch. I don't like the direction they are heading with their test and I am begging you to not give up on your sister. She is a special person."

"Detective, are you in love with my sister?"

"Yes, I am. I didn't realize it until she was shot but I am more in love with her than I have ever been with anyone in my entire life."

"My sister is strong and has endured a lot during her life. She can beat this." Matthew said full of conviction.

"I guess that you have some questions as to how all of this happened. Take a seat and I will fill you in." Brian said as he gestured to the chair on the other side of the small room.

Hours later, Brian had finished his story and Matthew sat in silence. The story was unbelievable but was obviously true.

"Are you going to be here a while. I didn't want to leave her alone and I need to go to the office. I haven't left here in three days and the chief is getting pissed. I will be back as soon as possible." Brian said.

"Yes, I will be here for the night. Thank you for staying with my sister. I got here as quick as I could but it was comforting to know that she had someone with her."

Brian arrived at the office about twenty minutes later. He brushed off the concerned stares of his

coworkers who obviously knew about Cheyenne. Brian knocked on the chief's door and walked in.

“Chief, Cheyenne's brother just flew in on emergency leave so I came in for a bit. I want to interview Maria.”

“If you think that you can get her to talk then have at it. Brian, I know that this girl mean something to you. Try to be objective and not ruin the case.”

“Okay Chief.” Brian said as he walked out of the office.

He headed straight for the holding area. His stomach was in knots and his body felt like he had pulled a drunk even though he had not drunk in days. With his palms sweaty he pulled his badge out of his pocket and flashed it at the jailer.

“Please bring Maria Garza to interview one.”

The jailer nodded and Brian proceeded to the room to get settled in. As the older woman ambled into the room, she appeared frail and scared. The thought made Brian happy. He hoped she was miserable. There was no sympathy for her in his mind.

“Maria, this interview will be recorded. I would like to ask you a few questions regarding your involvement in the attempted murder of Cheyenne Wingate.”

“I won't speak without my attorney present.”

“From what I can understand, you won't even speak to him.”

“Then I guess you have your answer. I'm not going to speak to anyone.”

Brian felt his blood begin to boil. He wanted to jump over the metal table and strangle the life out of this arrogant woman. Abruptly he left the room before he acted out one of his fantasies. On his way to the locker room to shower and change clothes, he looked at the chief and shook his head, signaling his inability to make her talk. After his shower, he headed back to the hospital for the night.

FOR next two weeks, Brian and Matthew stood vigilant by Cheyenne's bedside. After a third and fourth opinion, her prognosis hadn't changed but both men were adamant that she would get better and each refused to give up on her. She meant the world to the men in her life and now they just needed her to wake up so they could prove it to her. The doctor's moved her to a private room after the second week and she seemed to rest more comfortably. Brian was dying inside and needed her to wake up. Just like he needed air, he desperately needed to hear his name on her lips and see her smile again. She was a shell of her former self at this point and no matter how hard he willed her to wake up she hadn't come back to him yet. Brian was a stubborn man though and he knew that if he prayed hard enough or made the right deal with god that she would wake up. It was only a matter of time.

Chapter Fifteen

Cheyenne awoke to bright lights overhead. Disoriented and scared she tried to sit up and could not. Brian and Matthew both flew to her side, each grabbing a hand trying to comfort and calm her. Brian

hit the call button and a nurse appeared by her side.

“You are in Mercy Hospital. You have been in a coma for three weeks.” The unknown nurse stated. Cheyenne tried to speak but it felt like a pipe was down her throat.

The nurse hit the red button beside the bed and a doctor quickly appeared.

“Miss. Wingate, you are intubated at the moment; if you will bear with me we will remove it and you can speak.” With that, the doctor and nurse set to work. In a moment the horrible experience was over.

“Can I please have some water?” Cheyenne croaked. The nurse held a cup of water while Cheyenne took small sips from the plastic cup. As she looked around she saw Brian’s face. He had obviously not shaven in a few days and looked like hell. In a sea of confusion his presence felt like a lifeline being tossed to her. She immediately smiled and was genuinely glad to see him. He looked tired and haggard as though he had not slept in days. She looked into his eyes and felt like she was home.

Suddenly, Matthew came into her view.

“Stop hogging my big sister!” He said to Brian with a laugh.

He bent and scooped his sister up in a huge hug.

“I love you Cheyenne. You are one lucky lady. This man hasn’t left your side since you got here.”

She was shocked and confused. Her head ached and her chest burned but she knew that she needed to figure this out. Was Matthew saying that Brian had not left her bedside? The man who walked out on her and left her on her own had not left her bedside? In her head she knew that the chief had ended his assignment but she still felt abandoned. She had so many questions for him but for now, Cheyenne wanted to enjoy the company of her little brother.

Brian excused himself from the room for a while so that Cheyenne and Matthew could catch up. When he returned an hour later, Matthew was asleep in a chair and Cheyenne was looking at him like a

protective mother hen.

“Brian, I am glad that you came back. Matthew told me how dedicated that you have been and I want you to know that I appreciate it.”

“It was nothing. I just didn’t want you to be alone. Do you remember anything that happened?” He asked as he sat on the edge of the bed and took her hand in his.

She looked into his eyes and was afraid of what she saw. Yes, she saw anger and frustration but she also saw the softness of love. It scared the hell out of her.

“After you left that day, I fell apart. Walking around the house, looking for something to get my mind off of you, I decided to finally go through Charles’s room. I found a hidden safe and inside, the threat letters you told me about and a will. You were right about the missing money, by the way.” Cheyenne paused for a moment before continuing.

“I took a break and heard a knock at the door. It was Jason. I let him in and told him about the will and also showed him the letters. I let him know that Maria felt like he was the one who had sent them. He was clearly hurt and angry and left. I went back to the room to look through the folder more carefully and Maria burst in, demanding that I get out of the room. She was crazed.

I found a gun while I was looking through his nightstands and had put it on the bed and when I heard one of the stairs creak before she came in the room, I stuck it in the waist band of my jeans. She pulled a gun of her own and ordered me out of the room at gun point. I left the room and midway down the stairs her gun went off, so I ran and hid. I struggled with her and at one point, knocked the gun from her hand. But, Brian, she was so strong. Eventually, she got the gun back and that’s when she shot me.”

“You are lucky to be alive. Maria left you for dead. If I had not found you when I did...” he trailed off.

“You found me?” Cheyenne asked, puzzled.

“When I heard that Jason had posted bail, I came over to let you know. When I got there, you

were barely clinging to life. I am sure that Maria was startled by my arrival and fled but she was arrested only a few blocks away by a patrolman. We were not sure initially that she was involved but when we performed a gun powder residue test on her, she failed. The bullet barely missed your heart, Cheyenne.”

She lay in her hospital bed, soaking up the information.

“Cheyenne, I know that I left you that morning, but I want you to know that it was the hardest thing I have ever done. I realized that I love you and I cannot be without you. Please tell me that you love me too? I came so close to losing you and I can’t do it again. I need you in my life.”

“I love you too Brian but you really hurt me. I don’t know if I can get over it that easy. I want you in my life to but I have to make sure that you’re not going to leave again. You just made it look so easy.”

“Cheyenne, if you never trust anything else, please trust this. I love you and I’m not going anywhere.”

A light knock came at the door and in walked the doctor.

“I need to speak with Miss. Wingate in private Detective.”

With that, Brian bent to kissed Cheyenne’s forehead and walked out of the door. Once the doctor was sure that he was gone he turned to her, “Miss. Wingate, you gave us quite a scare,” he began.

“Your vitals look great but I need to tell you something.” Cheyenne’s heart began to race. “Miss. Wingate, you are pregnant.”

“What?” she said aloud. “How can that be?”

“You are about four weeks along. The damage done by your injuries has not affected your baby at this point. It seems to be a viable pregnancy.”

Cheyenne was in shock. She knew that she could support a baby by herself but she had never intended to raise one alone. Her life had become a constant assault on her emotions. Looking back, she knew that she should have never let Brian chip away at her resolve. She had not been interested in a

relationship and now she was in love and pregnant. “Doctor, when can I get out of here?” she asked.

“As I said before, your vitals are good but we would like to keep an eye on you for at least another week,” the doctor informed her. “Miss, Wingate, you have just come out of a coma. Until an hour ago, you had not breathed for yourself in three weeks. I strongly recommend that you stay here for observation.”

Cheyenne knew that she needed to tell Brian but she could not bring herself to. He had just declared his love for her and this may be too much for him. The last thing that she wanted was to drive him away. Cheyenne decided that for now she would keep the news to herself.

Time crept forward, but day by day, Cheyenne could feel her strength returning. Brian and Matthew were always by her side, willing her to get better so they could take her home. Cheyenne was grateful that Brian had arranged for Matthew to come to her. She had missed him more than even she had known.

