



CHAPTER 1

1878-----

The noisy streets of New York filtered through to the suite in their hotel. Kerry had been looking forward to her shopping spree with her Auntie Audrey. Kerry had not considered the interruption that happened.

Thomas entered the room in his typical reserved butler stoicism. "A gentleman caller for you, Miss Kerry."

"A gentleman caller? Who could that possibly be? We have just arrived here this morning." Kerry winced in surprise at Audrey Astor.

"His card says he is Everett Mann, Miss Kerry." Thomas responded after reading the presented card. "Shall I tell him you are indisposed?"

"No Thomas, you may show him in. I am curious to find out just how he found out I was here."

"You have many suitors, my dear." Audrey Stuart Astor chuckled. She was still a beautiful woman at the age of fifty-four. Her eyes were still twinkling bright blue and had the same deep brown hair color of her niece only touched by sprinklings of gray. "Everett is certainly persistent."

"Too persistent, especially after I told him when I left school last year, I was not interested." Kerry turned to look at the tall blond man entering the sitting room of their hotel suite whispering, "and again when he showed up at your Nob Hill residence last week upon hearing of my visit to you."

"Kerry!" Everett beamed. "I am so glad I found you."

"Just how did you find me?"

"When I was told you were no longer in residence in Boston with your Aunt Audrey, I knew you would be shopping and of course New York is the best place to shop." Everett's smile was wickedly egotistical at his intellect and logic. "There are only a few hotels in New York that Audrey Astor would stay in and I was in luck. You were at the third hotel I inquired in."

"Well, you have found me." Kerry smiled graciously to her persistent suitor. "However I see no purpose in your reason for doing so. I hardly think you would want to shop with Auntie Audrey and myself."

"Dearest Kerry, I have taken a room in this hotel, not for the purpose to shop with you, but to dine with you, enjoy a play or two and keep you company."

"Everett, I have told you before I returned to home after matriculation. I am not interested in your company."

"Yet you returned to Boston."

"I had promised Auntie Audrey I would visit regularly."

"Beautiful goddess, Kerry. I am too enchanted with your beauty to give up on us."

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"Everett, there is no **us**!" Kerry said in exasperation. "There never was an **us**!"

"Not yet, Kerry. I intend to make you mine."

"I don't think you understand the word, **not interested**! Do you Mr. Mann?" Audrey snickered in protective interference. "Perhaps, a simple **no** and **go away** would do."

"Nothing will do other than Kerry accept my proposal of marriage."

"I already told you, **no**!" Kerry's voice was rising in frustration. "I will never give up my home in Nevada!" Kerry stood and walked toward her room in the suites to escape this repeated irritating conversation.

"I will never understand what loyalty you have to that wilderness, when you can have the civilized world at your feet. I would see to it."

"And you sir, will never understand the clean air and freedom of the wide open spaces. You will never see the stars so clearly; enjoy the velvet purple view of a mountain sunrise, watch a mustang run free, or watch an eagle soar in the skies. You, Everett, will never understand peace, serenity and beauty."

"I see your beauty, dearest Kerry. A beauty to be by my side."

"You want an ornament?" Audrey interjected caustically. "Kerry is a living breathing soul, her mother's daughter. She would never be an ornament."

"An ornament alone would never do. I also require an heir."

"Mr. Mann, please just leave right now before my head really starts to hurt."

"I would like you and Kerry to join me for dinner this evening, Mrs. Astor." Everett smiled ignoring her dismissal. Turning to Kerry he suggested, "We could discuss this love for the wilderness as we dine and then leave to enjoy a play."

"I really don't want to share dinner with you Everett." Kerry answered as she leaned against the door to her room. She was staring angrily into the gray eyes of the unwanted suitor. Everett Mann was handsome, there was no denying that, but he never worked a day in his life. Everything was given to him and his idea of life was watching the next polo match and sitting in the men's club discussing certificates and stocks that their bankers had invested for them. In reality, Everett Mann was a shallow person and a true bore. There was also something about him that disturbed her. Kerry had always felt that beneath that cordial and spoiled child persona was something deeper, a cruel side to his nature. Any wife of his would be a possession, not by love but by might and right. That feeling had frightened Kerry. It was Kerry's inner warning to keep him always at a distance.

"I won't take no for an answer. You know that Kerry." Everett retorted. He was certain of one thing in his life. He got whatever he wanted, and he wanted Kerry. The beautiful dark brown haired, perfect figured, sculpted perfect face, light blue eyed, peaches and cream skinned, Kerry would be his one way or another. "Unlike your other suitors. I will not give up. I will stay here until you and your Aunt agree to dine with me."

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"Oh alright, Everett. If Auntie Audrey agrees, we'll have dinner but that's all, understood?"

"Mrs. Astor?" Everett questioned for approval.

"One night for dinner would be fine." Audrey agreed just to get him out of the suite.

"Wonderful! I'll collect you at seven for dinner." Having his way again, Everett turned on his heels and pranced out the door.

"There's something about him that I don't like and never have since he first tried courting you. I just can't put my finger on it." Audrey revealed to her niece.

"My feelings exactly." Kerry agreed. "I love visiting you Auntie, and shopping with you, but I really love those miles between Everett and myself when I am back in Nevada."

"I can understand that completely, dear Kerry. Let's forget that dinner engagement until this evening. I am in the mood to shop."

The rest of the day with Auntie Audrey was positively delightful for Kerry. They bought some new day dresses, and gowns. Kerry purchased several bolts of cotton and linen materials in different solid colors. She also purchased several bolts of different color and patterned calico. These were gifts for her Sosoni' friends; they truly loved the fabrics, especially the calicos. For her Auntie Alyson she bought velvets, satins, brocades, and silks.

"Why do you buy that fabric for those Indians, I will never know?" Audrey complained.

"It is more of a trade Auntie Audrey. I give them the calicos and I get buckskin trousers and shirts. They are comfortable for riding and they are warm and practical."

"Alyson must be furious when she sees you in that Indian apparel."

"She's accustomed to it!" Kerry laughed. "The two of you have seen to it that I was raised a lady after my tomboy years, so don't fret!"

"Those brothers of yours still see you as that little tomboy, from what Alyson writes to me."

"I couldn't have learned to shoot, fight, ride and rope without them."

"Please don't admit to all of that!"

"I'm still always a lady with you and Auntie Alyson, don't worry. That other twin of mine only comes out when I am with my brothers."

"Just how are they doing?" Audrey asked raising a disapproving eyebrow. "Alyson doesn't write about them very much."

"She doesn't write because it's the same old story. They are kind of in a rut. Ayden spends most of his time in finances and new ranching principles to the chagrin of Pa. Ryan likes to spend most of his time working the ranch with hands on, and Dwayne spends most of his time fending off the eligible women in the county, since he is such a dandy."

"Why don't those handsome brothers of yours ever come and visit their city cousins?"



"Your boys are usually across the ocean in Europe with Uncle Henry, and my brothers love the freedom of the open spaces. They still remember the visits with Mama and Auntie Alyson to the big cities. They never cared for the city at all. You know that." Kerry chuckled, "Besides, city folk don't care for the guns on their hips, and my brothers feel undressed without them."

"You manage to function in the city without your gun." Audrey shuddered in jest.

"I'm just more amiable."

"You are your mother's daughter!" Audrey laughed remembering the audacity of her sister with fondness. "And just as beautiful I must say."

"I do take after the Stuart women, don't I Auntie!"

Audrey only chuckled at her niece. "Let's get our purchases back to the hotel."

"Wait a moment Auntie, look at that!" Kerry was looking at a working sewing machine being demonstrated in front of a general merchandise store.

"Yes, it's what they call a sewing machine. They make our clothes now, there is no need for hand stitching anymore."

"I want to buy two, one for Auntie Alyson and one for dabai 'hubia."

"American names please!"

"Auntie Alyson and Morning Song's daughter in law, Fragrant Flower."

"You are really influenced by the Indian woman, aren't you?"

"Morning Song was my wet nurse and then my nanny for ten years, until Auntie Alyson came to make a lady out of me. Of course she means a lot to me and influenced me, and now Morning Song is Pa's wife and my Stepmother."

"I just wish we could have cared for you sooner, you grew up took quickly in that male dominated and Indian influencing arena. Your father just wouldn't give you up and send you to me to care for."

"Of course not. After all, I am the only girl in this second generation. Besides, I like being Pa's little girl."

"Pa's little girl? Tomboy and fourth son is more like it!"

"I turned out alright."

"No doubt you are a lady when you choose, but you are twenty years old and you still haven't found a husband to suit you."

"Can I help it if the men in the west only want Pa's ranch, and the men of the East are wimps?"

"Your Uncle Henry is a man's man and so are your cousins."

"What can I say, Auntie. They broke the mold."

"I give up, but just remember you will have to marry sometime soon or you'll be a spinster."

"I prefer the word bachelor, and I see nothing wrong with that."

"What about your inborn mothering instinct? You will want children someday."

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"I'll raise cattle and horses."

"You'll want babies."

"I'll have them without the excess baggage."

"I don't think Grady or your brothers would approve."

"I'll just have to talk them into it, but don't worry. I haven't even found a man I would consider to be father of my children."

"When you do, I think you will finally be in love."

"It hasn't happened yet."

"No, not yet. Soon I hope. You are too beautiful to be a spinster."

"Bachelor."

"Fine."

They purchased the two sewing machines and had them shipped to the ranch in Nevada.

When Audrey and Kerry arrived in the lobby of the hotel they didn't notice the flash that darted around them and hid behind Kerry's peach silk street dress as they stopped to let a small, severe, and angry looking woman cross in front of them.

They did hear that worried and angry woman calling, "Bennett! Bennett! Come here at once!"

Once she had left the hotel lobby Kerry and Audrey Astor continued on and walked the stairs to Audrey's second floor suites. Thomas opened the door at their knock and after entering the suites Thomas cleared his throat and asked, "Should I expect a young visitor with you today, Mrs. Astor?"

Audrey turned around and retorted, "What are you talking about, Thomas?" Audrey then saw the young boy behind Kerry. "And just who are you young man?"

"I'm Bennett Wessex, ma'am."

"Wasn't your mother just calling you in the lobby?" Kerry asked with a big smile as she knelt to eye level with Bennett. "Are you playing hide and seek with your Mama?"

"Madam Hudson isn't my Mamma, she's my nanny. My Mamma is in heaven, at least that's what Papa tells me." The little boy answered a little timidly.

Kerry felt an instant bond with the little boy upon hearing his mother was in heaven. Kerry understand so well what it was like not to have a mother at such a young age. Her own maternal instinct took over without her being aware of it as she asked, "Are you playing hide and seek with Madam Hudson then?"

"No, I'm not playing with Madam Hudson. I am hiding because I don't want to get spanked and hit again. She is so mean when Papa isn't with me." Bennett answered with a tremor to his voice.

"Where is your Papa?" Kerry asked in concern. It was obvious the little boy was afraid of Madam Hudson as Kerry watched him shake while



talking about her. Kerry wondered about the little boy referring to spankings and being hit. Did his father know?

"He is getting business done with the wires and then getting tickets for a train ride." Bennett answered proudly. "Papa is always very busy. He is an important man."

"Your Papa is here with you in this hotel?"

"Oh yes, ma'am. He told me he'd be back before supper."

"Have you ever told your Papa that Madam Hudson hurts you?"

"I can't. Madam Hudson told me that she would beat me bad if I told Papa how she spansks me and pulls my ears. She's always mad and mean when Papa isn't around. She told me Papa wouldn't believe me." Little Bennett sighed heavily. "I don't think Papa would believe me. Madam Hudson is so nice and sweet when Papa is around."

Kerry couldn't help herself; she cradled Bennett in her arms and gave him a gentle kiss on his cheek. "I believe you, Bennett. Somehow we will get your Papa to believe you."

"You're a nice lady." Bennett grinned at Kerry. "You're real pretty too!"

"Why thank you Bennett." Kerry accepted and turned to her aunt, "Auntie Audrey, I think I am in love."

"With such a handsome young man, I can certainly see how it would happen." Audrey smiled at her niece. "Thomas, please find out where Mr. Wessex is staying in this hotel and send him a note that young Bennett here has found a playmate. We will entertain Bennett this afternoon. His Papa can collect him for supper."

"I will find out where his rooms are and relay the message." Thomas replied with a stiff bow.

"Please make sure the note is signed, Mrs. Audrey Astor."

"Auntie, are you doing that for a reason?"

"Of course dear. I am married to a cousin of the Astors, and in New York it is wise to be a namedropper. I am certain it would keep Madam Hudson from collecting young Bennett before his Papa. Don't you think?"

"I do think." Kerry agreed. "We will have to work on convincing his Papa, that little Bennett is telling the truth, won't we?"

"We will, given the right opportunity." Audrey combed her fingers through the dark hair of the young boy, "I believe you as well, young Bennett."

"Can we really play together this afternoon?" Bennett asked with a smile beaming on his face. "No one ever plays with me."

"We'll change that right away. Would you like to play cowboys?" Kerry asked playfully, "Can I call you Ben?"

"Sure you can ma'am."

"Ben, you can call me Kerry and that is Auntie Audrey. Okay?"

"Yes, ma'am, I mean Kerry."

"Cowboys say, 'Sho Nuf!'" Kerry instructed.

"Sho Nuf!" Bennett repeat

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CHAPTER 2

Kerry spent the rest of the afternoon playing with Ben. She spent most of that time teaching Ben how to use a rope and lasso.

It was at dusk that a knock was heard on the door and Thomas answered it.

A tall, handsome, dark haired, and muscular man approximately the age of thirty stood at the door, he was dressed quite formally in a dark black woolen suit with a deep burgundy vest and white linen shirt with silken cravat. “Good Evening. I am here to collect Bennett Wessex. I was left a note that he found a playmate and was spending the afternoon here.”

“And you are?” Thomas questioned the stranger dressed in a well tailored European cut suit.

“I am Braden Wessex, Bennett’s father.”

“Do come in, Mr. Wessex. Bennett has indeed found a playmate and is quite involved in play at the moment. Shall I retrieve him for you?” Thomas bowed swooping his hand in invitation to enter.

Before Braden Wessex could answer, Audrey Astor came into the entrance hall of the suite and extended her hand in welcome. “Mr. Wessex, I am Audrey Astor. We are captivated with your son, such a bright boy and a joy to be around.”

“That’s strange, his nanny Mildred Hudson says he is an introvert, slow in studies and doesn’t like to play, and around me he is always quite somber.”

“I think you and Miss Hudson find that statement to be in error. Just listen.”

They both turned around to follow the sounds of a little boy laughing and a female voice giggling.

“I wouldn’t call that a somber child if I were you, Mr. Wessex.” Audrey cautioned. “Why don’t you look for yourself?”

Audrey slowly opened Kerry’s bedroom door that had been left slightly ajar. Braden Wessex’s eyes opened wide at the sight. His son Bennett had a rope around a beautiful woman’s waist and was sitting on her, and tickling her rib cage area. Bennett was laughing as delightfully as the beautiful woman.

“Little doggie, I’ll git ya branded yet.” Bennett laughed loudly as he began to tickle Kerry again. “Tickle! Tickle!”

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"Please Ben that's enough, please stop!" Kerry was laughing even harder to tears were forming in her eyes. She looked quite silly laying with her back on the floor, a child sitting on her and tickling her ribs. Her dress was a rumpled mess and was up to her knees by this time.

Braden Wessex could not help but notice those shapely calves as his eyes moved down from that beautiful face. Braden cleared his throat to get attention, when that didn't work and he couldn't be heard over their laughter, he spoke, "Bennett! Bennett! It 's time to go to our suites. It's time for supper."

Bennett looked up and saw his father in the doorway, "Papa!" He got off Kerry and ran to his father.

Braden Wessex scooped his son up in his arms and gave him a warm hug. "I see you were playing and having a great time. I am sorry to break this up, but it is time for us to eat."

"I love Miss Kerry!" Bennett announced with bubbling vivaciousness. "Papa, can Miss Kerry and Auntie Audrey have supper with us?"

"Would you really like that?" Braden asked his son with surprise and now he knew the name attached to those shapely legs. It was the first time Bennett had ever asked to have someone share supper with him. It was the first time he had ever heard Bennett laughing, and courting a large smile since his mother died. Braden shook his head briefly; he didn't want to think about Laura. The boy usually was sullen and introverted these past three years and suddenly this was a different child. Bennett was a happy child and it delighted Braden. Bennett's new friend also delighted Braden.

"I really, really, really would Papa. Oh please!"

"Mrs. Astor and Miss Kerry, would you please join us for supper?" Braden requested politely.

Kerry stood up at that moment and Braden got his first good look at her. She was incredibly beautiful. Braden Wessex suddenly felt weak in the knees and very much like a schoolboy. His response to Kerry surprised no one more than himself. After the death of his wife, Laura, he had stayed in mourning. Braden had not even looked at another woman in the three years since her death. He had loved Laura deeply and went into depression after her death. No woman would ever be as beautiful or as wonderful as his Laura, Bennett's mother! It was because of that depression he had left England to visit his father's friend on his parent's advice. Braden's father had told him he needed to get far away from his memories of Laura.

"Ben, sweetie! I would love to have supper with you, but we have promised another gentleman supper tonight." Kerry explained as she walked up to Bennett. Braden was still holding him, as Kerry stood tiptoe and brushed Bennett's cheek with a little kiss. "I would prefer to have supper with you."

"Could you invite your gentleman friend as my guest as well?" Braden suggested feeling a sense of jealousy that there was another man in this woman's life. He was unable to take his eyes from her. Thunderstruck would be a good description of his current situation.



“What do you think Auntie Audrey?”

“I think I would prefer Bennett’s company over Everett’s myself. Everett will just have to adjust. Don’t you think?”

“I think we will accept your gracious invitation Mr. Wessex. If you are sure it isn’t too much of an imposition.”

“No imposition at all. I have never seen Bennett so enthused or happy in quite awhile. I rather enjoy it and would like to make it last.”

“Then we accept. I can’t wait until supper, Ben.”

“Can I have another kiss Miss Kerry?”

“My pleasure Ben.” Kerry reached up on her tiptoes to softly kiss Bennett’s cheek. Kerry focused on his father clearly then. He was handsome in a masculine way. Braden had dark hair and deep blue eyes like the color of clear lake. Kerry noticed how much Bennett resembled his father, the same hair and eye color as well as strong cheekbones, a square jaw and a full sensual mouth. Kerry looked at those lips on Braden Wessex and to her surprise wondered what it would be like to be kissed by them. How could I possibly be so attracted to a man I just met and know nothing about? Hold on there Kerry, don’t get carried away!

Braden was thinking the same thing. Those full lips are most definitely kissable. I wonder how she would taste? This is crazy! I don’t even know this woman. “Thank you. Bennett and I will bathe and change. We will meet you downstairs in the Golden Ring restaurant say about seven o’clock?”

“Seven it is!” Audrey accepted and walked with Braden Wessex to the door.

“I hope you are the one that will tell Everett Mann that we are sharing supper.” Kerry said to her Auntie Audrey when she returned from seeing Braden and Bennett Wessex off.

“That is the benefit of age, Kerry.” Audrey smiled. “I get to tell the young studs where to go and what do with themselves without regret or fear. Of course I will tell him.”

“I think I should change.” Kerry said noticing her rumpled dress.

“That is a splendid idea! Your dress really wasn’t meant to play in, much less play as a doggie for roping.”

“Auntie Audrey, admit it. You had as much fun as Ben and I did.”

“I did indeed. It has been too long since a little boy was underfoot, and my sons still show no interest in providing grandchildren even though one of them is married for three years now.”

“Is it true a husband usually spends sometime in the same bed with his wife to make the children? Robert is hardly ever in the same town with Eloise.”

“You are bold to say the least. It must be that Indian influence. I should blush to such references.”

“After giving birth to two sons, if you don’t know how it’s done, then the world is truly in big trouble here in the East.”

“A lady never discusses such things, Kerry McGillinen.”

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"She most certainly should! Then perhaps a young woman such as myself would be able to make better decisions. We certainly would know more than men did before we learn it by experience."

"I keep forgetting you are a grown woman and should know these things but do not. I also think I am so sensitive to the subject because I know you are right. Robert and Eloise need some time together to make a grandchild."

"I 'm sure you will find a way to make that happen."

"Maybe I should send them on a trip to your ranch and let those Indians show them how it's done."

"That, Auntie Audrey, is a great idea."

They both laughed and went to their rooms to bathe and change for supper.

Everett Mann arrived at their suite precisely at 7 o'clock. Audrey was the first to greet him.

"Good evening, Everett." Audrey offered her hand. "Kerry and I have a surprise for you."

"Really?" Everett was taken aback.

"We will be sharing dinner with Kerry's new beau, and you are invited." Audrey related with a wicked smile on her face.

"A new beau? What? This is absurd!" Everett turned red with anger, but he knew he could not cross Kerry's Aunt if he wanted Kerry as his wife and controlled his viable temper.

Kerry entered the room at that moment and Everett spun around to glare at her. Kerry had for the first time seen a glimmer of rage in Everett's eyes that confirmed her fear of his potential violence and potential brutality.

"What is this about a new beau, Kerry?" Everett's voice was conspicuously restrained.

"I admit I have been completely captivated." Kerry smiled in response. "His name is Bennett and I fear it was love at first sight."

"And he feels the same for you? He has received your permission to court you?" Everett growled.

"Well I'm not sure if he feels the same. No, he hasn't asked to court me." Kerry replied. Inside she was laughing at Everett's consternation. It was especially funny because Everett had no idea that Bennett was about five years old. "Will you be coming to dinner with us?"

"Indeed!" Everett snarled. "I want to meet this competitor. Will he be taking you out after dinner? I would like to know because I purchased theatre tickets for tonight."

"I never agreed to accompany you to the theatre, Everett."

"You only promised supper, but since I now have to share dinner with my competitor, you should concede and accompany me."

"Did you purchase a ticket for Auntie Audrey as well?"

"I anticipated that, and I did."



"Then we will concede for the theatre, but do not depend on my agreeing to any more than that for the next week we are here."

"Let's get on with supper." Everett refused to respond to Kerry. Instead he opened the door and bowed slightly for the women to proceed to the restaurant. When Kerry walked by, Everett took her arm and led her down the stairs. His grip was strong and Kerry thought she might bruise from it.

"Everett, your hold is quite strong. Could you be a little more gentle, please?" Kerry whispered to him.

"I apologize, you just mean so much to me. My instinct is to possess you." Everett whispered back.

"I will never be possessed." Kerry warned quietly as he released his strong hold and walked her down the stairs and towards the hotel restaurant.

Braden saw Kerry enter and stood up so she could see him. He was disappointed when he noticed the tall muscular blond man holding her arm. It shouldn't matter to him, but it did.

"Mr. Wessex." Audrey recognized and proceeded to walk towards his table and little Bennett.

"Miss Kerry!" Bennett squealed when he saw her and ran to her.

Kerry removed her arm from Everett and allowed Bennett to run into her arms as she knelt to hug him.

Everett was staring at Braden Wessex, assuming he was the new beau. Everett was not even paying attention to the little boy that ran into Kerry's arms until he heard Kerry.

"Do I get a big kiss from you Bennett?" Kerry asked hugging the little boy.

"You sure do!" Bennett gave Kerry a big smacking kiss on her cheek.

"That is Bennett?" Everett choked in surprise.

"Bennett, I would like you to meet Everett Mann an acquaintance of mine." Kerry had the politesse with introduction.

"I am please to meet an acquaintance of Miss Kerry." Bennett bowed. "Will you join us for supper?"

"Such a polite young gentleman," Audrey remarked. "Perhaps now you can see why Kerry is in awe of her Bennett, can't you Everett?"

"It is understandable, but I had no idea that Kerry was so fond of children." Everett grinned, "I am happy that obtaining heirs will be agreeable."

Bennett pulled Kerry over to the table and pulled her chair to seat her. "You will sit next to me!" Bennett was beaming.

Everett and Audrey came in behind them and Braden offered the chair next to him to Audrey. When Braden had seated her, he offered his hand to Everett Mann. "I am Braden Wessex, Bennett's father."

Returning his hand Everett asked. "Your accent is very heavy, you are English?"

"I am."

"You are here on business?"

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"Actually, Bennett and I are on holiday."

"Will you be in New York long?"

"Only one more week. I have some business ends to tie up and then we plan on visiting a friend of my father's."

"Well, I hope you and your son enjoy your holiday in the States."

"I hope we do." Braden wanted to ask if he was Kerry's suitor, or fiancé. He chose not to ask since his question could be misconstrued, but more importantly he didn't even know Kerry and it was none of his business. Braden was aware that Bennett had taken immediately to Kerry and that was something special to him, it gave him the excuse to invite her and her aunt to dinner.

The meal was formal and conversation controlled with proper etiquettes. It was during the dinner conversation with Audrey Astor that Braden made a remark about how happy Bennett was and hadn't seen him like this since before his mother, Laura died.

Kerry and Bennett were oblivious to the formality. They were enjoying each other. Kerry did hear the remark about Braden's deceased wife, she now knew her name had been Laura. Kerry was also oblivious to the continual glances of Braden since she concentrated on Bennett.

Everett was aware of Braden's observations of Kerry. "Kerry, we should be leaving for the theatre. I told my carriage to wait for us in the front of the hotel at precisely eight thirty. The play begins at nine o'clock." Everett said in with unmistakable authority and possessiveness.

"You will excuse us, Mr. Wessex?" Audrey asked for her niece. She had bristled at Everett's tone and did not want her host to be insulted.

"Of course. It is Bennett's bedtime as well." Braden answered. "In the future please call me Braden. Thank you for joining us. You have made Bennett happy."

"It was our pleasure. Good night and sweet dreams, Bennett." Kerry quietly said to Bennett as her finger gently swept over his cheek.

"Can we play tomorrow?" Bennett asked Kerry hopefully.

"That is up to your Papa." Kerry answered looking at Braden.

Braden felt like he was going to melt when their eyes locked. God he wanted to kiss her, but Everett was her suitor and next to her. Braden's thoughts would never do and he took a deep breath for control. "If you have the time for Bennett, of course he can play."

"Yippee!" Bennett bubbled. "I'll see you tomorrow Miss Kerry."

"I look forward to it." Kerry told Bennett as she forced her eyes to break from Braden's and look at Bennett.

"We must go!" Everett said as he again grabbed Kerry's elbow to guide her out of the restaurant. Everett was not pleased when he had noticed the shared looks of Kerry McGillinen and Braden Wessex.

At the end of the evening when Everett returned Kerry and her aunt to the hotel he whispered into Kerry's ear. "I was not aware you loved children so

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much. It pleases me to know that you will enjoy my heirs. I would like to take you my room tonight and start making our children."

Kerry pulled away from Everett and glared at him. "You forget yourself, Everett Mann. There is no us, there will never be an us, and I do not want your marriage or children."

"You're just tired. Good night my dear." Everett gloated with a 'so you say now' tone.

Kerry stormed past her Auntie Audrey and nearly ran into her room. "Oh I despise that man." She said aloud to no one in her room and stamped her foot in frustration.

She heard Auntie Audrey say, "Good night dearest. At least the play was enjoyable."

Kerry laughed in agreement. "Good night Auntie. The play **was** enjoyable." Kerry waited for her dear friend and half sister, Small Bird, to help her change into her nightdress. After Small Bird returned to her room Kerry crawled into her soft bed for a sound sleep that included strange and wonderful dreams of a tall handsome man named Braden Wessex..



CHAPTER 3

Kerry had restless dreams that night. She had tossed and turned so infuriated at Everett, and there was something else in her dreams. Kerry kept seeing Braden Wessex. She saw him in her mind and she felt tingles in her stomach. Why did she think Braden was so handsome? Was it because she adored little Ben? She really did adore little Ben. Waking up from an exceptionally sensual dream Kerry sighed and knew it was useless to try and sleep. Kerry dressed in her Sosoni' buckskins and moccasins. Auntie Audrey hated her to wear her Indian dress in the city, so Kerry only wore it early in the morning whenever she took her rides, that way Auntie Audrey was never aware of her wearing the buckskins. Kerry tried to understand that Auntie Audrey had no idea how soft and functional the buckskins were.

The sun was just starting to peek over the horizon as Kerry slipped out of the hotel. She had put her hair up and placed a cowboy hat on her head. Kerry thought she gave the appearance of a pretty young man, and since the fringed buckskin jacket covered her to her mid thigh, and the trousers were loose enough so her curved calves were undefined, she could pass as a pretty young man and therefore was ignored as she left the hotel. Comments were made on her western dress, but that was all.

Kerry quickly walked to the stables where she could rent a horse. The ride in the park would be enjoyable. Kerry chose a black stallion since the stable master thought she was a young man.

Braden was also awake early in the morning. He had spent a restless night with conflicting emotions. Braden loved his deceased wife and found his thoughts continually drifting to the beautiful Kerry. Braden was still in shock at how quickly his beloved son had taken to the young woman, and how quickly he was attracted to her. Yes, he had taken to Kerry just as quickly as Bennett did. A ride in the park would be relaxing and he decided Bennett should be with him. Braden reveled in the happiness Bennett had displayed yesterday and wanted to keep it alive. Silently he slipped past Mildred Hudson's room in his hotel suites and opened the room next to hers to wake Bennett.

"Papa?" Bennett asked wiping the heavy sleep from his eyes.

"Wake up Bennett. We'll dress you and I'll take you for a morning ride," Braden whispered. "Do you want to go for a ride with me?"



"Oh yes, Papa. I really do. I get happy when you spend time with me." Bennett said with innocent glee.