Chapter Sixteen

For the past few weeks Brian Russell had went through life on auto pilot. Cheyenne Wingate had wormed herself into every fiber of his being and he had no chance at a happy life without her. Their lovemaking had tormented his every waking moment. His body cried out for her as if she was oxygen.

Now, she was awake and his life was complete again. He had her back and vowed to never lose her again.

“Russell!” the chief cried as he sat stiffly in his chair. Brian heard his name and looked over his shoulder to see his boss motioning for him.

“This can’t be good,” he told himself. Laying his papers down, he strode to the older man’s office.

“Chief, you wanted to see me?” He questioned.

“Russell, we have a big problem. The maid finally broke during questioning this morning. Do you know where the Wingate girl is?” he asked with concern in his eyes.

“Yes sir. She’s still in the hospital. Why do you ask?” Brian stated.

“Well, that crazy woman has told a horrible tale and if any of it is true, that young lady is in danger. We need to get her secured immediately,” he exclaimed.

“Chief, can you tell me the specifics?” Brian pleaded.

“We don’t know a lot right now. She has implicated Ed Crowley and Jason Turner in the murder of Charles Wingate,” he paused. “What?” Brian said, taken aback. “Yes, but that’s not all. Close my door and take a seat,” the chief instructed.

By the time Brian left the office he had lost all color in his face. He rushed to Mercy Hospital as fast as he could go, knowing that he had to get to Cheyenne. As he raced through traffic his thoughts turned to her.

Brian entered through the emergency room doors and ran three flights of stairs to Cheyenne’s room. It was empty. He flagged down a nurse and asked, “Where is Miss. Wingate from 323?”

“Sir, she is on a walk with her brother on the hospital grounds.”

“Has anyone else been here today besides me and her brother?”

“There was an older gentleman here earlier.” Brian knew instantly who had been there and exactly what he had wanted. His sense of urgency had just doubled and he knew that there was no time to waste.

His head began to spin. Just when he felt the desperation swallowing his body, Matthew and Cheyenne walked into the room.

Brian rushed to her side and swept her up on a bear hug.

“Matthew, we have to get her out of here. Circumstances have changes and she is no longer safe here.”

“Do you have a safe place to keep her?” Asked Matthew.

“Can you two quit talking about me like I’m not standing here?”

“I’m sorry. We have to get you out of here. I can explain later.” Brian said as he handed her a set of clothing he had brought for her weeks ago.

She quickly changed clothes and was escorted out of the hospital by Matthew and Brian.

Once on the road, Cheyenne demanded to know what was going on.

“Well, this affects you and Matthew so I guess now is as good a time as any.”

“Ok. Maria finally confessed this morning.” He could see the confusion in her eyes. Know that she was wondering why she was here if Maria confessed, he continued his story,

“Cheyenne, she confessed to much more than just your father’s murder. Before I came to Slidell that first day, I pulled your history on the departments system. I know that your mother’s murder has never been solved.”

“What are you trying to say?” she whispered.

“Cheyenne, she confessed to participating in your mother’s murder,” he replied.

Matthew reached over from the back seat and squeezed his sister's hand.

"Pull over now, I think I'm going to be sick," she cried. As he swung the truck onto the side of the road. He swore out loud as he ran to the passenger side to help her. Yanking the door open just in time, she jumped out and hunched over. Brian held her hair back as she heaved repeatedly. Once she was finished he and Matthew helped her back into the truck.

"Are you feeling better?" he asked, full of concern.

"Brian, I don't want to talk about how I am feeling. I want to talk about the crazy bitch who has almost wiped out my whole family!"

"My house is not far from here. This is going to be a lot to process and I think it would be better if we stopped," he stated.

They pulled into his driveway ten minutes later and the suspense seemed to be too much for Cheyenne to bear. She looked pale and clammy and Brian was afraid that she was going to be sick again. He unlocked the door and Matthew and Cheyenne went in ahead of him. He closed the door behind himself and locked the door. Immediately, he set the security system and led her to a warm toned leather couch in the living room. Matthew sat on the edge of the adjoining loveseat while Brian took a seat beside her. He was clearly nervous to tell her about Maria's confession and that was not a good sign.

"What are you not telling me about Maria?" she asked.

"Cheyenne, there is so much to tell you that I don't know where to start," he said, sounding defeated.

"Why don't you just start at the beginning Brian?" Cheyenne said softly.

"Ok. She confessed this morning to your father's murder. I've already told you that, but she did not stop there. Apparently, Maria had been in love with Charles for at least twenty of the twenty five years she worked there. After years of trying to make him fall in love with her the old fashion way, she started to connive. According to her, your father had always been in love with your mother and she could

not compete with that. She figured that if she could get him to bring you home to Wingate Ranch that he would eventually see her as a mother figure and would marry her. As your eighteenth birthday approached, she realized that soon, Charles would be back in contact with your mother through you. Becoming desperate, she solicited Ed Crowley to get one of his clients to get rid of your mom. As it turned out, he loved Maria unconditionally and would do anything that she asked. He committed the murder himself, all the while telling her that they would both be safer if no one else knew their secret. Between the two of them, one crime led to another and led to another. Before either of them realized, they were in deep. That's when Jason Turner came along. According to Maria, he was rotten from the start, always scheming to get money out of your father. Once he was placed in the office at Wingate Drilling he was in a prime position to reap all the benefits his heart could desire. Maria and Ed saw the potential in Jason's situation and pounced on the opportunity. When the company would near the end of its fiscal year, Jason would stack rigs to save the company money. Each rig that was decommissioned would save the company a quarter of a million dollars a month. Usually he would stack five or six but last year he got greedy. He tried to stack ten rigs and that caught Charles's attention."

"Brian, that is the same thing I stopped him from doing the day I visited the office," she said as the revelation sank in. "I don't understand what benefit there would be from stacking the rigs. All I can see is that it would hurt a lot of innocent workers and their families." She added. "Once the rigs were stacked, it increased their profit margin for the year. That would send the price of their stocks up. All three would buy stock before the fiscal year ended and sell soon after their financial report came out. The stocks would always level back out so they needed to sell before that happened. Maria and Ed noticed that Jason was getting greedy and knew they had to take action. Maria began sending Charles threatening letters in the hopes that he would believe it was Jason. There was one thing that they did not count on. Charles was a smart man and after about a year he figured out that Maria was behind the letters. She delivered them the same way each time and Charles installed a surveillance system to catch her in the act. That was how she always knew someone was there even before they rang to doorbell. Apparently, when he confronted her, he let her know how he caught her and she began using the system to her

advantage. Once Charles confronted Maria, she knew that she had to kill him so she approached her old friend Ed again. This time, they would kill for money and power. Even before Charles caught her with the threat letters, he had always thought of her as a maid. He never shared in her feelings for him. In all of his wills except the one you saw on video, he provided nothing for her. Ed destroyed all wills that post dated the one he wanted viewed, except the one you found in the hidden wall safe.”

“I do not understand why they would murder Charles. It would have been much easier to get rid of Jason. None of this makes sense.” She said as she shook her head in disbelief.

“The night of his murder, Charles was working late. Maria slipped into the office complex and laced the coffee pot with sleeping aid and Xanax. He was quickly unresponsive on his desk. She seized the opportunity and rushed into his office and shot him. As it turned out, she had stolen Jason’s nine millimeter and used it as the murder weapon. When she saw the opportunity she planted the weapon in Jason’s truck to frame him for the murder,” he explained. “I don’t understand how Ed fits into all of this with my father.” Cheyenne said as she wiped tears from her eyes. Brian looked at Matthew and noticed a furious scowl on his face. Revenge was on his mind and it was obvious to Brian that he was skilled enough to get it.

“His involvement was contained to hiding money and destroying wills. This was a crime of desperation for Maria but for Ed it was pure greed. What was not expected were both Ed and Maria framing Jason. But, that was their way of getting rid of him. He probably still doesn’t know that they were responsible for setting him up.” Brian clarified.

“I think that he might. Remember that I told him about the will and showed him the letters. I also told him that Maria had accused him of sending them. Which one of them shot at me and Blaze?” she asked.

“That still remains a mystery. As it turns out, each of them had opportunity and motive. Ed claimed to be sleeping, Jason was unaccounted for and Maria had about fifteen minutes from the time I arrive to the time that you brought Blaze to the house. Anyone of them could have done it.” He replied.

The statement gave Cheyenne little comfort as she thought back to Maria shooting her. She remembered the feeling of the bullet piercing her flesh and the smell of the gunpowder in the air. She was not likely to forget that incident any time soon. At times, she could still smell the horrible metallic scent of her blood spilling onto the expensive marble floor. Shaking her head to rid herself of the memories she looked back to Brian.