"We must be very quiet not to wake Miss Hudson."

"Shh!" Bennett murmured putting his little finger over his mouth, "I don't want to wake her."

"Come, I'll help you get dressed."

"Miss Hudson will get mad when she can't find you, Papa."

"Don't you worry about her! I left her a note."

Bennett was so happy that the delight twinkled in his eyes. Braden could hardly believe the sparkle he saw in his son's eyes as he dressed him. Braden promised himself he would definitely start spending more time with Bennett, Laura's precious son. Carrying Bennett in his arms, Braden went to the stable stall he had rented for his thoroughbred, Socks. Braden had trained this horse himself and they had a special bond. Braden was determined to bring Socks with him for his holiday in the States. It had cost extra, but money was really no matter to the Viscount. Braden saddled Socks, put Bennett on the English saddle and then mounted himself behind Bennett. Once mounted, Braden moved Bennett up to ride more securely on his lap. In a few moments they were headed for the park.

Braden handed Bennett the reins and started giving instructions on riding to his son when he spotted the black stallion and the buckskins of the rider. Curiosity took hold of Braden and he instructed Bennett to rein Socks towards the western cowboy.

As Socks came closer, Bennett recognized the rider. "Miss Kerry!" Bennett shouted. Braden choked on a quick gulp, looking closer he realized his son was right, it was Kerry. God, he didn't even know her last name.

Kerry turned toward the familiar voice. "Ben!" She reined her stallion to canter over to Braden and his son. Dear Lord, Braden Wessex looks gorgeous in the morning.

"Where did you get those clothes?" Braden asked blatantly not thinking how rude it sounded.

"I beg your pardon!" Kerry answered defensively. She loved these clothes but she knew it was upsetting to city folk, and of course a Brit would be shocked.

"I apologize, Miss Kerry. I didn't mean it the way it sounded. You see I will be heading out west the end of this week and those clothes look so comfortable. I find I would like to own some of my own." Braden tried to explain. "They look so functional as well as comfortable."

"Papa, Miss Kerry lives in the West. She is only visiting her Auntie." Bennett informed his father about his new friend.

"Ben is right, and I am sorry to say I don't know where you can purchase anything like this. These are gifts to me from my Sосoni' friends." Kerry clarified.

"Where in the West do you live?" Braden could not control his curiosity.

GENEVA'S HOPE



"I live in Nevada."

"That is where Bennett and I will be heading."

"What a coincidence." Kerry stated with amazement, "And I will be leaving the end of this week myself."

"Are you returning by train?" Braden hoped he wasn't sounding too eager. If she wasn't, he would offer her his private car he had just purchased yesterday for the trip.

"Yes, I will be taking the Saturday Central Pacific."

"Bennett and I are taking that same train." Braden was actually excited and he couldn't believe it. "It seems that we are fated to share company."

"I certainly will enjoy Ben's company."

"I am also certain you can prepare us for our visit in the wilderness."

Kerry started laughing. "The West isn't really that much of a wilderness anymore."

"Papa does that mean we will be going with Miss Kerry?"

"It looks like that son."

"Yippee!" Bennett's delight was evident.

"I hope you can teach me about Nevada. Would you have breakfast with us?" Braden invited hopefully.

"I would be happy to accept, but let's enjoy the ride first."

"I couldn't help but notice how well you set the stallion." Braden complimented Kerry. "It is very unusual for a lady to ride one."

"As a young child, I learned how to ride and break horses from my brothers." The grin on Kerry's face was quite broad as she looked at Braden directly. "Mare or stallion, it's a horse."

"Miss Kerry told me that she has even been on cattle drives and she taught me how to lasso a doggie."

"A what?" Braden asked quite surprised. "How to lasso?"

"I think your Papa has a lot to learn Ben."

"Sho Nuf!" Bennett spouted proudly. "That's cowboy talk, Papa!"

"I do have a lot to learn." Braden admitted holding back his laughter, he really did have a lot to learn and his five and half year old son was already ahead of him.

The trio enjoyed the ride in the park for more than an hour before they returned to the stables.

Kerry and Braden each held one of Bennett's hands as they walked back to the hotel.

Everett spotted Kerry in her buckskins before the trio spotted him. Everett was accustomed to seeing Kerry in buckskins and hated them. When he married her he would have them burned he thought with disgust. Everett had seen her wear them many times for her early morning rides when they were attending the same college. Walking up to Kerry, Everett grabbed her arms.

"Kerry, I have been waiting for you for more than an hour!" Everett shouted when he grabbed her. "Why are you wearing those horrible Indian



clothes? You are a lady, my lady. You embarrass me when you wear them. Damn you, I should rip them off you!"

"Everett, you're hurting me. Let me go!" Kerry squealed in pain. Everett was exerting great force and started shaking her.

"Let her go!" Braden said deceptively quiet. Braden had no patience for anyone that hurt another, especially a woman and to his surprise he had feelings for Kerry.

"Back off Brit. This is between me and my woman!" Everett snarled.

"I am not your woman. I never was your woman. I never will be your woman!"

"The hell you aren't! I want you, so you are! You'd better get used to it." Everett growled and applied more pressure.

That was the only conversation Braden needed to hear. Kerry was not betrothed or interested in Everett Mann. "Obviously you didn't hear the lady." That was the only warning Everett received before he found himself knocked to the ground with right upper cut.

"That's my Papa!" Bennett beamed as he looked at the large blond man sprawled on the ground.

Braden put a protective arm around Kerry's waist and took his son's hand as they walked past the embarrassed Everett Mann.

"Where did you learn to fight like that?" Kerry asked Braden, she was surprised that one blow knocked Everett down. Everett was a tall and strong well-built man.

"I had training from professional pugilists in London."

"Oh." Kerry said still surprised at the one punch it took to rid her of Everett. She was impressed even more by Braden Wessex.

Braden led Kerry and Bennett to his suites. "We'll order breakfast now."

"Good, I'm hungry." Bennett announced.

Mildred Hudson entered the room with a gasp, "Mr. Wessex, what have you brought into our rooms? A savage? Think of the effect on Bennett!"

"Kerry is hardly a savage Miss Hudson, and she has been a wonderful influence on Bennett." Braden informed his son's governess. "We are going to order our breakfast, did you eat?"

"No, I was waiting for you," Mildred said softly. "I wasn't anticipating company." The glare Mildred shot at Kerry could have melted stone.

"Perhaps this is an inconvenient time." Kerry tried to excuse herself catching the angry glare of Mildred Hudson. Kerry recognized the change in Mildred's tone and the unspoken; this is my territory of a she cat.

"I won't hear of it, and neither will Bennett. You must join us for breakfast. We would like that." Braden countered unaware of the hostility emanating from Mildred.

"Bennett, keep Kerry occupied while I order our breakfast." Braden turned to tell his son.

"Yes sir!" Bennett said proudly.

GENEVA'S HOPE



The moment Braden Wessex left the suites Mildred Hudson changed personality.

"You savage strumpet. Get out right now. I won't tolerate you interfering in my relationship with Braden Wessex!" Mildred snarled to Kerry.

"I have no intention of interfering in your territory Miss Hudson. I do believe I am correct in assuming that as a grown man, Mr. Wessex is capable of making his own choices."

"You bitch! Stay away from him! I have put up with his rotten spoiled little brat to make him learn to love me. I won't have a savage like you endanger that, just because you are pretty."

"Speaking of Ben, why is he terrified of you?"

"What do I care if the brat is afraid of me? He deserves the beatings. He is a rotten little brat due to the spoiling his father provides him because of his guilt over the death of his wife, Laura."

"Beatings? You beat Ben?"

"What of it?" Mildred hissed. "That little brat brought you into his father's life. I know, I heard them talking last night. I shall beat him well for doing that."

Bennett was trembling in fear at the Mildred Hudson he was used to, and when Bennett heard he was going to get a beating he hid under the table.

"You won't touch Ben ever again, or you'll answer to me!" Kerry snarled back. Rage was showing in Kerry's face and her eyes were blue steel daggers.

"You won't be able to. I will convince Braden that you are a lying trollop and a bad influence on his son."

"I think you will find that hard to do, Miss Hudson." The familiar male voice came from the side door. Braden walked into the room. He had forgotten his money clip and was returning to the rooms when he heard Mildred begin her tirade. He had waited to hear everything and he was glad he did. Braden now knew the truth of Mildred Hudson and was beyond furious to learn she had beaten his son, Laura's son. "I think you will find that **very hard** to do. Your services are terminated immediately."

Mildred held her hand to her mouth. "Braden, this woman provoked me into anger. I didn't know what I was saying."

"You knew exactly what you were saying and I understood every word. You will never have the opportunity to lay a hand on my son again. Start packing. I will put you on the first ship back to England."

"Braden." Mildred's voice was imploring.

"Get out of my sight!" Braden roared.

Kerry was reaching for Bennett under the table. "Come out now, Ben. It's safe."

Braden went on his knees to Bennett. "I'm sorry son. Why didn't you tell me she hurt you?"



Tears of fear were streaming from Bennett's eyes when he answered his father. "Miss Hudson told me she would hurt me worse and you wouldn't believe me."

"Don't you ever think that! You must know you can tell me anything. I will believe you, I promise."

"How much did you hear?" Kerry asked Braden.

"I heard everything and too much. I apologize for her misguided infatuation and her atrocious language." Braden responded softly as he gently stroked his son's tear stained face. "I think our trip to the Geneva Ranch will be postponed, Bennett. I have to find a new governess for you."

"Geneva Ranch!" Kerry took a sharp intake of breath. "You're going to the Geneva Ranch?"

"You know it?" Braden asked in astonishment. "We are visiting my father's good friend who owns it, Grady McGillinen. Do you know him?"

"Yes." It was the only answer Kerry could get out the shock was too much. Talk about fate.

"Do you live near there?" Braden surmised.

"Yes, you can say that."

"Then I have a wonderful idea. Bennett is already fond of you. I would like to hire you to be his governess."

"I don't know."

"Please say yes, Bennett adores you. I can't think of anyone that would make him a better governess. I pay well and I'll pay you more. My son's happiness is that important to me. We are both going to Nevada, even on the same train." Braden remembered he didn't even know Kerry's full name. "Say yes, Miss Astor." Now that is a good guess since her aunt was Audrey Astor.

"I'm not Miss Astor. I'm..." Kerry hesitated, she wasn't sure she wanted him to know she was Kerry McGillinen, the daughter of the man he was going to visit and she didn't know why that should matter, but she wanted to be close to Bennett and Braden. The thought of being employed as a governess sounded like fun and she liked Bennett a lot. Those strange feelings she had around Braden felt good as well. She had to think of a name, now what name could she think of. "I'm Kerry Blaine." Kerry thought of the name of a mining town near their ranch.

"Would you agree to be Bennett's governess?" Braden pushed. He wanted Kerry to stay near Bennett and himself.

"Please Miss Kerry," Bennett implored. "I promise to try to be a good boy."

"You are a good and wonderful boy, Ben." Kerry sighed, "I will accept your employment Mr. Wessex. I can't so no to Ben."

"Please call me Braden, Kerry." Braden found himself grinning from ear to ear. He didn't know why, but he was quite happy to keep Kerry near.

"Can we eat now?" Bennett asked. "I'm hungry."

"I'm hungry also." Kerry agreed.

GENEVA'S HOPE



"Let's go to the restaurant to eat. I don't think I can wait much longer myself." Braden concurred.

"You won't be ashamed being seen with a woman in buckskin?" Kerry questioned.

"Why? Should I be?" Braden queried back. "You Miss Kerry Blaine would look beautiful in a potato sack. Isn't that right, Bennett?"

"Sho Nuf!" Bennett giggled.

"Thank you kind sirs." Kerry answered as she took Braden's offered arm. When she touched him she felt those same funny feelings again.

Braden stopped at the desk in the hotel lobby and made arrangements for a room in another hotel for Mildred Hudson and obtained passage for her on the next available ship to London. Braden Wessex was a true gentleman and would not leave the woman stranded in a strange country. He offered to pay all her expenses and left a sizable sum as severance pay.

In the restaurant only a few eyes turned at the woman in buckskin, but the few eyes that stared were men admiring the beautiful Kerry.

"Are you sure I'm not embarrassing you with my ensemble?" Kerry leaned over and whispered to Braden Wessex.

"I think its just jealousy that Bennett and I are dining with the most beautiful woman in New York." Braden answered gallantly.

After breakfast Braden walked Kerry to her aunt's suites. "I should go in with you and talk to her about your accepting employment as Bennett's governess."

"I prefer to do that myself." Kerry replied knowing her aunt never questioned anything she did, but wanted to tell Auntie Audrey that she was going to Geneva with Braden Wessex and that he was visiting Grady McGillinen, her own father. The irony of it was so funny, Kerry wanted to share that with Auntie Audrey privately.

CHAPTER 4

"Just where have you been?" Audrey questioned Kerry when she walked in. "And why are you wearing those clothes in New York?"

"I'm sorry I'm late, and I try not to let you see me in my riding clothes."

"Well I should hope so. You look like a pretty boy!" Audrey reprimanded.

"You couldn't have been riding all this time."

"I met Ben and Braden Wessex in the park this morning. They were riding also."

"I'm glad you had company, but I 'm surprised they recognized you in that get up?"

"Ben did."

"No doubt. Bennett is a smart little boy. You were with them all morning?" there was reproof in Audrey's tone.

"Yes, after an altercation with Everett Mann."

"What altercation?" Audrey was worried at that statement. Audrey Astor did not like Everett Mann.

"Oh, he just grabbed me, shouted at me, and bruised me claiming I was his woman and he was going to rip my buckskins off." Kerry's lips then parted with a large smile. "Until Braden decked him with one blow."

"I wish I could have seen that. If any pompous peacock deserved to get decked it is Everett Mann."

"It was a wonderful sight. Then at the hotel, Mildred Hudson threatened Ben and I when she thought Braden had left his suites."

"Mildred Hudson? The Wessex governess?"

"One in the same."

"You were in the Wessex suites?"

"Braden and Ben invited me for breakfast."

"How long have you been calling Wessex, Braden?"

"Since this morning's ride."

Curiosity had taken control of Audrey, "don't end there, what happened with Hudson?"

"She told me in so many words she was in love with Braden and I was to stay out of her territory. She also threatened to strop Ben."

"She didn't!"

GENEVA'S HOPE



"She did, and Braden heard every word. Mildred Hudson was terminated immediately."

"I'm so happy for little Bennett. Maybe Wessex can find a suitable governess now."

"Oh, he already did."

Audrey cocked a suspicious brow, "Just who did he find in such a short period of time. Not your friend, Small Bird by any chance?"

"No, someone better. He hired me."

"What?" Audrey inhaled quickly. "Why in the world did you take employment? Lord knows you don't need it, much less a servant level as governess. Are you out of your mind? Alyson will murder me, and your mother is sure to haunt me. You are a Stuart!"