She wanted more than anything for him hold her close. She needed him desperately right now but instead she sat and cried. Matthew leaned over and squeezed her knee to show support. Cheyenne had dealt with the death of her mother years before. After the first year she decided that she needed to be real with herself about who her mother had been. But, the news brought a new sadness for her wayward parent. Just knowing that she had been murdered by this pair sent chills down Cheyenne's body. Now, she was seeing that a manipulative angry maid had taken her chance at a happy family with the help of her father's best friend and quazzi adopted child. Knowing that she would never fully get over the shock, broke her heart and fear welled up inside her. It was fear for her unborn child. Cheyenne knew that she had no choice but to get over this news. In eight months she would become a mother and would have to be the best woman she could be for her baby. Her baby would have to be raised without a father. There was no way that she would trap Brian with the news of a baby. "Cheyenne, what's on your mind?" he said tenderly. As he spoke he reached out took her hand. The physical contact made her shudder. She desperately needed him to hold her, even if it was only for the night.

"I don't understand any of this. Until I came to Houston I did not realize that the world had that many evil people. What really gets to me is Ed. He seemed like such a sweet old man. I was very fond of him."

Cheyenne could not speak any longer. Moving toward him on the couch, she fell into his waiting embrace. It was almost as if he knew what she needed.

"I made a big mistake pushing you away. Can you forgive me?" he confessed.

“Ahhhhmmmm. I will find the kitchen and see what I can whip up to eat.” Matthew said as he rose to leave the room.

Neither Cheyenne nor Brian acknowledged his departure.

“Why did you do it? How could you make love to me the way you did and then just throw me away?” she whispered against his chest. It seemed to break his heart as he saw the tears fall from her eyes. He bent and gently kissed her lips as he wiped the tears from her face. Cheyenne responded to his kiss by wrapping her arms around him. Brian lifted her in his arms and pulled her closer to him. Instead of making love to her, he simply held her. Cheyenne knew that she would not be so quick to forgive.

She felt very sick suddenly. Cheyenne sprang from Brian’s arms and ran to the bathroom. He followed behind but she kicked the door shut as she hugged the toilet. “Cheyenne, can I get anything for you,” a concerned Brian said at the door.

“Water,” she pleaded. Opening the door, she almost ran right into him waiting with her glass. She drank and washed her mouth out as she stood over the sink. Cheyenne wanted to brush her teeth and asked him for a toothbrush. He pulled a new one from the medicine cabinet and left her while she freshened up.

The concern Brian showed moved Cheyenne. But she did not let herself slip into their old, familiar routine. She sat back on the couch and he pulled her close to him. *Of course he would tell her that he had made a mistake, they were pushed together by circumstance again* she told herself. She could not allow herself to trust him again. It may prove to be a mistake but it was a chance she was willing to take. Cheyenne Wingate would no longer gamble with her heart. There she sat in her lover’s arms, pregnant but unwilling to let herself be happy. She knew that she could not entrust her heart to him again. Although he already possessed it, she would not, could not let him know that. Her thought went back to Ed Crowley. In her deepest thoughts she could not imagine him being guilty of what he was accused. Maria had lied before and Cheyenne secretly hoped that she was lying again. To her, Ed had almost been a life line to her father. It felt as though Ed was the closest thing she would ever have to getting to meet her father. Now, it felt as if he had died twice. Her heart was breaking at the thought of

Ed bringing harm to her father. As it turned out, Charles Wingate had needed Cheyenne far more than she had ever needed him. So much was going through her mind but none of it made any sense to her. She hoped that a fair night's sleep would clear things up for her. At some point she would have to face reality but she knew that she could not do that in her current state of mind. Confusion was replaced by anger and soon that was replaced with sleep. Cheyenne lay beside Brian in what should have been a happy moment. She had prayed for Brian to come back to her and for god to let her lay in his arms again. Now she knew why her mother had always said to be careful what you ask for. The reunion had become a double edge sword.

Chapter Seventeen

By noon the next day, Cheyenne and Brian were traveling to a location that Brian knew would be safe. Matthew had to be dropped off at the airport to report for duty. Cheyenne had cried when they let him out at the airport. There was so much that she wanted to say but was at a loss for words. She simply hugged him tightly and made him promise to come back soon for a long visit.

Brian was jumpier than usual and that sparked alarm in Cheyenne. She had known him to be calm and in control at most times and this was unlike him. The closer they got, the worse it became. When he passed the familiar exit to Wingate Ranch she looked at him curiously,

“Where are we going?”

“Somewhere that Ed Crowley and Jason will never think to look,” he replied. After another hour of driving, Brian pulled into a wooded lot on the west side of Houston.

“We are here,” he announced. Something else had his attention. Upon closer inspection, Cheyenne could tell that he was scanning the horizon for unidentified dangers.

“Why is Ed such a danger to me? He’s an old man who looks like he is well past his prime,” she asked as she twirled her hair around her index finger.

“He is a very real danger, Cheyenne. Aside from the fact that he was able to kill your mother in cold blood, he has contact with dangerous criminal elements. I don’t know where the threat will come from but I am sure that it is coming,” he added. She looked at him in deep thought. His beautiful eyes were furrowed in deep contemplation and his full pink lips were pursed as though he were holding his breath. *Even in deep thought, he truly is a gorgeous man,* she said to herself.

“Is there any chance that Maria has lied and none of this is true?” Cheyenne asked hopefully.

“Cheyenne, it is time to grow up. When I tried to tell you about Jason, you resisted and was sure that he was innocent. Now, you are holding out hope that Ed is not guilty as well. At some point you have to realize that your judgment about these two is skewed. You are not allowing me to fully protect you if you continue to hold out hope that either is innocent.”

Brian walked around to her door. As he opened it, he held out his hand to help her out of the truck. Accepting his assistance she stepped out and surveyed their surroundings.

“Where are we supposed to sleep?” she asked in bewilderment.

“Follow me,” he demanded as he began walking into the brush. They walked for about half of a mile and came to a clearing with a small cabin. It was a quaint setting and could be very romantic if two people were inclined. Approaching the cabin, Cheyenne noticed an old flower bed that had not been tended in a while.

“Does this cabin belong to you?” she asked Brian.

“Yes, it was my mother’s before she passed away. She loved coming up here just to get away from everything. After she passed, I kind of let the place go,” he said as he motioned to the flower bed.

She had not heard him speak of his mother before and it was touching. His eyes lit up momentarily as he spoke of her but shame soon followed as he eyed her flower beds. For some reason, Cheyenne could not see him poking around a flower bed pulling weeds. The idea was so foreign to her that she let out a quiet laugh as they walked through the cabin doors. Once inside, she soaked in her surroundings. The floors looked like marbled leather and veins danced across the surface as light from the numerous windows teased it to life. The furniture was plain but it complemented the rough pine walls as they transitioned into vaulted ceilings. *This cabin is nicer than my home in Slidell*, Cheyenne noted as she proceeded on the tour that Brian was giving her. A large flokati rug lay protectively over the living room floor, inviting passerby’s to remove their shoes and stay a while. Cheyenne could not help herself as she took off her sandals and dug her toes into the thick pile of the rug. Continuing barefoot, she moved to the first bedroom and found a simple yet comfortable room. With no adornments except a lush down comforter, she decided that this was where she wanted to sleep. No fancy duvet’s or eyelet curtains would overpower the simplicity and charm of this room. As she placed her bag beside a beautiful antique cedar chest, Brian’s voice brought her back from her thoughts, “This was my mother’s favorite room as well.” She felt transparent as though he could see her thoughts. Brian took her hand and led her from the

room. Right down the hall was a huge kitchen. Cheyenne could picture herself cooking a Sunday meal while her baby napped in the simple room down the hall. She inhaled deeply to capture the curious scent of the cabin that already felt like home. Brian studied her movements and expression as she took in the wonderment of the cabin.

“My mom used to do the same thing,” he noted aloud. “She would always say that this place had a smell that she wished she could bottle. She would have called the fragrance, Home.”

“This is a wonderful cabin Brian. It is understandable why she loved this place so much. It sort of captures your heart in a way I can’t explain,” she said. Here, there were no pools or maids but it had become part of her unlike any place she had visited. Cheyenne opened the cupboards and noticed that they were fully stocked.

“I come up here on the weekends when I have a chance,” he explained, trying to answer her question before she asked.

“What would you like for supper? It is getting late and I am hungry,” she stated.

“There are frozen pizzas. Maybe we can just keep it simple to night. It has been a long day,” he said as he pulled the pizzas from the freezer. “Why don’t you go sit down and I will bring you a slice when it’s done.”

Cheyenne knew that she could get used to this. As she sat on the cool leather couch, she put her feet up and before she knew it, she drifted off to sleep. She was startled awake by Brian gently shaking her.

“Your pizzas ready,” Brian said soothingly. Sitting up on the comfortable couch, Cheyenne smoothed her hair before taking the delicate plate from him.

“This china is exquisite,” she exclaimed as she nervously handled the heirloom. Brian smiled at her as he took a large bite of his slice. Both ate in silence as there was no television. The cabin was designed for leaving the world behind and relaxing. Cheyenne felt safe tucked into the woods in this

small piece of heaven on earth.

The days past and soon Brian and Cheyenne had been in hiding for a week. Neither had spoken much as it didn't seem like there was much left to say. She had been plagued by nausea and found it increasingly hard to hide it from him. Part of her wanted to tell him so badly and another part warned her against it.

He paced the cabin floor, watching and waiting for an unknown threat and her thoughts were consumed by her unborn child. Even though she knew that she would never bring herself to have him again, she would always possess a piece of him through their baby. The thought was comforting but yet left her feeling alone. *How can I feel like this when there is another human being occupying my body?* She asked herself. Strangely, she could never come up with an answer. Cheyenne was content to spend her days exploring the cabins many hidden joys, and working crossword puzzles. Brian had found his moms stash of puzzle books and offered them to Cheyenne to help pass the time. She had felt honored that he would allow her to have something that had been his mother's. It was a small thing, but she could remember after her mother died, she held onto every scrap of paper that had been hers.

Provisions were starting to run low so Cheyenne decided that she would make beans and cornbread for supper. As she took the bread from the oven, she could feel herself being stared at. After setting the hot pan down, she turned to find Brian sitting at the table with a bottle of whiskey in hand, eyeing her. His eyes looked misty as though he had been crying but she knew that he was much too masculine for that. Deciding to pretend she had not noticed, she turned to cut the cornbread but as she did, she felt his heat on her neck. He was inches from her and she could smell the whiskey on his breath. Without saying a word, she side stepped him and carried the meal to the waiting table. When she looked around, he was leaning against the counter with his back to her; shoulders slumped as if in defeat. Cheyenne wanted to go to him and kiss away his pain. She wanted to tell him everything was going to be okay, even though she knew it would not. The food went untouched that night and Cheyenne, not being a wasteful person, put it up as leftovers for the next day. The feel in the cabin was oppressive and brooding so she showered and turned in early. Crawling into the nice warm bed felt like a safe haven for her.

Under the covers, all of the turmoil and stress melted away as though they could not penetrate the heavy quilt that covered her.

During the night Cheyenne awoke to a booming clap of thunder. It rattled the old windows of the cabin. For her, it was unsettling. Periodically, lightening would strike nearby and the shadows of her room would come to life. The rain soon came and the sound of the drops hitting the tin roof was like sweet music to Cheyenne's ears.

"Are you awake?" Brian called from the door. She heard the rusted hinges groan as he pushed it open.

"I am." Cheyenne said groggily.

"We are under a tornado warning. The wind is getting pretty strong out there." He said as he waited for a response from Cheyenne. She lay quietly in the bed, not being difficult, but suffering from the lack of anything to say. Wanting desperately for things to be normal between them, Cheyenne turned toward the doorway. Brian was leaning against the door frame wearing only his boxer briefs. His physique was that of a Greek god. Cheyenne scooted over and patted the once occupied mattress beside her. Without hesitating, Brian sat next to her. Suddenly, a loud explosion outside made Cheyenne almost leap out of her skin. Instinctively, she darted for him as though he could protect her from a noise. The fan sputtered to a stop and she knew that the power had gone out.

"A fuse must have blown." Brian said as he cradled her in his arms. Cheyenne felt less fearful. It felt nice to be in his arms but she knew that she should not get used to it. It took a lot for him to tell her that he loved her. That was obviously a huge commitment for him. He would no doubt run if he knew that she was pregnant.

Brian lay down in the bed beside her after a while and the storm outside continued to rage. Cheyenne woke up several times during the night and he was holding her tight each time. By six a.m. the storm had blown through. Looking out of the window of her room, Cheyenne noticed tree branches down and patio furniture blown about the yard. Leaving her room, she went to the kitchen to make coffee only

to discover that the power was still out.

“It could take days for the power company to get this far out,” said Brian. “It may be time for us to head back to Houston.” The thought was depressing to Cheyenne. She had grown accustomed to the solitude and peace found inside of the little cabin in the woods.

“I think I would like to go back to the ranch.” She said with determination. The last place she had truly felt comfort and peace was the ranch, right before Maria had shot her. Vowing to reclaim that state of mind, she began packing her bags to leave the little piece of heaven the cabin had become.

Getting back on the road felt nice. As a child, Cheyenne was used to moving often. Never having a chance to put down roots had carried over into her adult life. Although she never allowed the thoughts to invade her life, they plagued her mentally for years. She had internally suffered from the grass is greener syndrome. Always envying others was a difficult task to keep up and it was equally hard carrying the shame of her thoughts. Now, she had everything monetarily that she could ever want but realized that she was no happier than she had been without it. Love was the only thing that was going to make her whole and her chance at that was slipping away rather quickly.

“It looks like we are going to get some rain later.” She noticed out loud. Making small talk was hard since Brian did not seem to be in a chatty mood. She rode in silence until they reached the ranch.

It appeared to be just as she left it. Nothing seemed out of place. Brian punched the familiar number code into the iron gate control and they waited for it to open but after waiting a moment, nothing happened.

“Stay right here, I need to open the gate by hand,” Brian said as he hopped from the driver’s seat. *Wow, he can speak!* She said to herself. As he pushed the gate open, Cheyenne could see the muscles rippling through his thin cotton t-shirt. *God this man is under my skin!* She mumbled under her breath.

“Did you say something?” Brian asked as he slid back into the driver seat.

“No, I was just thinking to myself,” She admitted begrudgingly. Cheyenne could not remember

when their banter had turned dark but she got the distinct feeling that Brian was angry with her.

“Have I done something to upset you?” she demanded shyly. Instead of an answer, Brian, once more got out of the truck and walked toward the front door. She knew that her mixed signals had upset him. At the hospital she had told him that she loved him and then found out that she was pregnant. She began pushing him away at the cabin and he had caught on and probably gotten his feelings hurt.

“Hey, I’m talking to you,” Cheyenne said hotly as she slammed the truck door. He still continued to walk away from her as though she had said nothing at all.

“Fine, walk away. You wouldn’t be the first and you probably won’t be the last.”

Brian spun around to face Cheyenne. His eye’s blazing; she could feel his anger bursting inside him like an inferno.

“I am tired of the games. I am fed up with your moodiness as well. You are sweet and kind one moment and the next you are snapping at me. I don’t function well under these conditions. So, forgive me if I am not eating up your particular brand of bullshit but I have had enough.”

Cheyenne was stunned. She knew what was causing her crankiness but she could not tell him. Really, she had not thought it to be that bad and figured that she had been holding up well under the circumstances. Looking back, she now realized that for the past few days she had been snapping at him.

“I’m sorry.” She volunteered. “I had no idea that I have been taking out my frustrations on you. It won’t happen again.”

“Look, I know that this is stress full but you have to work with me.?”

With that, Brian walked into the house.

Danger registered in Cheyenne’s body. Something was not right, he should not have been able to walk in the house, she had locked it when she left. The hairs on her neck prickled and her stomach suddenly had butterflies. The gate had been her first overlooked clue but they had been too busy arguing

with each other for either one of them to take notice of the disabled gate. Cheyenne began back peddling out of instinct and suddenly a firm hand grasped her around her neck as a gun barrel was placed against her temple.

“Get in the house,” a gravelly voice demanded in her ear. Stunned, she began taking small tentative steps toward the door. Her captor shoved her hard from behind, signaling her to pick up the pace. Not wanting to take a chance with her baby, Cheyenne complied with the unspoken demand.

Where is Brian? He should have noticed I have not come in yet. I have to get his attention before this man shoves me into the house.

Without thinking it through Cheyenne yelled out for Brian. She felt a sharp, cracking pain in the back of her head and then nothing.

Cheyenne was only out for what seemed like a moment, but when she opened her eyes, many things had changed. She was tied to a dining room chair and right next to her was Brian, also tied but blindfolded as well. Cheyenne began panicking, straining against her ropes that bound her helpless body. Her head hurt and she could not feel her fingers. Her ropes were too tight. “Cheyenne, are you okay?” Brian’s concern was evident.

“My head hurts and the ropes are really tight. I’m scared Brian.”

“Cheyenne, I am so sorry. If I had not been mad at you, this would not have happened. Don’t be scared, I am going to get you out of this.” Brian assured her with compassion.

What about getting his self out of this? Was that a slip of the tongue or would he give his life to save mine? Oh, I’m so scared, God please help me.

From the next room, Cheyenne could hear their captures talking. “We have them at the ranch...their tied up and the cop is blindfolded. What next?”