"I am also a McGillinen. It turns out Braden is going to Nevada to visit Grady McGillinen."

"What did he say when he found out he hired Grady McGillinen's daughter to be his son's governess?"

"He doesn't know, I told him my name was Kerry Blaine."

"Just what are you up to, young lady?"

"Give over Auntie Audrey. I like Ben. I will be a wonderful governess for him and it will be fun to have Braden find out I am Grady's daughter. We are both headed for the same place, at the same time, so why not?"

"I have a thousand reasons, and one of them being Wessex will be none to pleased when he finds out you deceived him."

"It's just a little deceit. I'll find a good governess for Bennett after we get to Nevada." Kerry was not about to admit to herself much less her Auntie that she wanted to be near Braden. Kerry was simply strongly attracted to Braden Wessex.

"I just wonder if that will be necessary once you get to Geneva."

"What is that supposed to mean?"

"It means, my adorable niece. I think you're in love with Braden Wessex."

"That's insane. I barely know the man. I just happen to adore his son and so do you."

Audrey was sure she was on target with the obvious electricity between Braden and her niece with the quick denial of Kerry. "I do adore little Bennett, but I'm not the one going on a long train ride alone with his father."

"Auntie Audrey, how can you think such a thing?"

"Let's just say, stranger things can happen and after thinking it over, I kind of like the idea of Bennett Wessex becoming part of my family."

"Braden Wessex is still in love with his deceased wife. He has no room for a new woman. Mildred Hudson found that out." Kerry stated still trying to deny her attraction for Braden.

"Mildred Hudson would be impossible to love I'm sure. You on the other hand are beautiful, kind, loving and talented."



"I will just be considered Ben's governess."

"You think so? That isn't what I saw in his eyes last night a dinner."

"And just what do you think you saw at dinner?"

"Interested are you?"

"Cut that out, Auntie Audrey. Just what do you think you saw?"

"Nothing. Other than Braden Wessex couldn't take his eyes off you."

"He was most likely watching Bennett."

"Goodness child. When are you going to realize how beautiful and desirable you are?"

"As beautiful and desirable as **any** twenty year old."

"Not **any**. You constantly have suitors that break down our door and your Papa's to court you. Of course I am happy that some of them you can't stand."

"You mean my dislike of Everett Mann?"

"Now there is precisely one I am in complete agreement to your distaste. The man is insufferable and I don't know what it is about him, but I sense a brutality underneath."

"Really Auntie Audrey? I sense that same thing."

"That's why I was happy when you told me Wessex downed him."

"So was I." Kerry felt it was the time to ask her aunt's blessing for her masquerade. "Will you go along with Kerry Blaine?"

"I think I will. What is supposed to happen next?"

"The hotel will send people to transfer my things to Braden's suites. I will begin my duties immediately."

"Doesn't it seem at all strange to Braden Wessex that you would accept a position of employment considering you are my niece?"

"He found out from Bennett that I am from the West, I told him it was Nevada. Braden is under the assumption that only the poor and derelict live in the West. No, he doesn't find it strange. I am sure in his mind I am from the poor side of your family."

"Won't he be surprised?"

"I think he will, even though I did tell him the West is not that much of a wilderness, but you know how these Brits are."

"Indeed I do, when I accompany Henry in Europe I am always asked if I have ever seen a wild Indian savage. And I live in Boston!"

"Some Indians I know are more cultured and intelligent than some city folk I know."

"Definitely more refined than that Everett Mann and some of your other beaus," Audrey smirked.

A knock at the door interrupted their conversation. Thomas announced that Master Bennett and Braden Wessex were present.

"Mrs. Astor," Braden addressed Audrey. "Do we have your approval to employ Miss Blaine as Bennett's governess?" His eyes switched to Kerry and twinkled as he saw she was still dressed in her buckskins.

GENEVA'S HOPE



"You are in rather a rush, aren't you Mr. Wessex?" Audrey responded drawing Braden's attention back to her. "Kerry first had a chance to tell me, and in reality it is not my approval you need. You will need Kerry's Papa to approve. I am sure you will get your answer from him shortly after you arrive in Nevada."

Braden Wessex felt himself blush. It was if Audrey Astor could read his mind. Yes, he was in a hurry. Yes, he wanted Kerry near him as soon as possible, but more importantly, or he tried to convince himself, Bennett needed her. "I want to make sure that Bennett's welfare has been seen to."

"Of course." Audrey said with sarcasm heavy in her tone.

Braden Wessex did not hear the sarcasm; he chose to hear the approval. Well, more or less the approval. "Miss Hudson's belongings have already been moved into her new hotel and I am told her ship departs for England the morrow next. I have brought the same men to move your things into our suites. That is if it is alright with you, Miss Blaine."

Thomas raised an eyebrow when he heard Kerry McGillinen referred to as Miss Blaine, but a butler says nothing on the antics of the gentry. "I will be most happy to assist if you require."

"Thank you Thomas, I would appreciate it if you did see to the proper moving of Kerry's things." Audrey Astor replied in appreciation.

"I'll see to it at once, madam." Thomas answered and walked towards Kerry's room.

"Since you will be starting your employment, I think I will return to Boston on the morrow. I hope you do understand that I want reports from you on your way back to Nevada and definitely when you arrive there."

"You have my promise Auntie Audrey."

Audrey turned to Braden Wessex. "I expect you to take good care of my niece."

"You have my promise, Mrs. Astor."

"You can start by allowing Kerry sometime to bathe and change clothes before she leaves me."

"I beg your pardon, Kerry." Braden apologized sincerely. "Bennett is just in a such a hurry."

"Strange, I haven't heard a word from Bennett. I have only heard from you, Mr. Wessex." Audrey chided.

"Perhaps it is I. Bennett has never been happier since his mother left us, and I enjoy his happiness." Braden had to acknowledge honestly to Kerry's aunt. It appeared that Auntie Audrey was extremely perceptive.

Braden Wessex was not as perceptive. He did not notice the Sosoni' woman walk into Kerry's room. Small Bird was Kerry's friend and half sister. She went to assist her with Kerry's bath. In the privacy of her privy and bath, Kerry explained to Small Bird in Sosoni' that they would be on the same train back to Nevada since Kerry already had the tickets and that Kerry would need her assistance but they would have to work around Braden Wessex and his



private car. Small Bird laughed when she heard the entire story about going to Nevada and Kerry hiring on as Bennett's governess.

It was the afternoon before Kerry had moved into the room formerly occupied by Mildred Hudson and she now had the time to devote to Bennett. Braden Wessex had taken his son shopping while Kerry settled in.

Bennett came running into the suite calling for Kerry. In his small hand was a ribboned package.

Finding her in his room he ran to her smiling broadly, "I bought something for you Miss Kerry. I picked it out all by myself." Bennett then handed her the package wrapped in a pretty pink ribbon. "Open it! Open it!" Bennett said excitedly.

Kerry opened the package with the same excitement Bennett was emanating. Kerry gasped when it was unwrapped. In her hand was an expensive ruby studded hair comb. "Ben, this is beautiful but I can't accept such an expensive gift."

"We insist. Bennett wanted it for you. Therefore you must accept it."

Kerry looked up at Braden. There was an unmistakable twinkle in his eye that she had seen in Bennett's eyes the first time they played together. "I will cherish it always."

"Good. Will you wear it to dinner then?" Braden asked.

"I will. I have just the dress to compliment it."

Braden and Bennett had gone off again so Kerry went to get Small Bird to help her dress and do a coiffure that would compliment the studded hair comb. Kerry was ready sometime before Braden and Bennett returned to collect her for supper. She took that time to prepare Bennett's room. On her first visit this afternoon Kerry noted there were no toys and the blankets were not soft enough. While Small Bird readied her, Kerry sent Thomas out for toys, books, and new bed linens. Before the two men returned all was in readiness and Kerry was anxious to see Bennett's face when he went into his room.

Kerry was sitting in a chair reading when Bennett and Braden returned. "Miss Kerry, you look so beautiful!" Bennett squealed as he ran into her open arms and snuggled into her satin burgundy dress. A big hug warmed and surrounded him.

"Your comb makes me beautiful, Ben." Kerry said as she hugged her new charge. "And where have you been so long?"

"Papa and I were working hard and it's going to be a big surprise for you."

"You aren't the only one with surprises. Come with me to your room. I will dress you for dinner and then you can see your surprise." Kerry almost giggled like a child. She was delighted with her surprise for Ben.

"Wow!" Bennett exclaimed as he entered his room and saw all the toys. Bennett flew into his room to examine and discover the new toys.

GENEVA'S HOPE



Braden heard his son and came into the room. "Was this your doing?" Braden addressed Kerry.

"I take complete responsibility for it, although I hope you do approve." Kerry sighed. "I just saw his barren little room and thought this was not a true boy's room. It wouldn't be a boy's room without toys."

"I do approve. I greatly approve." Braden remarked and noticed his son's bed. "Are those new bed linens and isn't that a down quilt?"

"Yes, the other linens were the hotel's and far too harsh for the sensitive skin of a child. Even I bring my own linens when I know I will be staying in a hotel." Kerry looked at Braden. "Please be warned. I have every intention of spoiling Master Bennett Wessex. You should know now, so you can terminate my employment if you so desire."

"My dear Miss Blaine. Do I look like a man that is out of his senses?" Braden smiled to her. "Nothing could make me happier than know with certainty that Bennett is getting all the warmth and affection he needs." Braden's own words suddenly struck him. He needed that same warmth and affection. He missed it and wanted it just like Bennett. Feeling suddenly embarrassed by his own thoughts he excused himself. "Forgive me for the moment. I will dress for dinner and it will take me a little longer since my man Edward is preparing the private rail cars I have purchased."

"Cars?" Kerry queried the plural term. Most gentry purchased a rail car, not cars.

"Yes." Braden answered as he turned and left the room. God, she is lovely and perfect.

Braden's answer left Kerry still wondering, but she wouldn't think about it now. She had Bennett to take care of.

Dressing Bennett was easy for a woman that grew up with brothers and often dressed in togs considered masculine that she wore on occasion. With that extra time Kerry and Bennett played with his new toys.

Kerry and Bennett were so involved in their soldiers they did not hear Braden enter the room. Braden took advantage of that and watched the two with a growing happiness he found in his heart. He was enjoying the two playing when Kerry looked up and said, "I guess its time to go."

"Only if you are ready." Braden answered politely.

"I believe we are since Ben just defeated my army." Kerry laughed. "I do believe he will make a fine general some day."

"Aw, you're just a girl. It's easy to beat you." Bennett grinned.

Before Kerry could respond Braden told his son. "Don't be so naïve my son. Women are not only smarter, but also more powerful. We men may fight the wars, but women win them."

"Huh?" Bennett queried.

"You'll understand when you're older." Braden answered holding back his chuckles and he took Bennett's hand and extended his arm to Kerry.



Dinner was quiet and wonderful the only down side to it was the scowl Braden's face wore. Braden's conversation with Kerry and Bennett however, did not match that scowl on his face.

Returning to their suites Kerry asked him about it. "I couldn't help but notice the scowl you wore tonight. Was something bothering you?"

"Yes."

"Yes? That's it? Yes?" Kerry was a little irritated and it showed in her voice. "Do you care to tell me what was bothering you? Did I say or do something wrong?"

"Do? Yes. Wrong? No."

"You'll have to explain that, you really will." Kerry questioned now annoyed.

"You can't help what you do. You are incredibly beautiful. You are not wrong, the men that stared at you all evening are wrong. I felt like I would have to challenge every male in that room. They were all staring at you profoundly and luridly."

"I didn't notice." Kerry tried to assure him.

"I did, and I found it quite irritating."

Kerry didn't know what to say. He sounded jealous, but she knew better. Braden Wessex had love only for his deceased wife. Would he challenge a man that approached me? He would be worse than my brothers. Even my brothers never bothered a suitor until that suitor started irritating me or tried to take liberties. Brits must look at things differently. Her thoughts were broken by Braden's voice.

"I hope I haven't upset you in any way."

"No, of course not." Kerry lied. She found it more upsetting being near him, those unknown feelings twirled inside. Those urges to be cradled in his strong arms were growing and kiss those handsome strong lips, but she could handle that. Bennett needed her and she would take care of him. She would devote her time to Bennett.



CHAPTER 5

"You may play for a bit while I change and then prepare your bath." Kerry told Bennett.

Kerry went into her new room and disrobed to her broderie and put on a day robe. Her room was adjacent to Bennett's and she noticed to Braden's as well. Her room was smack in the middle. As she was disrobing she hoped the door to Braden's room was locked. After Kerry changed into her day robe, she started running the water in the tub basin in the privy next to Bennett and her room. When it was ready she retrieved Bennett.

"Oh my God!" Kerry shrieked when she took off Bennett's clothes for his bath. Kerry's shock at the sight could not be contained. Bennett's back and bottom were black and blue with strop marks.

"What's the matter Miss Kerry?" Bennett became frightened with her scream.

"Nothing my darling, nothing." Kerry was choking on her words. Rage was filling her. Kerry wanted to take a horsewhip to Mildred Hudson for what she did to this sweet dear little boy. "Come get into the tub."

Kerry turned to a knock on the door. "May I come in?" Braden Wessex asked. He heard the shriek and wanted to know if everything was all right.

Kerry opened the door for him.

"I heard you scream and I wanted to know if you were all right."

"Everything is fine, really fine. Ben is going to take his bath, right Ben?"

"Yes, Miss Kerry." Bennett agreed and turned to step into the tub.

Kerry looked at Braden with a look that said, 'don't say anything.' And she dropped the towel surrounding Bennett.

Braden went white as he saw the bruises on his son. His eyes soon filled with tears and then rage as he turned and left the privy without a word. He was cursing himself for allowing such brutality to happen to his own son.

Kerry followed Braden out as soon as she had put Bennett in the tub. "I want to horsewhip that woman." Kerry told Braden quietly when she closed the privy door.



"Perhaps I should be horsewhipped for allowing my own son to receive such brutality and not even be aware enough to stop it."

"Hudson purposely kept it from you. She even threatened Ben that he would receive more if he tried to tell you. It wasn't your fault."

"How did you know she threatened him?" Braden asked her in surprise.

"Ben told Auntie Audrey and I yesterday when I first met him."

"And you didn't tell me?"

"We were going to at the first opportunity, but Mildred Hudson did it so well on her own."

"Dear God, how could I let this happen to my dear innocent son?"

"Hudson did it, and I want so badly to horsewhip her I can taste it. You were far to kind and generous to her."

"Unfortunately, my upbringing interferes with my feelings." Braden became sullen. "Will Bennett be all right or should I send for a doctor?"

"Bennett will be fine. I will tend to him and I will make sure he never suffers again."

Kerry returned to the privy. She bathed Bennett and dressed him for bed.

Bennett couldn't ever remember being tucked in so gently. Kerry's soft caresses calmed him and made him comfortably sleepy. When Kerry started to read a story to him he quickly fell into a deep sound sleep.