A shiver passed through her body and she knew that she needed to find a way out of this but she could not think clearly with her head pounding.

Cheyenne began working her wrist in an attempt to loosen the ropes that were binding her wrists. *Oh this hurts so bad...*The bonds were not loosening.

“Cheyenne move your wrists around.” Brian whispered.

“I am already doing it, but I don’t know how much longer I can keep it up. They are really cutting into me.”

The masked men walked into the room as Cheyenne was squirming in her seat. She was sure that they had caught her, but as they walked by, neither said anything to her. They both went straight for Brian. They struggled, but finally managed to pick his chair up and move him away from her. Brian struggled

and called out, “Do either of you know who I am? This is prison time for both of you.” He threatened.

“We know who you are and the only way we will get caught is if you live through this. We can assure you that you won’t. Now shut up or we will gag you.”

Cheyenne tried to recognize either man’s voice. She decided that she had never heard them before. She was afraid to make eye contact with them, so as they walked from the room, she concentrated on the ground. “Brian.” She whispered loudly. “Brian!”

No answer. Cheyenne struggled against her bonds again and felt them giving way. She could hear the men on the front porch and knew that she had a small window of time to save them. Shaking the rope off of her hands, she quickly bent and removed the ropes on her ankles. Quietly, she moved from her chair and reached for Brian. “I have freed myself and will have your ropes off in a moment.”

She made quick work of the ropes and he removed the blindfold from his eyes. He squinted as he adjusted to the bright light from the window. Brian removed a pistol from his boot and protectively pushed Cheyenne behind him with his other arm.

“Stay behind me until I tell you to run.” He instructed as he quickly kissed her on the lips. “Cheyenne, in case I don’t get the chance later....” Brian’s voice trailed off as he saw the front door open. In walked Ed Crowley. Close behind was Jason.

“I thought you said you had them tied up.” Ed screamed as he motioned toward the empty chairs.

“Boss, we did have them tied.” Ed’s goons exclaimed.

“Find them now.” Ed demanded.

Jason walked in and surveyed the situation. “You should have let me handle this my way Dad.”

Cheyenne could not believe what she had just heard. Looking over at Brian, she knew that he was as surprised as she was.

Dad? Ed is Jason’s father? Can this get any crazier?

Hiding behind the china hutch again brought back bad memories of Maria's tirade. The memories were fuzzy but unpleasant to relive. Cheyenne felt Brian's arm tense and knew that he was about to come unhinged. Suddenly, he sprang from the hiding place in a hail of bullets. The group was caught off guard and one of the kidnappers fell instantly, but the other, along with Ed and Jason ducked behind the door.

Cheyenne had never seen a dead body before and she was sure that the sight would not be easy to forget. As she moved to step over the body, she was yanked backward. The feeling was familiar and she knew instantly that Jason had her. She was hauled forcibly against him and then thrown to the ground. Cheyenne protectively wrapped her arms around her mid section.

In the confusion she had not realized that Brian was not in the living room until Ed marched him back in at gun point.

"Now that I have your attention, maybe we can get something accomplished." Ed said.

"Why are you doing this?" Cheyenne demanded. "It is not for you to ask why my dear. This is just simply the way things are going to be. After I have disposed of the two of you, I can go about my life like none of this ever happened. It really is unfortunate though, if Jason had not become greedy, your father would still be alive," he said as he scowled at Jason. Cheyenne refused to believe that anything could have changed the course that Ed, Jason and Maria had been on. They were all pure evil. Ed leveled his gun on Cheyenne. "You are going to be first, my dear." Jason came from behind Cheyenne and grabbed her by the hair. As he lifted her, it felt as if each strand would be pulled out one at a time. She wrapped her arms protectively around her stomach. Knowing that she would have to expose her secret to save their lives did not make it any easier to do. Taking a deep breath Cheyenne pleaded,

"Mr. Crowley please do not hurt me. I am pregnant." Brian's eyes widened as she spoke.

"You're what?" Brian exclaimed.

Cheyenne knew that it was a shock to him but the intended target just laughed and replied, "That is of no consequence to me young lady."

“Before you kill me, please tell me why you have done all of this. Why have you hidden the fact that Jason is your son?”

“I have done all of this for love. You see, I came to town many years ago. Jason was only ten at the time and lived with his mother. When he turned seventeen he came to live with me. I had fallen in love with Maria and she did not know about him. She was a wonderful lady but she did not like kids. Maria wanted to marry your father for financial security and I wanted her to marry me; we were at an impasse. In the meantime, Jason had begun working on one of Charles’s rigs. Charles liked Jason very much and brought him into the office to work. No one ever found out that he was my son, so no one suspected anything when we began insider trading. We all appeared to be unconnected. Hiding the fact that Jason is my son helped us to cover up what we were doing. I will say that Jason and I had no idea that Maria was going to kill Charles. That was a total surprise, but at the same time, we have kept our secrets from her as well. There is only one thing that I regret. Killing your mother was a mistake. I had no idea that Maria planned on marrying your father as a result of your mother’s death. If I had known that, I would have never carried out Maria’s plan.”

“That is the most disgusting thing I have ever heard. You are the most self centered person I have ever met in my life. You regret killing my mother because you felt used? You make me sick!” Cheyenne screamed.

“Young lady, in life things do not always go our way. You have been through some hard times but you should be thanking me. From what I learned, your mother was a no good con artist who had no business having children and your father was too clueless to understand. He should have never left you in your mother’s care. I was quite surprised that you turned out so well considering the role model you had.”

Cheyenne moved forward at lightning speed, taking Jason by surprise. She almost reached Ed, when Jason regained his composure and hauled her backwards with such force that she bounced off of his body.

“You disgust me Ed Crowley and you should be ashamed of yourself. Maria was right about one thing. She knew that your son was trouble but was obviously too stupid to realize that you are too. It has been funny watching you all tear each other apart. Maria killed my father and tried to set your son up to take the fall. You are caught in the middle not knowing which side is going to frame you and your precious son is out for himself. All of you deserve each other.”

Ed studied Cheyenne intently. “I may have misjudged you, young lady. You have more fire and grit than your mom and dad combined. It is such a waste to kill you but it is necessary.”

While he was distracted with Cheyenne, Brian lowered his shoulder and pushed him, knocking him off his balance. Every muscle in his body tensed as he pulled his right arm back and smashed it into Ed’s face. While on top of him, he pressed his knee into the attorney’s neck with all of his might. Ed was turning red in the face as he struggled to ask his son for help. Jason released Cheyenne and lunged for Brian. Just as he was about to reach him, a sharp bang echoed through large living room. Everyone froze for a moment. Everyone that is, except Cheyenne. She held the pistol that Jason had left behind, trained on Ed as she ordered him to let Brian go. Jason lay on the floor bleeding. Cheyenne had shot Jason in the back and he had fallen immediately. Ed released Brian long enough to reach for his pistol that had landed on the marble floor. Taking deliberate aim, Cheyenne fired the pistol one last time. Ed Crowley fell to the ground on top of the gun he had so desperately tried to get. As the shot rang out she was stunned it had been so easy to kill two people who were trying to harm the father of her child. She felt no remorse for the killing and knew that she would have done it again if she had to. Cheyenne stood there, holding the gun by her side as Brian reached her. He did not say a word as he took the gun from her dangling hand.

“How long have you known?”

“About a week,” Cheyenne admitted, as she looked at the ground. “I’m sorry that I didn’t tell you, but I did not want you to feel trapped.” So many emotions were coursing through her body that she did not know what to do next. He said nothing more. She was waiting for the big blowup but it never came. Brian radioed for backup and the coroner. Soon they would be arriving and Cheyenne would have to

recount the ugly ordeal. He walked to her and put his hand on her shoulder. “Don’t worry, it is all going to be ok,” he said through gritted teeth.

Cheyenne could tell that even at his maddest, Brian was still concerned about her feelings. It broke her heart to have shut him out the way that she had, but in the end, she knew that she had done it for the right reasons. Brian made it look so easy to walk away from her and she could not get over that. She wanted someone in her life that would be by her side no matter what happened. Cheyenne could allow him a few slip ups here and there but she could not over look a blatant disregard for her feelings, especially now that a baby was in the picture.

But, she could not deny that she loved him desperately. She had just taken two men’s lives to save him and their baby. Cheyenne knew that they would have to talk about the situation but she was not looking forward to the confrontation. Any man would be furious to learn that his child had been hid from him, but Brian was so passionate, she knew that his reaction would be over the top.

Chapter Nineteen

After the coroner removed the bodies and the statements were taken, Cheyenne was ready for everyone to leave. Brian helped her to a nearby chair while he spoke with the chief. The adrenalin was still coursing through her veins and she wanted to put it to good use. As the chief walked past her on the way to his car, he smiled. It was a reassuring and knowing smile as though he knew that things would not end so easily. The mental fallout from killing two men would stay with her for the rest of her life.