Kerry brushed his cheek with her lips and carefully tucked the quilt around his shoulders. Bennett looked so angelic in his sleep. Kerry went to her room and removed her day robe and broderie. She put on her white cotton nightgown and lay down to sleep. Sleep eluded her. Kerry tossed and turned and finally gave up trying to sleep. Kerry put on a robe and went back into Bennett's room.

Opening Bennett's door from her room she looked upon Braden kneeling by his son's bed. Braden Wessex was smoothing the covers on his son and then ran his finger's lightly through Bennett's hair. Kerry was thinking about silently closing the door when Braden looked up and saw her standing in her doorway.

Braden rose and walked towards her. "I'm sorry, did I wake you?" He whispered as he took her hand in his.

Kerry's knees started to buckle with his simple touch. She forced out in a soft quiet voice, "No, I came to check on Bennett because I couldn't sleep."

"Sleep is eluding me as well." Braden continued to whisper. He led her out of Bennett's room and closed the door silently behind him still holding Kerry's hand. "Since neither of us can sleep tonight, perhaps you would join me in nightcap?"

"Do you think that would help?"

"Absolutely!" Braden grinned broadly. "Perhaps even a little conversation. We could possibly determine why sleep is eluding us." He



didn't wait for an answer; instead he led her out of the other door in her room that led to the parlor in the hotel suite.

Kerry was thinking it didn't seem to disturb him that he was in her room. Braden didn't seem shy to the fact she was in her nightgown and robe. Kerry started to wonder if Braden had given Mildred Hudson a reason to believe she would have a future with him.

Braden gallantly sat Kerry down on the settee and walked over to a cabinet that obviously held the liquor. "Would you care for a brandy or wine? I have a light port if you're interested."

"Would you have American Whiskey?"

"You're joking aren't you?" Braden looked at Kerry with surprise at her question.

"No, I was raised on Tennessee Whiskey. Of course it was mixed with a seltzer." Kerry smiled at Braden's shocked look.

"I think that is stocked here, if that is your wish."

"It is and thank you."

Braden poured her whiskey with seltzer and then poured himself a brandy. "I will have to get used to the American woman, won't I?"

"If you intend to keep me in your employ, yes."

"Bennett is so happy. I will do my utmost to keep you as his governess. I ask you to be patient with me as I learn these strange Western ways."

"You will have to instruct me in your strange British ways." Kerry countered.

"What is so strange about British ways other than British women generally drink wine and not stronger liquors."

"I am beginning to see other differences."

"Such as?" Braden asked as he sat next to her on the settee and handed her the whiskey and seltzer.

"American men would never enter a single woman's bedroom without feeling a twinge of discomfort is one example."

"I see. I did not show discomfort in your room. Is that it?"

"It seemed it was a most common occurrence to you."

"I can assure you it is not, nor will it be. I can tell you that in England no matter where the master goes, albeit home or hotel, it is considered his domain. Therefore a master or employer if you wish considers every room his domain." Braden touched Kerry's cheek with the back of his hand. "If it is different here I will comply to the etiquette of America, you have my word."

Kerry almost hoped he wouldn't comply. Kerry then offered, "American men would be embarrassed to be sitting with a single woman dressed only in her robe and nightgown."

"British men would also, however; since I am a widower employing a woman as governess in close quarters, this may occur on occasion. I promise to be a gentleman." It was a promise that Braden could not keep had he been truthful instead of assuaging.



Again Kerry almost wished he wouldn't be a gentleman. She was beginning to get those tingling feelings inside once more and an urge to put her arms around his neck and kiss those lips of his. Instead she couldn't help but ask, "Did you have this close quarters problem with Mildred Hudson?"

An eyebrow rose at the question. "That is an interesting question. Are all American women this bold in questions?"

"I think we are."

"There were times that Miss Hudson was in her robe in my presence, but don't ask me to explain that I never felt comfortable with it and I certainly never offered her a nightcap or sat next to her on the settee."

Kerry felt somewhat comfortable with that answer and relaxed a little. Braden's answer made her feel special and she wanted to feel special with him. Kerry took a sip of her whiskey.

"There is something about you that makes one feel comfortable." Braden looked directly into Kerry's eyes.

Kerry thought she saw loneliness and a sadness reflected in his eyes. "I'm happy for that. I want us to feel...comfortable around each other." Kerry took another sip and watched as Braden sipped his brandy. "Is there a reason you cannot sleep?"

"Yes. I find I am having a difficult time dealing with my guilt."

"You can't continue to blame yourself for what happened to Ben. That was the sole responsibility of a cruel and selfish woman."

"It should never have happened to my son. Never! I should have prevented it."

"You didn't know."

"I should have known."

"Not when it was hidden. You must stop blaming yourself and concentrate only on loving your wonderful son."

"That's not all I am feeling guilty about."

"What else?"

"Your turn now. Why can't you sleep?" Braden was not about to confess that he was feeling guilty about wanting Kerry. He didn't plan to tell Kerry that he wanted her near to him the first time he met her and saw her playing with Bennett. Braden was not about to tell her that he wanted her so badly his conscience fought with his need. He was still feeling disloyal to the memory of his Laura.

Kerry didn't want to tell him the true reason either. Kerry had been thinking of him in her room. She couldn't tell him about the tingling feelings she had whenever she was near him and that she was thinking of him and that kept her awake. Instead she said. "This governess duty is new to me and I wanted to feel more secure that Ben was sleeping comfortably."

Braden smiled and after another sip of brandy put the snifter on the table next to him. He took the glass from Kerry's hand then and placed it next to his. He picked up Kerry's hands and softly brushed his lips across her knuckles. "You are so wonderful, Kerry Blaine. I feel the same toward you as



my son feels. He needs you, and I think I need you even more.” It was at that moment Braden’s conscience lost to his want and need for Kerry.

Kerry was holding her breath. Those soft seductive lips on her hands were sending flutters in her being and her heart was beating twice as fast. Trying to keep hold of reality Kerry asked herself, *did he kiss Mildred Hudson’s hands? Didn’t he say he felt uncomfortable near her? I hope so. I hope I’m special. No this is madness!*

Kerry’s eyes locked into Braden’s and he saw questions in them. *God, she looks so beautiful, so innocent.* Braden found his hand reaching for her head and pulling it towards him. He brought her lips to his and kissed her gently. Braden’s other hand found her waist and pulled her body to his. Soon Braden and Kerry were both lost in their physical feelings. They were engulfed in those carnal urges. Braden slowly parted her lips as his tongue searched for hers. The hand that held her near to him found the sash to her robe and untied it. Braden felt Kerry respond to his kiss as she parted her lips and her tongue began to duel with his. Slowly and carefully he moved his kiss to her neck and he took a moment to nibble her ear lobe. Kerry’s sigh bade him to take a bolder step. Braden unbuttoned her nightdress and that hand gently invaded her nightgown searching and finding the soft roundness of her breast.

Kerry was drowning in pleasant feelings. She felt her skin begin to heat as Braden’s kisses became deeper and more demanding. Kerry became lost in those desires and was unaware Braden had opened her robe and unbuttoned her nightdress. She was suddenly aware of his strong warm hand around her breast. Her heart beat even faster and her breathing heavier when gentle fingers played with the nipple that was now hard and taut. *God, this feels so wonderful.*

Braden became lost in his own need. It was a need that he had denied himself since Laura’s death. He hadn’t wanted another woman, not until Kerry, and he wanted her now. Encouraged by her response he pulled down her open nightdress revealing both breasts and keeping his hand massaging the one he took his mouth from her neck to the other.

Kerry gasped as his mouth covered her breast and suckled. Suddenly there was a throbbing in her loins and a need to have him closer wanting his warm skin next to hers. Her hands went from his shoulders to his hair and back again. A groan of pleasure escaped her lips.

Braden looked up and smiled. God he felt good. He had denied himself this pleasure for far to long and Kerry was the first woman to ever attract him since Laura’s death. Braden was fully aroused and wanted to take Kerry right on the settee but thought better of it. He needed to get her into his bed. Both hands were on her breasts as his mouth returned to hers. In a moment he would raise her from the settee and carry her into his room.

Kerry was totally oblivious as Braden led her into a new world, a world of passion, need and want. Lord, she wanted Braden. Her body was hot and aching for him, but she was a novice in the relationships between a man and woman. She had heard her brother’s talk of this, but she herself had no



experience in the joining of a man and woman. All she could do was let Braden lead the way and hope she was doing it right.

Braden was going to burn into a cinder unless he entered Kerry soon. Braden kept his lips on hers as he raised her and put his arm under her knees to carry her to his bed when they were suddenly jolted into reality when Bennett's cry rang through the suites.

Braden put Kerry down. Kerry collected herself with her nightgown and retied her robe as she ran behind Braden into Bennett's room. Bennett was thrashing in his bed. A nightmare was clearly in control of the little boy. Braden's first thought was to wake Bennett, but Kerry grabbed his hand. "No, don't. It would be too much of a start if you suddenly woke him that way. We need to gently wake from the nightmare."

"What do you want me to do?"

"Nothing." Kerry said as she walked to the bed and softly whispered.

"Ben, wake up darling. Ben. Ben."

Slowly Bennett opened his eyes to Kerry hovering over him. "Miss Kerry?"

"Hello darling, were you having a bad dream?"

"Dream? Yes. I was running and I was afraid."

"What were you afraid of darling? I can make it better for you."

"I was afraid Papa would leave me, like Mama left me and there was a dark person, someone that hurt me."

"Papa isn't going to leave you son." Braden reassured Bennett taking his little hand in his large one.

"And I won't let anyone hurt you." Kerry promised. "Tomorrow I will make you a dream catcher. It is made by Indian women to catch the bad dreams and let sweet dreams enter as your night visions."

With a sleepy little voice Bennett said, "I would like that Miss Kerry. I don't like bad dreams."

"You won't have any more, I promise," Kerry said and she bent over to kiss his little cheek. "Go back to sleep now, I will sit here with you to chase those bad dreams away. Tomorrow I will put the dream catcher over your bed."

"I'll be right at your side tonight." Braden promised.

It didn't take long for Bennett to return to his sleep. He was now secure knowing both people he cared about were at his side.

Braden gently stroked his son's hair as he looked to Kerry. "Go off to sleep, Miss Blaine. I'll stay with Bennett. No point in both our losing sleep."

Miss Blaine? Miss Blaine? He tells me to sleep after he was so intimate with me? "I don't think I can sleep." Kerry growled at Braden.

Braden winced at her tone he couldn't imagine what had changed it. She must be upset with the liberty I took with her. I should have known better than to try seducing such a beautiful woman, but I want her and need her. I must not forget that she is a lady of high quality. I tricked her into becoming Bennett's governess, but I don't regret it.

GENEVA'S HOPE



Braden's look of consternation and confusion quickly cooled Kerry's anger. "I'll try Mr. Wessex." Kerry returned his formality. *Perhaps formality is a British thing.*

Braden shot Kerry a smile. Kerry had guessed right. Formality was a British thing that even the closest lovers used with each other. It fell so naturally from Kerry's lips. Braden was enchanted.

Kerry felt relieved at the sensual smile Braden had given her.

CHAPTER 6

After a restless sleep, Kerry woke at sunrise. She quickly donned her doeskins and moccasins. It would be a beautiful day for a ride in the park and she would take Bennett for that ride this morning. Opening the door, she found Braden Wessex asleep in the chair. With the stealth of the moccasins, she went past Braden to Bennett waking him. Gently prodding and whispering his name, little Bennett opened his eyes.

"Morning Miss Kerry." Bennett said sleepily as he rubbed his eyes with his little hands.

"Let's get you dressed so we can take a ride in the park this morning. Would you like that Ben?" Kerry asked.

Bennett's little face lit up. "Uh huh. I'd like that a lot." He spotted his father sleeping on the chair and whispered asking Kerry, "what about Papa? Wouldn't he like to come with us?"

"Your Papa didn't get much sleep last night. It might be best to let him sleep in."

"Poor Papa." Bennett sympathized as he took off his quilt and got up from bed.

Kerry pulled fresh clothes from the armoire for Bennett and dressed him quietly and efficiently. A few minutes in the privy for Bennett and Kerry started writing a note.

Suddenly a large hand covered Kerry's as she was writing. "Where are you going?" Braden asked in a firm tone after he woke to find Bennett out of bed and looking for Bennett, finding her in the parlor wearing her doeskins.

Kerry was startled at first and then realizing it was Braden she turned to him, "I was leaving you a note. Ben and I were going for a ride in the park."

"You didn't wake me?"

"I thought you might need some sleep."

"Why?"

"Because I know you didn't get much sleep last night."

Braden released Kerry's hand and turned her around to look at him. "Give me a few minutes and we'll go together." Bending down and using his hand to raise her chin, he gave her a soft kiss.

Lord, he has kissable lips. Kerry smiled at Braden and looked up at him to respond, "We'll wait for you".

Bennett and Kerry went back into Bennett's room and played soldiers while they waited for his father.



It was worth the wait. Braden Wessex looked beyond handsome going for lustful sensual in his brown velvet jacket, white calfskin breeches that clung to every ripple of muscle, and shiny black boots with red leather accent on the top. Kerry had to stop herself from staring at the dashing and tempting figure that made her feel warm all over and her breasts tighten in attention. Kerry at once wanted to feel those strong hands on her body again. Kerry shook her head to gain control of her overactive libido that she simply could not control whenever she was near Braden Wessex.

After their morning ride, Braden Wessex sent Kerry and his son to the suite while he stayed in the hotel lobby to order breakfast. Mildred Hudson was waiting for him.

"You can't just send me away, Braden. I came to this foreign country as your governess. I should leave with you as your governess." Mildred Hudson demanded as she approached Braden Wessex at the lobby desk. Mildred Hudson was making a scene in front of guests and hotel staff for attention.

"You have incredible nerve even talking to me after what you did to my son. I should have had you arrested." Braden spoke to Mildred just barely above a whisper as he bent his head toward her ears. Braden was not about to play her game and make a scene.

"You believe what the girl said? I only responded the way I did in my anger at that girl and what she accused me of doing." Mildred responded quite loudly.

"I don't have to believe Kerry. I saw my son's back with my own eyes and the bruises you bestowed upon him." Braden now raised his voice as he continued to fight his mounting anger.

"Your son was clumsy, he fell. You can't blame me for those bruises." Mildred defended for all in the lobby to hear.

"You think me ignorant that I cannot tell a strop bruise from a fall? You should think again madam." Braden replied his voice controlled as he began to fight rage in his heart.

"You might blame that pretty little strumpet Bennett has attached himself to. She might have done that to him and blame me." Mildred hotly accused for the benefit of her audience.

"Miss Hudson, I suggest you leave my presence immediately before I forget myself and not only strand you in this country but jail you as well." Braden turned and walked away with his fists clenched. As a gentleman, he could not strike a woman but he truly wanted to give tit for tat to Mildred Hudson. Fortunately he had already ordered their breakfast before had Mildred Hudson approached him and he walked swiftly up the stairs to his suites. Braden didn't turn around and failed to notice that Mildred Hudson did not leave, but settled in an over stuffed chair in the lobby.

"What's wrong?" Kerry asked Braden as soon as he walked in the suite.



"Why do you ask?" Braden answered Kerry in a low growl.

"Your face is quite grim and those lines are set deep in your forehead. Your face color is flushed. You look like you are angry." Kerry traced her fingertip across Braden's furrowed brow. "You sound angry as well."

"Perhaps I am." Braden grabbed Kerry's hand and brushed his lips against the back of her knuckles. Lust was quickly overtaking anger. Kerry had a way of doing that to him.

"Dare I ask why?" Kerry asked looking into Braden's deep blue eyes.

"Dare not until I am in control." Braden replied with a double meaning. He felt his loins bulge against his breeches.

"In that case Bennett can stay in his room playing until breakfast and I will obtain your leave to change." Kerry smiled removing her hand from Braden's and turned to leave.

"No." Braden blurted out!

"No? No What?"

Braden gave his answer when he walked to her and folded her in his arms. His lips covered her next question and he was in possession of her at that moment. Braden kissed Kerry passionately this time. His tongue had parted her lips and in his kiss he was sucking hers. Allowing Kerry a breath, his tongue moved to her earlobe and after it he had laved it he nibbled on it. Kerry felt her consciousness had moved out of her body. As for her physical body, it felt like jelly and she was grateful Braden was holding her in his arms. The nearness of Braden Wessex had again taken its toll on Kerry's growing passion. Kerry felt the muscles of his hard chest tantalizing her crushed but responsive breasts. Her loins warmed and her body welcomed his onslaught of kisses and touch.

"Don't change your clothes. I like these clothes." Braden whispered and his hands cupped Kerry's breasts under her doeskin shirt where they had roamed in embrace. When Kerry wore her doeskins, she wore no broderie. The doeskins were like a second skin, and her body more accessible to the enamored Braden Wessex.

Kerry was so lost in the new sensations she did not feel Braden moving her closer to his bedroom in the suites. His hands seemed to be magical and all over her. Braden was touching her everywhere and his mouth was so warm and exciting. Braden laved, bit and nibbled in all the right places. The right places to send Kerry into a heat she felt could not be squelched. Last night she thought Braden was wonderful; right now Braden was beyond that into the fantastic. Was this passion? If it is, God I want it. Kerry was kissing back now her arms locked around Braden's neck and she heard Braden's soft moan.

"You tempt me beyond reason." Braden groaned. He picked up her shirt and his mouth covered her breast.

Kerry gasped with the feeling, and heat traveled from her breast to her loins. Soon she felt wetness between her thighs wanting and welcoming the heat and body of Braden Wessex.



Braden must have sensed it because he loosened the cord on her doeskin trousers and his hand went seeking that wetness. His fingers played there and he heard Kerry gasping for breath. Her body was flushed; he instinctively knew she was ready for him. Lord God, he needed her, after three years he was so aroused he felt he could explode. Braden removed his fingers and left her curly mound. His mouth released her breast and his hand slid underneath Kerry's knees as his other hand wrapped around her waist to pick her up and carry her to his bed.

"Papa? Did Kerry get hurt? Are you carrying her because she got hurt?" Bennett asked with great concern as he walked into the parlor.

Braden felt like he received an ice cold shower when he heard and saw his son.

Kerry took longer to calm down but was the first to answer Bennett. "No Ben. I wasn't hurt. Your Papa was showing me how strong he is."

"Papa is real strong." Bennett beamed with pride. "Some day I will be big and strong like Papa."

"Yes you will. I am sure of it." Kerry agreed and then looked at Braden. "Mr. Wessex, you can put me down. We are impressed with your strength and fortitude."

"I regret I cannot show you my real strength." Braden whispered to Kerry very huskily.

At that moment, Kerry regretted not knowing Braden's strength either. Kerry's body was still flushed and wakened to primal need.

A knock at the door ended the rest of the conversation. Breakfast was brought in.

After breakfast, Kerry bathed and changed Bennett then bathed and changed herself. Kerry chose a simple day dress because with Braden in residence Small Bird would not be able to help dress her.

"Well, why After breakfast Braden bathed also, but he used cold water. His body was still on fire and it had to be put out. The entire time he was bathing he was asking himself why this woman had entered his heart and why he desired her so much. He could not answer those questions, but then he didn't have to. Kerry was his son's governess and available. He wanted her and he would have her.

Kerry answered the next knock on the door. It was her Aunt Audrey.

"Auntie, I thought you were returning to Boston."

"I changed my mind when I saw the circus was in town. I bought tickets for us. I just knew that Bennett would love it and I would enjoy him loving it."

"I don't know if Mr. Wessex has made plans for today or not."

"Why don't I ask him?"

"Why don't you?"

Braden came from his room after the knock to see who it was. "Mrs. Astor! What a pleasant surprise."



"I'm glad to hear that." Audrey smiled and waved her gloved hand cheerily in greeting. "I was wondering if all of you would like to attend the circus with me today."

"Since we have no plans for today, I cannot think of anything more enjoyable for Bennett. We accept your invitation and would be honored." Braden accepted and bowed politely.

"Wonderful, my carriage is waiting. Where is Bennett?" Audrey smiled broadly. Audrey adored Bennett and knew that he would soon be a part of her family through Kerry. Audrey just wondered how long it would take Braden and Kerry to make it happen.

"Ben is in his room playing with his toy soldiers. He does love them." Kerry said proud of her purchase.

"Well, just don't stand there. Go collect him." Audrey ordered her niece.

Kerry went into the room and brought a very excited little boy out.

"The circus? We are going to the circus?"

"Absolutely Bennett." Audrey beamed and took the boy's hand. "Be sure to bring his jacket in case we stay out late," Audrey turned to order Kerry.

Braden took his jacket, Bennett's jacket and Kerry's wrap. Braden then took Kerry's arm with his free one. They followed Audrey and Bennett down the stairs.

A small woman suddenly lunged between Audrey and Bennett to stand in front of Kerry. In her hand Mildred Hudson held a small pistol. "**Slut! Whore!**" she screamed at Kerry. Mildred's eyes were glazed with madness. Mildred aimed her pistol and was about to fire when Braden flipped the jacket at her hand causing her to drop the pistol. When the pistol dropped to the floor it fired harmlessly.

A crowd suddenly surrounded them and one of the security guards at the hotel restrained Mildred Hudson. The hotel manager came and asked Braden if the woman, Mildred Hudson should be arrested. Braden said no, but asked that Mildred Hudson be escorted back to the hotel room he had paid for and restrained there until her ship would leave tomorrow. The security guard from the hotel, who had been restraining her, took the writhing and shouting Mildred and escorted her out. Mildred Hudson would be secured and taken to the ship in the morning.

Kerry was frozen and in shock having a loaded pistol pointing at her and she herself was unarmed. Kerry found she was trembling and could not stop. Kerry felt her trembling limbs and thought she would not have been so upset if she had her colt strapped to her side. Kerry's brothers had taught her to shoot and they were the county's top sharpshooters. Mildred wouldn't have had a chance to frighten Kerry if not for the surprise and being unprepared for the moment.

Bennett also was in trepidation just at seeing the cruel Miss Hudson. Audrey scooped Bennett into her arms and carried him off to the carriage.



talking about going to the circus to distract him from his fears and what had happened.

Braden reacted to Kerry's trembling with gentleness. Braden encircled his arms around her and whispered softly in her hair, "It's over Kerry, and don't even think of it anymore." Braden kept Kerry in his arms for a moment and lingered as he inhaled the intoxicating fragrance of her hair. Braden then led Kerry to Audrey's carriage and lifted her in. Following Kerry into the carriage Braden sat next to her keeping her in the protection and security of his arms. While gently holding Kerry, Braden talked to Bennett about the circus. Braden told his son he would see clowns and laugh at them. He told his son of lions and tigers and bears. Braden's voice was soothing and reassuring for everyone in the carriage.

Kerry rested her head on Braden's broad muscular shoulder. When she did, Braden tightened his protective hold on her. The secure and warm feeling in the crook of his arm felt wonderful and she soon relaxed.

For Braden, he realized nothing felt more natural than to encircle Kerry with his protection and love. Braden wasn't even aware of her aunt watching them carefully.

Audrey couldn't help but notice the couple and promised herself that writing Alyson in Nevada about Kerry and Braden would be a necessity. Alyson would be told everything including Kerry's governess deception. Audrey felt her sister had a right to be forewarned and prepare for the potential permanent relationship Audrey could see. Audrey knew Alyson would be delighted that Kerry would marry well and provide an instant great nephew into the family. *Alyson will fall in love with Bennett.*

The circus was more than enjoyable for the troupe. Bennett had the most fun especially since Audrey Astor bought him every toy they saw and purchased the candies and food that was being scalped in the circus. Bennett's eyes widened at the trapeze act, the lion taming act, elephants, and clowns.

Audrey Astor then treated the Wessex family and her niece to dinner in one of her favorite New York Restaurants.

Bennett was wound up when they returned to the hotel and was a veritable chatterbox. Kerry had a time calming him down enough for a bath, but when she did and dressed him in his nightclothes, little Bennett was ready to go to sleep. Minutes after Bennett's prayers, his head lay on the pillow and he was sound asleep.

Kerry took her time in the hot bath. She took advantage of the soothing fragrant bath salts to calm herself. Drying herself, Kerry slipped into her nightclothes and climbed into her bed. Within moments of her head lying on the pillow, Kerry was sound asleep.

Braden Wessex did want go to sleep. He was being tortured by his growing thoughts of want and need of the sensual Kerry. Braden kept feeling the softness of Kerry in his arms this afternoon. Braden realized how much Kerry meant to him when he remembered Mildred's pistol pointing at his Kerry.



Yes, his Kerry. Could it possibly be he loved her? He bathed and then dressed in his burgundy lounging silk trousers and robe. Braden went into the parlor to pour himself a brandy hoping Kerry would come out. When she didn't and he finished his drink, Braden went to his room to go to bed. Problem was, Braden couldn't sleep. Braden kept thinking there was no denying he missed the warmth and feel of a woman and Kerry was a nice warm woman.

What is it about Kerry Blaine? After all these years, I find myself suddenly attracted. Is it just because I need a woman? Is it merely lust? No, not only lust. I find her captivating. It must be that she is different, a Yank? Am I attracted because Bennett is so fond of her? Why can't I get her out of my mind? Why do I want her so badly?

Twice Braden had come very close to intimacy with Kerry Blaine. Twice he had been stopped because of Bennett. Braden contemplated that it must be a sign; Kerry was not to be trifled with. It was obvious that Kerry was an innocent. Braden could tell by her reactions to his lovemaking. Yet, he could not understand how such a beautiful woman was innocent. It was inconceivable that a woman from the frontier of the West would not be quite knowledgeable of copulation. It was common knowledge in England that women of the Colonies were of loose morals, especially the Colony women of the West. Was it possible that common knowledge in England could be incorrect?

Braden was also contemplating how possessive Everett Mann had been towards Kerry. He asked himself why a man would be that possessive unless Everett had tasted the sweetness of Kerry's innocence and in fact did have a reason to be so possessive.

Braden tried thinking of other things like planning the trip to Nevada as he tossed and turned on his bed. He contemplated what he would do once he entered Nevada. It would be fun to take Bennett to an Indian reservation to see how the American savages lived. He would show him the mountains he had heard about, and maybe even a little hunting trip.

However, Braden started picturing Kerry with them in her doeskins and he was aroused again. God, could he ever get her off his mind? He decided he could not until he took her himself and to hell with propriety, morality, or possessive suitors. Braden lifted the soft sheets and down quilt and jumped from his bed.

Braden put on his robe once more and opened the door connecting their two rooms; evidently, Kerry had failed to lock it. He stood in the doorway and leaned against it as he looked at Kerry sleeping. In Braden's eyes, she looked like an angel. Her peaches and cream skin contrasting radiantly against the white linens of her bed. Her unbound hair framing her face and the white nightgown she wore blending into the white linens of her bed added to the illusion of an angelic vision. She looks pure and innocent, but she couldn't be. Could she? Braden felt his body heat to his needs. Tonight he would not be deterred.

GENEVA'S HOPE



Slowly and silently he removed his silk robe and trousers. At Kerry's bedside he stopped for a moment to smell her lilac fragrance. Braden inhaled her essence. His arousal grew proportionately to his desire to be inside her. Carefully Braden picked up the white eyelet quilt and slid next to Kerry's warm and inviting body. Braden lost any propriety as soon as he touched her. Searching her, discovering her and kissing her entire body as he lifted her nightgown gently.

CHAPTER 7

Kerry was dreaming of Braden Wessex. Ben had not interrupted their parlor scene and Braden had taken her to his bed. Kerry dreamt of Braden's kisses and his warm body and magic hands bringing her to ecstasy. *Such good feelings!* "What?" Kerry heard herself say in a sleepy voice as she was wakened from her dreams. She heard soft moans and felt a warm body nearly on top of her. Hands were raising her nightgown and lips were brushing hers. "Braden?"

"Shush Kerry." Braden answered and his mouth silenced hers. He put a hand behind her and raised Kerry's nightgown over her head to toss it on the floor breaking his kiss for just that movement. Braden had unbuttoned the nightgown and raised it before Kerry had woken up to him. After Braden had tossed her nightgown he rose on his arms to take in her body. "God help me, you are more beautiful and enticing than I had even imagined." Braden said huskily as the moon illuminated her with soft revealing light.

Kerry felt the warmth flow over her body as Braden's eyes moved from her neck to her breasts then down to her belly to her dark brown triangle mound. Kerry found she had lost her voice and croaked as she asked, "Braden, what are you doing in my bed?"

A husky voice answered, "I came to make love to you my sweet Kerry. I found I couldn't resist your temptations any more." Braden found his body urgently needing to unite with Kerry's and was in no mood for conversation.

"Temptations? How have I tempted you?" Kerry was frightened now that Braden was actually in her bed. Her body was heating up and she was terrified there would be no denying her body's needs or wants this time. "Is it because I had let you kiss me and touch me?"

"Only part of it, sweet Kerry. Actually I find just looking at you tempts me and I haven't been tempted to taste a woman since my...." Braden couldn't say the rest and he bent down to kiss Kerry and stop the questions. It didn't work.

"You mean since your wife died?" Kerry guessed accurately and stated between his kisses. "You mean you didn't find yourself tempted by Mildred Hudson?"

Braden pulled himself up abruptly to look at Kerry directly in her eyes. "Why the deuce would you even think that?" Braden did not want to



continue the discussion he needed Kerry quite urgently. Braden began to knead Kerry's breasts tenderly.