Once Brian closed the door, the room fell silent. It was just the two of them now. She wanted to say so much but could not get the words to form right in her head. So, instead of saying something that would salvage the train wreck that had become her life, she said nothing at all. She could not blame him for his anger but she was upset too.

“Cheyenne, we need to talk about this,” he pushed.

“Brian, there is nothing to talk about. Sure, in the face of danger I am someone to play around with, but this is real life. I am real and my life is not a game. You cannot pull me to you only to push me away when you are through. It hurts too much to keep dancing this dance with you. I don’t need you and neither does our baby.”

Cheyenne stomped up the stairs and slammed her door. In her opinion, the conversation was over. She had not meant to say the things that she had, but the words had poured out of her mouth without effort. Wanting to hurt him had been her motivation but now she felt guilty. She wanted to go to him and take her hateful words back, but she knew that she could not unring a bell. Her words were spoken and she would have to deal with that.

It was not long before the bedroom door flew open and a very upset Brian Russell stood glaring at Cheyenne.

“How dare you presume to decide if I will be there for my child or not. Your father may have accepted that from your mother, but I will not stand for it from you. I have pushed you away to protect you from my life,” Brian declared. “When I almost lost you, I realized that I couldn’t live without you. I need you in my life and you being pregnant does not change that.”

“What is there to be protected from? You say that your job is so dangerous but you had no problem fucking me and dumping me like I was nothing. You are dangerous, not your job.” Cheyenne demanded naively.

“Did you not see how close to death I came a few hours ago? That can happen to me at any time and sooner or later I will not be so lucky. If I had done what I wanted, I would have married you already and be damned if you worried or not” he screamed. Cheyenne was shocked.

She sat on the edge of the bed, completely in shock. The tears started flowing and she was powerless to stop them. The last thing she wanted was to break down right now. As her body shook from

sobs, Brian walked toward her. Cheyenne put her hand up to signal for him to stop. She wanted to be clear headed when talking to him and knew that if he touched her, that her judgment would become clouded. Brian ignored her signal and continued toward her.

He neared the mattress and slid up beside her. Wrapping his arms around her, he lay back on the bed and brought her down with him. She lay against his chest and slowly her sobs became quiet whimpers until they stopped altogether.

“Cheyenne,” Brian whispered into her ear. “I love you.”

Cheyenne had never been one for changing her mind once it was made up. She eyed him suspiciously as she sat up on the bed.

Without saying another word, Brian sat up. He took her face in his hands and kissed her lightly on the lips.

“I want to kiss you like this every morning of our lives,” he whispered as he sought her mouth once more. Cheyenne was unable to speak. He had taken her breath away. Brian lifted her effortlessly in his muscular arms and gently laid her back on the bed.

“Did you hear me? I love you and I will love our baby. Please believe me.” He pleaded.

Cheyenne wrapped her arms around him and pulled him close. “Do you mean it? Or, are you going to wake up some day in the future and decide that we won’t work out? “

Delicately he pushed her further on the mattress and began to lift her dress around her waist. His mouth targeted her soft pussy and worked feverishly to show her his love. Licking her swelling nub sent pleasure waves through her body. She bucked underneath his dancing tongue as he pushed the dress further up her waist. Cheyenne alternated between running her hands through his hair and grabbing handfuls and pulling his face farther into her. Grinding herself onto his face gave her the ultimate pleasure. His stubble added another layer of friction to an already growing heat. Her pussy was on fire and she needed him inside her. He rose to his feet but before he could make another move, she pressed

hard against Brian's stomach and pushed him back. A look of surprise passed over his face.

"*You don't tell me what to do this time,*" she said quietly as she looked him in the eye. At the same time she reached down and grasped his hard cock through his pants. "*I tell you what to do,*" she said as she squeezed.

Brian let out a moan half-pain and half-pleasure. It was clear to Cheyenne that she was now in control. She moved her long legs seductively, letting him gaze at her tight ass as she passed by. She stopped before the wall and flipped her hair back and gave him her most inviting look. Brian's gulp was almost audible as he stared at her dumbfounded and obediently. Before he knew what was happening, she was on top of him pulling at the zipper on his pants. She simply pulled his already hard cock out of the whole and sat on top of it. She slid up and down his slippery cock, all the while never taking her eyes off of her prize. Cheyenne knew that he was getting close to blowing his load inside of her. That only served to make her ride him harder. Brian clawed at the front of her dress, trying desperately to free her large tits. Knowing exactly what he was up to she slapped his hands away.

"You are going to have to wait until it is your turn," she panted.

"Now, tell me how bad you want me." Brian moaned as she stopped riding him suddenly.

"I said tell me now!" she reinforced.

"I want you so bad my cock is going to explode," he cried as he tried desperately to rock underneath her for relief.

Reaching back and pulling his sack out of the zipper hole, she fondled and rubbed him, all the while remaining completely still on his desperate cock. She ripped his pearl snap shirt open and threw herself forward on his chest and began sucking and licking his sensitive nipples. "Oh god Cheyenne, please fuck me, I need you to ride my dick," he pleaded. Still not giving in, she sucked his taugt nipple harder, flicking it with her tongue for emphasis. Brian's body could take no more. He wrapped his arms tightly around her and rolled quickly putting her underneath him. Her dress was still around her waist as

he ravaged her pussy. Pumping in and out he pounded her slick cunt until he felt her begin to tighten around him. Pulling her top down he finally exposed her delicious tits. Taking a nipple in his mouth, he sucked as hard as he could while pulling back. It would pop from his mouth and snap back in place. He repeated this several times until she started begging him.

“Please, finish me. I need your hot come in my pussy. I need you, Brian. Give it to me, please,” she begged. Her pleading pushed him over the edge. He stabbed her pussy a few more times and blew the biggest load of hot, juicy come deep inside of her. Once he pulled out, she was on her knees in front of him with the mouth open, waiting. Brian put his wet cock in front of her face and clearly enjoyed the feeling of her cleaning him.

Brian pushed her back from him and looked into her eyes. He reached down and took her hand in his as he helped her onto the bed.

“Stay on the bed until I come get you,” he said as he kissed her on her lips. She heard water running and bottles moving in the bathroom. He came to the room and led her to the waiting bath he had drawn for them. Slowly he turned her toward the mirror and began to kiss her neck.

I love watching him love me, she thought as he trailed his hot kisses down her back. He undressed and helped her in as they both sank into the bubble bath to wash away the day. The candles he lit flickered on the side of the tub and sent an eerie glow casting over the water. The flame danced on top of the wax and made her enjoy this moment even more. She snuggled in between his legs and rested her head and back on his chest. Brian wrapped his arms around her. “Brian,” Cheyenne whispered, “I love you.”

“I love you too baby.”

They both sat in silence as the Jacuzzi jets pulsed around them.

“Cheyenne,” Brian said sleepily, “Will you make me the happiest man alive and be my wife?”

Cheyenne rose up and turned to look at him. For the first time since meeting him, she was sure that

he wanted a future with her.

“Yes, I will,” she said without hesitation. Brian ran his hand down the valley of Cheyenne’s chest and brought his hand to rest on her flat stomach. His lips brushed hers as he embraced her. She held onto him like nothing else in the entire world mattered. She was his and he was hers, forever.

Chapter Twenty

The next few months flew by in a blur. Cheyenne and Brian wanted to be married as quickly as possible. Neither had ever planned an event as large as this before but Cheyenne took it on like she was a pro. Remembering the woman who cut her hair, Cheyenne had a brilliant idea. Angie seemed as though she knew everyone that there was to know. Cheyenne decided to contact her and see if she could give some advice.

Angie stood behind her chair in her beautifully decorated salon. She looked pleased to see Cheyenne again, although the look on her face gave away her surprise. Cheyenne had begun to show.

“Bless you heart, I didn’t know that you were pregnant.” The blonde exclaimed with a deep southern drawl.

“Yes. I am. We are both really excited and planning a wedding. I actually came here to see if you knew of a good party planner.” Cheyenne explained.

“You have come to the right place. I know an amazing planner and you will also need a stylist, hint, hint!” Angie’s laugh enveloped the entire room.

Cheyenne was not sure why, but she felt like she had known the woman for years. Their easy conversation and laughter put her at ease.

“I didn’t realize that you were such an important person the last time that you were here. I have read about you in the paper and I have to say that I am proud to know you.” Angie said.

“It was nothing, I hardly ever think about it now. I was only protecting my future husband and baby. I am sure anyone would have done the same. But, for right now, this wedding is keeping me up at night. I would love for you to style me, and I would also like to get the number to your planner.