"Think what? Bringing up your wife or Mildred?" Kerry gasped as she fought with a final effort to give into her wanting Braden.

"Mildred!" Braden replied with a snarl. Braden began to position himself properly. There was no turning back for him and Mildred was the last thing on his mind.

"A governess in the next room is quite convenient, don't you think?" Kerry had no idea how accurate her statement had been about a governess in the next room being convenient. She asked the question because she had to know if she would be special to Braden or just another servant to satisfy lust.

"A governess has nothing to do with anything. You, dear beautiful Kerry have everything to do with everything. I want you and this time I won't be deterred." Braden warned as he concentrated on sucking Kerry's breast.

"Are you saying you never made love to Mildred, that she never attracted you?" Kerry barely breathed out through the pounding of her heart and the heating of her loins. Kerry wanted Braden badly but she also wanted to find out Braden's feelings before there was no return for her.

"I am saying Mildred tried to seduce me but she never succeeded." Braden nibbled at Kerry's lips sensually. "You on the other hand haven't even tried to seduce me, but I will make love my darling." Braden teased the soft folds of Kerry's womanhood with the satin tip of his manhood.

"I'm not sure this is ..." Kerry tried to say right but Braden had already covered her mouth with his. Kerry felt his arousal begin to penetrate and hands began a magic massage on her bared breasts. His touch quickly turned her nipples into hard little nubs betraying her passion for him. Moans were throttling from Kerry's throat and the feelings were turning her inside out. Her body was moving instinctively to the seduction Braden Wessex was orchestrating.

"I want you, I've wanted you." Braden whispered into Kerry's ear as he laved his tongue over her earlobe and withdrew from her. Braden realized he wanted this joining to be special, very special.

Kerry was breathing irregularly. A loud sigh emanated from her lips. Kerry started needing the feel of Braden and she began to move her hands from Braden's shoulders down his back and up again. It was an automatic response as she opened her legs with a nudge from his knee and she felt his warm hand enter her, thrusting and retreating in a rhythmic pattern. Kerry gasped when his hot mouth found her breasts tasting one and then the other not making up his mind, which one was better. It was a moment later Braden decided to rest his head on her chest and suckle the chosen breast. Braden's fingers had not once lost the rhythm of thrusting and retreating. Kerry's body responded to the seduction and Braden pulled his fingers from their wet haven and he brought them to his lips and then placed them on Kerry's lips. She smelled her womanhood and tasted her femininity. "I think I shall burn alive."



Braden licked under her breasts, then her belly and went lower until his tongue tasted that warm and welcoming femininity. "God you taste wonderful." Braden groaned.

"I can't ... oh dear God... don't..." Kerry was incoherent at this point. Her body arched in response to the teasing of Braden's tongue. It was the most pleasant torture Kerry could have imagined as Braden's tongue drove deeper and deeper into her womanly flesh.

Braden moved to position himself over Kerry. "You want me, you are ready for me," he whispered as he entered her slowly and carefully. Braden stopped when he felt the barrier, the barrier he didn't expect to be there. "My God, Kerry. You...you're...I'm your first."

Kerry was beyond reason or understanding, his warm tantalizing hardness was feeling to good to lose now. Kerry arched automatically and her hips began writhing to feel all of him. "My first." Kerry whispered back.

With Kerry moving under him and the warm tight haven he was feeling soon sent him over the edge and there was no turning back. Braden covered Kerry's mouth with passionate kisses and with a strong quick thrust he tore the barrier. He felt Kerry's scream in his kiss and slowly retreated and then re-entered slowly and carefully. Braden began his thrusts and retreats to the same rhythm his fingers had used in seduction. When he felt Kerry responding with matching rhythm he stopped his kissing and watched her as he increased in time and depth his thrusting. He swallowed hard when he felt her achieve her climax and he was surrounded with the warm wet results of her orgasm. Braden lost control in the tightness of her climax and thrust even harder and deeper in cresting waves until he expelled in spasms the seeds of his climax. Braden heard his mouth release a quiet roar.

Braden continued staring at Kerry as he tried to catch his breath and wait until his heart stopped pounding.

Kerry's eyes were closed and her breathing was beginning to return to normal but her heart was pounding against her chest so loudly she thought it would leave her deaf.

Slowly Kerry opened her eyes to the beautiful soft blue eyes of Braden Wessex. "Braden, is it always this wonderful?"

"Yes Kerry, if it's with the right person." Braden blinked and quietly continued, "and you are that right person. God help me, I was your first, Kerry."

"Would that have really made a difference with you, between us?" Kerry asked lazily as she reveled in her new found euphoric feelings.

"I'm not usually a seducer of innocents, but in your case? No Kerry, it would have made no difference. I had to have you, I had to taste you." Braden rolled onto his back and pulled Kerry over with him settling her on top of him and her head on his chest. He stroked her hair with one hand and fondled her breasts with the other. "I'm feeling pretty wonderful right now, Kerry Blaine. I haven't felt this way in more than three years." Braden sighed heavily, "no I have never felt this way."

GENEVA'S HOPE



"You have shown me some pretty wonderful feelings."

"I have? What are you feeling?" Braden breathed hotly as he asked the wonderful body laying upon his.

"A calm wonderful serenity. I feel protected, warm, safe and comfy."

"Mmm, I like that explanation." Braden grinned showing his bright white teeth.

Kerry decided fair was fair and enjoyable was enjoyable so she started using her tongue on Braden's chest. His moan encouraged her to be even more daring and started nibbling on his nipples.

"God woman!" Braden moaned and Kerry found herself underneath him again. He entered her quickly and they soon were sharing again the passionate delights of conjugal joining. It was late into the night and several joinings before Braden finally was sated. Kerry was asleep first in the crook of his arm and he watched her until he fell into a deep and satisfied sleep. His last thought before sleep was that he was definitely going to share her bed as often as possible. Braden determined at that moment Kerry would become his wife. Kerry was his, and his alone, his destiny. Tomorrow he would stop at a jeweler and buy an engagement ring and wedding bands. It didn't matter how he would make it happen, it would just happen.

Braden woke to find his one arm under the pillow and head, the other possessively pulling Kerry into the long hard muscular frame of his body. His one leg was lying casually over her legs. Braden had also found himself fully aroused and it was quite easy to position Kerry underneath him once again for lovemaking.

In her sleep Kerry's body responded to Braden automatically. In her dreams Braden was making love to her and it was very pleasant. Kerry's dream allowed her to feel every nuance of his body in hers and she purred contentedly. Kerry felt her body climax with his and stayed in that wonderfully pleasant dream.

Braden once expelled, kissed the creamy neck and licked the ear lobes of this beautiful and magnificent woman. Last night Braden had determined he would never have enough of this woman. He realized that he had taken no precautions with Kerry to prevent pregnancy, though he knew several including the Dutch rubbers he could have purchased easily. He acknowledged to himself in honesty he didn't want to buy them. Braden wanted to impregnate Kerry. If he would get her with child she couldn't refuse to marry him. It became his plan. Braden knew her father couldn't refuse marriage to his daughter if she was carrying his child. A forced marriage would make it acceptable, however scandalous, to his parents and the nobility of England with his marriage to a Yank. *Yes, I will impregnate her. She can't refuse me if she is carrying my child. Her family could not refuse me if she carried my child. I wonder what he would look like. Bennett looks much like me, I wonder if our son will look like me. If we have a daughter, will she be as beautiful as her mother?* Braden felt smiles cross his lips with his thoughts. He wondered if



Kerry would ever learn he tricked her into accepting the position of Bennett's governess so he would have her nearby and how she would accept that. He told himself that if he were honest, from the moment he saw Bennett playing on top of Kerry it was his plan all along that he could make love to her, and eventually have her accept his proposal of marriage.

If Braden had shared his thoughts and fears with Kerry that she as a beautiful woman would turn his marriage proposal down because he was a widower with a young child, he would have been easily assuaged. Kerry was in love with him the moment he walked into her room to collect Ben that first day. If Braden had a difficult time accepting love at first sight, Kerry did not.

Kerry had her own fears though, she felt Braden was still in love with his deceased wife and would have no room for another love. Pregnancy was something Kerry didn't consider because she really was an innocent in the physical relationships between a man and a woman. Kerry was well educated and well rounded in both school knowledge and common sense, but procreation was one subject that Grady, Morning Song, Auntie Audrey, or Auntie Alyson had not instructed her in. Unfortunately for Kerry, they all still saw her as their little girl and would not see her as the grown woman she had become. The grown woman she had become under the charms and seductive Braden Wessex.

Kerry slowly opened her eyes to find the smiling face of Braden Wessex looking down at her. Braden had not removed himself from her and when she woke and moved under him, he became fully aroused again.

"Good morning Kerry Blaine." Braden said through the smile on his face.

"Good morning Braden Wessex." Kerry responded and feeling the hardness of his manhood in her, remembering her dreams and last night, smiled back at him to ask, "This love making, does it go on forever?"

"With you beneath me, that is a good possibility." Braden replied and his bodily need took over in function once again. With Kerry fully awake and participating, their lovemaking was even better. The two exchanged kisses, fondling and moans of pleasure as they slipped into the passions of their bodies.

Later, Kerry relaxed in Braden's arm enjoying the security she felt when near him.

"Still feeling comfy?" Braden asked as his finger played with her lips.

"Extremely." Kerry confessed.

Silence followed as they both enjoyed the pleasant feelings most recently shared between them.

"Papa?" The little voice questioned.

Braden sat up with a start. "Bennett? Why are you up so early?"

"Papa why are you in bed with Miss Kerry?"

Braden was mortified. He had not anticipated Bennett waking up and walking into the room with them.

Kerry came to the rescue. "Ben, I was having a nightmare, like you had the other night and your Papa came to comfort me."



"Oh. Are you still afraid?" Ben cocked his head and asked with a worried little brow.

"Only just a little." Kerry answered keeping the sheet covering her body. "Now run along to your room and play for a little until I can get up to bathe you and get you dressed."

"Yes, Miss Kerry." Bennett obeyed dutifully but then turned around. "What are we going to do today?"

"I'm not sure yet, especially if Auntie Audrey has made plans that I don't know about like she did yesterday."

"I like Auntie Audrey."

"I am certain you do." Braden remarked grinning in happiness.

Bennett went into his room and took out his toys to play until his bath would be ready. Bennett was not aware he was giving his father and governess time to separate from the embarrassing situation he had found them in.

"Nice Save!" Braden grinned. "You are talented in so many ways."

"You are a wicked man." Kerry teased the handsome man laying in her bed.

"Thank you. I hope to be wicked all the time when I am near you."

Kerry gave him a gentle punch. "We have to get dressed."

"Yes, I suppose we do. I'll order breakfast while you bathe and dress Bennett."

Kerry moved out of the bed, walked to her armoire and retrieved a fresh broderie. She then pulled a lavender striped day dress to slip on temporarily.

"Kerry?"

"Yes?" Kerry turned in question to see the muscular naked body of Braden still laying on the bed. "God Braden, you still haven't gotten up yet?"

"Kerry, did you really have nightmares? I was hoping that I saw pleasant dreams in your face this morning."

"I really had pleasant dreams, Braden Wessex." Kerry answered reassuringly. "The nightmare story seemed the right answer for Ben's question."

"Kerry, why do you insist on calling Bennett, Ben?"

"He looks more like a Ben, than a Bennett."

"What exactly does a Ben look like?"

"Like Ben. Will you stop and get up to dress. Please?"

Braden rose from the bed and walked to Kerry. He encircled her in his arms and whispered. "Do I look like a Braden?" He moved his manhood into her loins reminding her he was quite naked.

Kerry cocked her head and looked at his face quite seriously as her hands brushed his bottom. "No, you look like a Brad!"

"Brat!" Braden teased pulling her tightly to his muscular body. "I think you look like a Ker!"

"I like that name, **Brad!**" Kerry laughed. "Will you please get dressed before Ben asks us why you are standing in Miss Kerry's room naked."

PAYTON LEE



“You could tell him you would be giving me a bath.”

“Go!”

Braden grabbed his robe and silk trousers he had taken off last night and gave Kerry a quick kiss before he left her room.

Kerry sighed and wished she didn't love Braden Wessex as much as she did, she also admitted to herself she really liked his lovemaking and could easily get used to his sharing a bed with her. It was disappointing to remember that loving Braden meant trying to share him with a specter named Laura.

Casting her gaze upon the shared bed, Kerry saw the blood stain. She quickly covered the sheet with the quilt and being an innocent she did not really know what it was about. Kerry quickly removed her broderie and took a cold bath to clean her body and prepare for her menses if that's what it was.



CHAPTER 8

Kerry tended to Bennett during breakfast and the knock at the door was answered by Braden Wessex. Kerry could not hear what was said as the strange man at the door was not brought in and the words exchanged were spoken quietly. Kerry heard the door close and Braden returned to the breakfast faire. Whatever was said Kerry was sure that Braden would not share the exchange. His face was set and looked quite stern. Kerry was beginning to understand Braden's moods by reading his facial expressions. Now that was a frightening thought, feeling his feelings and knowing what they were after just knowing him less than a week.

Braden showed relief after he was informed by the hotel security guard that Mildred Hudson was put on board the ship bound for England. The guard also told Braden he had stayed on the pier until the ship was well out of sight from the docks. Braden would not mention any of this to Kerry or Bennett since he was afraid the mere mention of Mildred Hudson's name would upset them. It was bad enough that it upset him, and when he thought of Mildred possibly hurting his Kerry he became angry again.

Another knock at the door disturbed Braden from his breakfast. Braden was missing his valet and butler, Edward, dearly this morning. A governess would be considered a servant and normally expected to fulfill those mundane duties, but Braden did not see Kerry as a governess. It was true that he would pay her a salary, but that was only temporary in his mind. Braden wanted to see Kerry as the new mistress of the household, Bennett's new mother, and his wife. It would take time, but Kerry would be his wife.

It was Audrey Astor standing at the door. Braden had invited her to share their breakfast as Audrey had already anticipated. "I wanted to breakfast with you so we could plan our day." Audrey related to Braden as he seated her.

"What plans have you already made, Auntie?" Kerry asked suspiciously.

"Well, I thought we would spend today at the beaches, it would be most enjoyable for Bennett, don't you think?" Audrey commented sipping her tea.

"Oh yes, I would love to go to the beach." Bennett squealed and ran over to sit on Auntie Audrey's lap.



"I guess that's settled then." Braden interjected with great amusement showing on his face. "Unfortunately I will be unable to accompany you as I do have some further business to attend to before we leave for Nevada."

"Perhaps you will join us for dinner at Françoise this evening say about sevenish?"

"I would be honored Mrs. Astor." Braden replied gallantly as he dabbed the napkin at his mouth.

"Perhaps I should warn you ahead of time that I hope to take my niece and Bennett to the park tomorrow for the day. The park is sponsoring a traveling minstrel show that I am sure Bennett would enjoy." Audrey announced quite casually.