Angie gave her the number and both women chatted for a while longer. Angie told Cheyenne the story of how she came to Houston. She was originally from a small town called Buna. At twenty five she could not wait to come to the big city of Houston to start her career. Angie missed the closeness of her small town but visited often.

Cheyenne booked her for the wedding and thanked her for all of her help. As she left out she called the wedding planner and unloaded all of the stress onto the poor woman’s shoulders. She felt free and able to concentrate on her current condition and the upcoming arrival of her baby. She hoped that she would be a good mother but had fears deep down that Ed Crowley had been right. With the example she had growing up, she was not sure that she would know how to be a good mom. Trying to put the negative thoughts behind her, she drove home.

Brian was at work and she had the whole house to herself. With so much time on her hands, she had run out of things to do that would keep her mind occupied. After Maria’s arrest, Cheyenne had interviewed housekeepers but could not find one that felt like a good fit. Being pregnant though had proven to make housework difficult. She opened her address book and dialed a number.

“Hello, this is Cheyenne Wingate. You answered my ad regarding housekeeping duties. Are you available to come over for an interview?”

An excited voice on the other end of the line said, “Yes, I can come now.”

Cheyenne waited on the young lady to arrive. She was anxious about allowing someone into her home after her last experience but she also knew that she needed help. Many women described pregnancy as a wonderful time in their lives. For Cheyenne, nausea had been the norm up until this point. It was not pleasant yet, but she hoped that when the morning sickness passed, things would get better.

She had drifted off to sleep when the doorbell startled her awake. A young woman of about twenty five stood at the door, clearly nervous and overdressed.

“Hello, I am Cheyenne.”

“Nice to meet you Miss Cheyenne, I am Margarite. I am here about the housekeeping position.” The young woman said as she extended her hand to shake Cheyenne’s.

Cheyenne held the door open and invited the young woman in. As they sat in the living room, Cheyenne studied the girl. She was impressed with the way she carried herself and thought that she seemed genuine and well spoken. But, she learned a long time ago that she needed to read between the lines.

After three hours of interrogation, Cheyenne decided that she liked Margarite and offered her the job. She knew that Brian would support whatever decision that she made so she felt no need to run it passed him first.

Margarite had moved to Houston from South Texas three years ago. She had no family and no home. For the past year she had lived in and out of shelters and on friend’s couches. Cheyenne felt like they met for a reason and she sensed that Margarite felt the same way too. Cheyenne showed her around the home, explaining her duties and then showed her the room that would become hers. The young girl cried as she walked around the room.

“Miss Cheyenne, you have no idea how much this means to me.” The girl said as she wiped away tears.

“Margarite, please sit back down and I will tell you a story.”

As they sat, Cheyenne told the girl how she had come to live at this house and about her past.

Margarite sat in awe of the story Cheyenne was telling.

“You were like me then? I cannot believe it. I can also understand why it took you so long to hire a house keeper. You have really had a rough time the past few months. But, God is good. Just look at all that you have now, a baby on the way, a man that loves you and a beautiful home.”

Cheyenne agreed and truly did feel blessed. Her life had sure come a long way in the past five months. Now, she had things that she had only ever dreamed of. Her life had become a fairytale and she was living out her fantasies.

She heard Brian’s truck pull up and walked outside. Cheyenne loved meeting him at his truck door and getting a kiss before his feet could hit the ground.

“I hired a house keeper today and also a wedding planner.” She said as she stood on her tip toes to kiss him.

“Well baby, it sounds like you have had a productive day.” Brian said as he hopped from his truck. He wrapped his arms around his future wife and walked inside with her.

Margarite was waiting in the living room to meet Brian. As they walked in, she rushed up to them and introduced herself to him. He shook her hand and was genuinely happy that Cheyenne would have help.

Margarite came from the kitchen with a tumbler of bourbon for Brian and a glass of juice for Cheyenne. “I will be starting dinner in a moment but I wanted to make sure that you all are ready to eat before I begin.”

“Thank you Margarite for asking. Yes, you can start any time you like.” Cheyenne assure her.

Chapter Twenty-One

Life was going so well for Cheyenne and Brian. Both were basking in the glow of happiness and Cheyenne was meeting with the wedding planner later that day. It was hard for her to believe, but their wedding would be in just a few weeks. The thought excited her and scared her all at the same time. She hoped that she would be a good wife and she had no doubt that Brian would be an incredible husband. He was one of the most thoughtful men she had ever met and felt like the luckiest women in the world that he would soon be her husband.

The wedding planner arrived at noon and Margarite had lunch prepared and served it on the patio. The weather was warming up and spring was in the air.

“I am Stephanie Burch. Angie spoke very highly of you.”

“Thank you. I am Cheyenne and I am so excited to meet you. You have no idea what a relief it is to know that this will become your headache. I love the idea of getting married but being pregnant and

trying to pull all of this together has proven to be too much for me.” Cheyenne laughed as she sat at the table.

Cheyenne let Stephanie know what she and Brian wanted for their wedding as they ate. Both had similar taste and only wanted a simple affair with their closest friends and what little family they had. Cheyenne knew that Matthew would not be able to attend but he had promised to visit as soon as he could take leave. She knew that it would be next Christmas before she could see her brother though. The thought saddened her but at the same time, she was very proud of his commitment to his country. Looking back, she knew that she had made the best decision for his future when she allowed Edna to adopt him. It had been a hard decision at the time, but now, she could not have been more proud of herself or him.

Turning her attention back to Stephanie, she explained that it would truly be an intimate affair. Without going into details, she informed Stephanie that most of the guests would be friends of Brian’s from the HPD. The woman did not question the guest list but did push Cheyenne to go a little over the top.

“You only get married to the man of your dreams once in your life. Invest in the day.” Stephanie urged.

“I will tell you what. You have seventy five thousand. Make it as grand as you can for that amount. I am giving you free reign, surprise me.” Cheyenne said with a grin on her face.

She had never thrown around money but certainly nothing as large as seventy five thousand. It felt good but also irresponsible. Cheyenne had not grown accustomed to having money and still found herself pinching pennies on everything from toothpaste to a cute sweater she had wanted. She would be become used to being wealthy but it would take time.

Stephanie left with a smile on her face and a check from Cheyenne in her wallet. Cheyenne had all confidence that the wedding would be amazing and Stephanie seemed like a very capable planner. Cheyenne could breathe easy knowing that her involvement was over except for showing up and saying “*I do.*”

Brian called Cheyenne around three o'clock and invited her to dinner at their favorite steak house. She gave Margarite the night off and set about getting ready. Taking extra care with her hair and makeup gave her confidence. She could not rely on her body to take center stage for the next few months so she played up her other assets. Leaving the house an hour later, she noticed that she had not been sick all day. *I hope the morning sickness is over...*she said to herself. The nausea had taken over her life. Every activity she planned was scheduled around when she normally got sick. She had been craving crawfish but was sure that the smell would send her over the edge. If her morning sickness was over, she would be excited to eating whatever she wanted. With her fingers crossed, she drove to the restaurant.

Brian had already arrived and was sitting at a table in the back. The candle in the center of the table was casting a dim light against his chiseled face making him look more handsome than ever. She walked to the table and Brian stood up and walked around to pull her chair out for her. Before sitting back down, he bent and kissed her soft lips. Breathing deeply he said, "If I live one hundred more years, I would never get enough of your perfume."

Cheyenne blushed and pushed her hair off of her forehead. "I love you baby." She said to Brian.

He had already ordered an appetizer and the waiter was approaching the table with it now. One dozen oysters on the half shell were placed in the center of the table on a bed of crushed ice. She nervously picked one up and dressed it with cocktail sauce before eating it. It tasted heavenly and she was relieved that the smell had not made her ill.

"I thought we needed a night out alone, just the two of us, before things get busy. I have missed you the past few weeks." Brian confessed to her.

She had missed him too but life had become so busy that she was only just then realizing it. "I have missed you too. I am getting so excited about the wedding. I cannot wait to become Mrs. Brian Russell." She said eagerly.

Both ordered steak and enjoyed their meal while they talked. For the first time in over a month Cheyenne felt turned on. She did not know if it was the oysters of Brian or maybe even a combination of

both but she wanted him badly.

“What are the chances of us getting out of here and going home to finish our date? She asked boldly.

Brian grinned, obviously knowing what Cheyenne wanted. He paid the bill and walked her to her truck. They drove home in separate vehicles but were definitely headed to the same bed. When they arrived at the ranch, each raced for the front door and up to the bedroom. The sexual tension had grown so thick in the air; one could have cut it with a knife. Cheyenne ripped her clothing off and hopped into the bed just as Brian was entering the room. He was not far behind her and when his body landed on the bed beside hers she felt whole. His lean muscular body felt hard and nice against her. She sought his lips and captured his mouth. The kiss began tenderly and soon grew to epic proportions. Without much fanfare, she pulled him close and rolled on top of him. He entered her waiting pussy gently. She pushed harder against him but he would not match her thrust.

“Are you worried about the baby?” She asked knowing in her heart that the answer was yes. Cheyenne decided to lay back and enjoy his gentle lovemaking. He pushed in and out of her, his cock gliding like silk within her cunt. As he made love to her, he bent and kissed her neck, feather light kisses were rained on her body as she moaned and writhed in ecstasy. Pressure was building in her body and she knew that it would not be long before she exploded. Her nails dug into the tender, tan flesh of Brian’s back. He moaned loudly as she wrapped her legs around his waist. Needing him more than ever she looked deep into his eyes and said, “I love you more than you’ll ever know.” Just then she spasmed on his hard cock. Her cunt tightened around him like a vise and he responded by shooting his hot come deep into her. His body went rigid and he held his breath. As his climax came to an end, he rolled onto his side and kissed her on the cheek.

“You mean the world to me Cheyenne. I am so excited about marrying you and even more excited about becoming a father. You are the best thing that ever happened to me. I do not want you to ever think that I’m not grateful that you saved my life. If I ever had any doubt that you loved me, it was erased at that

moment. I will love you until the day that I die and I owe you my life.”

“I love you too baby, but what has gotten into you?” Cheyenne asked.

“Tonight was a celebration of sorts. After Maria’s trial is over, I will be promoted to Captain. No more daily danger for me and no more sleepless nights for you.” He said happily.

“Congratulations! I am so happy for you. I knew that you would run the place someday.” She laughed.

Cheyenne was so happy as she fell asleep in Brian’s protective arms. Brian had been right about his job taking its toll on her. She worried constantly about his safety and could not exhale until he walked through the door in the evening. Cheyenne had never imagined that she would be one of those women. But, she had turned out to be. One thing she prided herself on was that she never once nagged him to change careers. She knew from the start how important his job was to him and never dreamed of making him choose. Of course she would have won but she did not have the heart to put him through that. His announcement of the promotion meant the world to her. She truly felt free and happy. No reservations and nothing making her unhappy. Even the thought of Maria did not carry the same negative weight that it used to.

Chapter Twenty Two

Cheyenne's thoughts had not been on Maria lately. Her life had become so fulfilling that her thoughts rarely ventured to the dark side of her past. The case had busted wide open when Cheyenne killed Ed and Jason. The full story had come out and if they had lived, all three would have realized that they had each betrayed each other. They had proven that there was no honor among thieves. The entire situation had been sad but some parts were still unbelievable. Their level of deceit was immeasurable and most who heard the story, could not believe that they had gotten away with so much for so long. They had proven that evil come with a price and sometimes that price is too high to pay.

Maria's trial would start the following Monday but Cheyenne would not have to attend. Maria had pleaded guilty which made that portion short and sweet. No one would have to testify or speak until her sentencing hearing. The district attorney originally wanted to seek the death penalty but he soon found that doing that would serve no one except Maria. Cheyenne wanted her to have to wake up every morning and live with what she had done. She still thought of her mother and father often. Everywhere she turned she had reminders of her dad. She was not sure if she wanted to raise her baby in the house at Wingate Ranch. So many bad things had happened there but she felt very close to her father while she was living

at the ranch.

Maria had recently asked for a visit from Cheyenne but she could not bring herself to accommodate the request. Having no idea what the maid could have wanted had plagued Cheyenne from time to time, but she knew that in order to begin healing, she would need to put it all behind her. Maria had brought nothing but pain and misery to her and she refused to let her add anymore. Her life would now be happy and she would let nothing interfere with that happiness. Anything that brought stress or unrest to her simply needed to go. That is why Cheyenne decided to sell Wingate Drilling. After being on the market for only two weeks, the company sold for two billion dollars. She knew that she would never want for anything in her life and owed it all to her father. His lifetime of hard work would now give her family a type of security that most could only dream of. Her father's dream had been for the drilling company to stay in the family and be successful but Cheyenne was not cut out for that life nor the business aspect of it. So many things in her life had changed but she was still true to herself. She began the journey as a lump of unmolded coal. Cheyenne Wingate knew that she was a work in progress but now felt like a diamond in the rough.

Epilogue

Cheyenne was miserable. At almost nine months pregnant, Brian had begged her to stay home but she would not hear of it. With her husband by her side, she would watch the women who had taken so much from her, be handed her punishment. Seeing Maria sentenced to prison would not bring her father or mother back but it was a small victory for Cheyenne.

She could now do anything she put her mind to. Never in her life had she been happier. In a matter of days she would get to meet her baby for the first time and life was as good as it could possibly get. Cheyenne Wingate Russell had a loving husband who would move heaven and earth for her. She had never felt love like his before. Reveling in her new life, she almost missed the bailiff calling the court to order. As the judge took the bench he began reading Maria's charges. Cheyenne felt a sharp pain in her stomach.

Breath deep, she chanted to herself as it passed. Finally the judge called for her to approach the podium and deliver her victims impact statement. She rose to walk to the front when another pain came. She could not hide this one. It was so intense she doubled over as it hit. The entire courtroom gasped. Brian was at her side in a flash.

"Mrs. Russell, are you able to deliver your statement?" the judge asked concerned.

"Your honor, I would like to continue," she said bravely. Another few steps found her in agony as her water broke.

"I have to do this Brian. I don't want our baby born without this chapter of my life being over," she pleaded with tears in her pleading eyes. Brian helped her to the waiting podium and stood steadfast by her side. Maria sat, stone face, oblivious to the agony Cheyenne was in.

"Maria, before I even knew you existed; you began to dismantle my life. You had my mother

killed and you single handedly murdered my father. You are an evil person and death is too good for you. I hope that you wake up every day, behind bars and feel like the animal that you are. From this day forward, I will not think about you. You will not have that kind of power over me. I came to Houston thinking that you had been an asset to my father and would be one to me. I was wrong and so was he. The level of scheming you have done throughout your life is astonishing and the only think I can be grateful for standing here before you is that you never had children. No one deserves to have you on their mind day to day.”

The judge looked upon Cheyenne from the large bench. His glasses sat perched on the tip of his narrow nose. “Young lady, you have shown significant restraint today. I commend you for your composure and wish you the best in your future endeavors. Now, as for you,” he said as he glared at Maria. “Maria Garza, I sentence you to life in prison without the possibility of parole. You have committed two heinous crimes and it is my hope that you will never be released back into society. Bailiff, can you please remove this defendant from my site?” The gavel thundered as he struck the bench.

Maria stood, showing no emotion and placed her arms behind her back. Cheyenne could not feel empathy for her but she also found it hard to feel hate. This woman was obviously deranged and it was the whole family’s bad luck that Charles had been acquainted with her. As they led her away in handcuffs, Cheyenne was sure that this would be the last day of her life tainted with an image of Maria Garza. From this day forward, she would never see this woman again and hopefully she would become a distant memory that would completely fade with time.

Cheyenne felt another contraction coming and gripped the podium for stability. Brian picked her up and carried her to a gurney where paramedics were waiting to take her to the hospital. “Detective Russell, follow behind us. She is in good hands.” They said as Cheyenne was wheeled down the corridor. The ride to the hospital was unbearable. Cheyenne hated needles and the paramedic who had placed her IV was not the most skilled she had ever encountered. The pains came quicker and more intense. She wanted Brian by her side but knew that it was just a matter of time before he would be. As they arrived at the emergency room bay, the doors to the ambulance were flung open and Brian stood

nervously peering in to see Cheyenne. She stifled a giggle at seeing her strong, masculine husband reduced to a nervous expectant father. The man who was immune to most human emotions was brought to his knees by a baby. She sympathized because she felt the same way, but he made a point to be tougher than most and she was excited to know that he had a kryptonite other than herself. As she was wheeled into the bay doors, she hoped it would not be long before she got to see her baby.

Ten long hours later, Detective and Mrs. Brian Russell waited in the delivery room for the time to come. Brian paced between contractions, worry evident upon his face. But, only an hour later, they welcomed Charles Wingate Russell into the world. With all ten fingers and toes they could not have asked for a healthier baby. “I have all I could ever want,” Brian said as he held his son. His pride was evident in his eyes. She knew that both had not had a family to speak of and now they were a family. They would all have somewhere to be on holidays and there would always be someone to wish them happy birthday. Cheyenne smiled up at both of them as she looked into her future. Her life now felt complete and whole. Brian bent and kissed her forehead as he held their baby securely in his arms.

“I love you. And I love you too little man.”

Cheyenne knew as she gazed at her family that her life was now complete. She had simply existed before she found her husband and now their beautiful baby boy would bind them together forever. The love she knew at that moment was more than she could have ever hoped and she knew that it was all she would ever need.

The End