"I get the distinct impression you have unofficially adopted my son." Braden commented as he tried to understand the growing closeness he felt himself felt for this family.

Audrey Astor cast her sparkling blue eyes on the handsome Braden Wessex and they twinkled with mischief as she replied, "I adore Bennett and I find I am at an age where patience for the inevitable is sadly lacking."

"I am unsure of your meaning, Mrs. Astor," Braden asked as his brows creased together. *Audrey Astor is quite astute in her statement. I think she is aware of my interest and future plans for her niece, yet she says nothing directly.*

Kerry on the other hand took her auntie's meaning to be a need that Kerry keeps Bennett as an adopted grandson nearby for Audrey to spoil. Although Kerry had been intimate and loved Braden, she did not think of marriage. Kerry believed Braden would always be in love with Laura and never offer his love to her. Kerry understood a body's lust because she often overheard her brothers, but love that was something different she had learned from their conversations. Kerry knew what she felt was love, but from her brother's conversations, didn't men just lust?

"As long as that is settled I have one more thing to address." Audrey Astor said in mischief.

"That is?" Braden Wessex questioned warily. He was afraid that Audrey Astor would reveal his plans for her niece to soon and ruin everything. The last thing he wanted was to frighten Kerry off. Braden knew Audrey Astor was perceptively aware of his attraction to her niece.

"My dear niece brought her friend Small Bird with her and since she took this position as your governess she has not had time to spend with her dear companion. I would deeply appreciate your acceptance and approval for Small Bird to accompany my niece once again."

"Small Bird? Isn't that an Indian name?" Braden questioned.

Kerry answered quickly, "Yes, she is Sosoni'."

"A real red Indian?" Bennett asked grasping on to the adult conversation. With Kerry he was allowed to be in the same room and participate with the grown ups. Mildred Hudson had always kept him apart and



in his room away from his father and other adults. The memory of Mildred made him shiver slightly.

"A real Sosoni", Ben. That is her tribe, like your tribe is English and she is my friend." Kerry looked hopefully at Braden Wessex.

Braden wasn't sure what to do. It was his plan to enjoy intimacy with Kerry every night he could, as he had enjoyed her last night and this morning. How could he enjoy this wonderful woman that had filled the emptiness in his heart if another woman would be near her. The answer came immediately, "I would not want to stand in the way of such friendship. I will arrange to rent a room adjacent to ours for Small Bird."

Audrey Astor quirked a smile, she knew that Braden Wessex had plenty of room in his suites for Kerry to share her room and bed with Small Bird. Since Braden Wessex would make such arrangements meant he would prefer private time for Kerry and himself. There was no doubt in her mind that Braden wanted Kerry McGillinen and had taken her already or planned to. The thought did not shock or surprise Audrey Astor, her husband Henry had done no less when he claimed her as his future bride some thirty years ago.

Kerry wanted to kiss Braden Wessex, but would not embarrass him and instead said, "Thank you." Kerry was also pleased that he wanted to keep Small Bird at a discreet distance. That meant he wanted to make love to her again, and Kerry enjoyed their lovemaking. The pleasure of his body was intoxicating and addicting. Kerry even found herself hoping he would love her again tonight. Kerry understood the enjoyment of lusts she had heard her brothers discuss, and wanted to enjoy it again.

Braden looked at Kerry to ascertain if the thank you was the end of the conversation and silence would be an agreement that Small Bird would be housed in another room. Braden found he had been holding his breath hoping Kerry would not insist that Small Bird stay with her in her room.

"I will tell Small Bird the good news and she will be happy to spend time with Kerry again." Audrey Astor said quickly to assuage both Braden and Kerry with their concerned looks betraying themselves to the wise and understanding woman she was. "In the meantime do prepare yourself for the beach m'dear. I will take Bennett with me while we wait for you. I will tell Small Bird that you will be joining us for the beach. She will be happy to hear it."

"I'll hurry." Kerry said to her auntie.

"Come Bennett, come with Auntie Audrey." Audrey again addressed Braden Wessex, "You needn't bother about obtaining a room for Small Bird. I have already obtained one for her near your suites. I merely wanted to make sure you would allow her access to Kerry."

"The more I speak with you, madam, the more suspicious I become to the possibility your are a mind reader and of supernatural talents." Braden could not restrain himself from saying. He rightfully guessed he had an ally in his pursuit of Kerry Blaine in her auntie.



“Not a mind reader or anything related to the supernatural, child. I am a woman of the world with a vast repertoire of personal experiences.” Audrey Astor replied over her shoulder as she walked out of the suites with Bennett in hand.

Bennett skipped happily along with Audrey Astor.

Kerry started to organize the dirtied breakfast dishes for the hotel staff to clear. Kerry was already thinking of the things she needed to collect for their trip to the beach and did not notice Braden until his arms were around her waist and his lips on the nape of her neck.

“I shall miss you today, Miss Blaine.” Braden whispered in her hair as his tongue brushed along her neckline.

Good Lord, this man drives me wild. Kerry thought as shivers of cold ran across her while her body responded in flushes of uncontrollable heat responding to his kisses. “Are you certain you will not be able to join us, Mr. Wessex?”

“Unfortunately I cannot. I must see to the final details of our trip and last minute financial and personal matters to attend.” Braden turned her around to face him. “Since I will be spending today in the heart of New York City, is there anything you would require? I would be more than happy to attain it for you.”

“Thank you, there is nothing I need.” Kerry answered, she repressed an inner want to have him take her again. She fought the wanting of his lips on hers. “I should go and ready our things for the beach.”

Braden was holding back on his own wants. Every time he neared Kerry he was painfully aroused. It seemed there would be no sating his physical need for her. Braden hoped she would not notice the growing bulge in his trousers. “I hope you and Bennett have a good time.” Braden quickly retreated into his room to cool his desires and then he quickly grabbed his hat and coat to leave for his meeting with the London Broker House in New York.

Kerry embraced Small Bird in Auntie Audrey’s suites. “I have missed and needed you so much, Small Bird.”

“Difficult to dress yourself with these impossibly confining white man clothes?” Small Bird chortled.

“Your words are the truth, Small Bird.” Kerry agreed laughing.

“I shall be here to help you from now on. We must thank your auntie for this happening.”

“I am so grateful for auntie’s interfering. Her interfering has always been of the most helpful kind.”

“It is good she does not interfere with the joining you do with this Wessex.”

“What?” Kerry gasped in shock.

“His man smell is powerful on you. Do you deny he has placed his man shaft in you?”

GENEVA'S HOPE



"Small Bird, you must not speak of such things." Kerry was completely red faced in embarrassment.

"Do you blush because it is truth, or do you blush because I speak of it?"

"Both! Please do not speak of it again." Kerry pleaded.

"The last I shall speak of it is, was it good, did you enjoy or does he take what you do not wish to share?"

"It is good and wonderful." Kerry whispered hoping no one could hear this conversation.

"For that I am happy for you, my dear friend." Small Bird stated and said no more.

Bennett dressed in his swimming attire was leaving Audrey's side and running in the sand to Kerry and Small Bird. "Can we walk in the water, Miss Kerry? Would you take me Miss Small Bird?"

"Come little one. I will take you into the salted water." Small Bird and Kerry had used a rented cabana to change into the swimming attire befitting a woman of standards.

"We will both take you into the water." Kerry announced as they took Bennett's hand and played with the ocean waves as they lapped at the shores.

Later Small Bird, Kerry, and Audrey sat on the beach and built a sand castle with little Bennett who gleefully brought buckets of water to moisten the sand for packing. They talked of the princes, princesses, kings, queens and knights of the grand castle they built.

Kerry and Small Bird made sure that Bennett did not expose himself too long in the sun as they went quite often to the shaded umbrellas that Audrey had rented. Audrey bought lemon ices and lunches for the day at the beach. Kerry was beginning to feel more and more like Bennett's mother, not his governess. It would be difficult to part with him when they would return to England. Those mother instincts Auntie Audrey had referred too were starting to haunt Kerry.

After returning to the hotel from the beach a quick bath was given to Bennett to remove the sands of the beach and relaxation enough for Bennett to take a quick nap. While Bennett napped Small Bird and Kerry bathed and dressed for dinner. Kerry was grateful to have Small Bird help dress her properly for the evening meal at Françoise's and assist in arranging her hair.

They had just finished the final touches of dressing when they turned to the door closing in the suites and Braden calling for his son.

Kerry rushed out placing a finger over her mouth indicating quiet, to inform Braden, "Ben is taking a nap. He was tired out by the day at the beach."

"I see." Braden responded and having been aroused immediately upon the exquisite sight of Kerry, walked toward her with passion burning in his eyes. He stopped suddenly when he spotted Small Bird entering the parlor. "I



should dress and prepare for dinner. We should leave for Françoise's within the hour." Braden turned and entered his room.

Small Bird giggled and Kerry turned to her. "What are you giggling about?"

"The passion was strong in his eyes and you would have been quite messed if he hadn't spotted me."

"You don't know what you are talking about."

"Don't I? Have I not seen the passion in Running Water's eyes? Have I not tasted and enjoyed Running Water's man shaft during the summer dance three seasons past? Have I not born my daughter from the seed of such joining?" Small Bird asked in directness. "The pleasures enjoyed by a man and woman are blessed by the Great Spirit for is it not His design in the differences of both to enjoy?"

"Your wisdom is true Small Bird. Your daughter is your great joy from this joining. I wept with you as Running Water left to walk with the Great Spirit."

"The time I spent with Running Water when he chose me in my maiden time is treasured in my heart. I close my eyes and remember the warmth and tenderness of his body." Small Bird smiled. "Do you not feel this in the arms of this Wessex?"

Kerry felt her cheeks warming again. "The pleasure is enjoyable. I also remember that even with the Sosoni' those pleasures are sought in privacy."

"You speak true, for such pleasures are private, the sharing is private, but the passion in the eyes scream loudly to all." Small Bird spoke quietly to her friend. "I am happy for you, Shining Star."

"It has been a long time since you have addressed me with my Sosoni' name, Small Bird."

"It is not good medicine to speak your name in the presence of many yellow eyes, but on special occasions such as this happiness and in privacy I can do so."

"You are a true friend." Kerry said and hugged Small Bird.

The evening meal was pleasurable as always with Audrey Astor as hostess and again lasted well into the night. Bennett's night bath was skipped as he had one after their return from the beach. Even with his nap earlier in the afternoon, little Bennett fell asleep in Kerry's arms on the carriage ride back to the hotel. When the carriage stopped in front of their hotel Braden took his son from Kerry's arms and carried him into their suites and his room.

Small Bird returned with Audrey Astor in her carriage and went immediately to her newly acquired room.

Kerry assisted Braden in removing Bennett's eveningwear and dressing him in his nightshirt. Gently Kerry tucked the sleeping boy in his bed and kissed his forehead.



Braden kissed his son's cheek and took Kerry's hand. He led her into the parlor and asked, "Do you care for a nightcap?"

"No thank you, Mr. Wessex. I find I am also tired from the beach. It has been a long and tiring day."

"Then we should retire to bed."

"Yes." Kerry answered unable to hide her own weariness. She started to her room only to be pulled back by a strong hand on her shoulder.

"We should retire to my bed, Miss Blaine." Braden led her to his room and began to skillfully disrobe *his* lovely Kerry.

Skillful was a mild word to describe the powerful sensations Braden provoked with every article of her clothing he removed. Every move of his was sensual. When Braden was amorous, he seduced with every muscle and every movement. Kerry was liquid in his artful seduction and in his strong arms. When she was completely disrobed Braden pulled back the coverlet on his bed and gently laid Kerry in it. He tenderly covered her and undressed himself rapidly. In a flash he was lying next to Kerry and rousing the passions in her. It took only moments of seduction before she was fully ready for him and he entered her swiftly unable to hold back his need for her any longer.

Braden could not deny to himself that Kerry Blaine was becoming an addictive habit and he needed to make Kerry his permanently. His heart sank when he thought about Kerry. Although she had responded to his love physically, he wanted her to love him. He longed to hear before, during, or after their lovemaking those words from her lips, "I love you." Braden watched her as she slept peacefully. He thought of all the other women these past three years that tried to snare him and how they said those words to him constantly even though he did not or would not touch them. Now, in his arms he cradled the woman he did want and she did not say those words. Kerry and he were compatible in bed, he had no doubts for that, not as responsive to him as she was. Would he tell her how much he loved her? Braden was afraid of her scorn, after all, how could a beautiful and wonderful woman like Kerry Blaine want a widower with a child? What would the beautiful Kerry want with an English Lord, a Viscount? Kerry was American and he had not met her family, would she want to leave them? Live with him in England? There were too many doubts in Braden's heart and he chided himself for being such a coward. Braden wanted to enjoy every moment of Kerry Blaine before she would reject him. There is no other choice, Braden thought. *I must get her with child. She would not refuse me then. She could not refuse me then. Who am I kidding? I want her to be the mother of my children, a mother to Bennett.*

Kerry moved in her sleep interrupting Braden's thoughts. She looked so lovely in his arms. Braden knew she belonged with him and must stay with him, one way or another. The trip to Nevada would begin in two days. He would have her until he met her family, then it would be final. Kerry Blaine would break his heart or become his wife. Braden sighed, closed his eyes and finally fell asleep snuggling next to his true love he pulled her body into the hollow of his frame and put his arm protectively over her.

PAYTON LEE





CHAPTER 9

Kerry woke up cradled in Braden's arms. The warmth of his body and the slow steady breathing while he slept made Kerry feel secure. *I love this man; I wish he could be mine forever.* Kerry sighed, she couldn't see that happening but she was going to enjoy this and all the other wonderful feelings for as long as she could. Kerry's doubts about Braden's first wife and her own doubts of herself prevented her from telling Braden how much she had come to love him, his arms, and his ardor.

Braden opened his eyes as Kerry tried to leave his bed before he or Bennett woke. "Don't leave me yet." Braden whispered to her as he pulled her back to him.

"I didn't mean to wake you."

"Come here, and kiss me." Braden ordered huskily when he pulled her down and as his mouth covered hers. Kerry did not leave the bed until she and Braden had consummated their love once more. Kerry and Braden both finding they needed each other more and more. They both admitted to themselves how addicted to each other they had become, but they never said aloud to each other what they felt for each other.

Braden again disappeared in New York for the day, while Kerry, Small Bird, Bennett and Auntie Audrey spent the day in the park. A quiet dinner followed without Braden, and Bennett was put to bed without his father hearing his prayers. Small Bird helped Kerry ready for bed and then left for her room.

Kerry had no idea when Braden would return so she went to bed a little disheartened that Braden was not there.

Kerry had not been asleep very long when she felt Braden in bed with her removing her nightgown. Lazily she allowed Braden to do so and purred as he carefully aroused her at the same time.

Braden, after experiencing the enjoyment of his Kerry several times now, knew Kerry was ready for him and cast his magical spell upon her.

It seemed impossible to both of them, but each time became better than the last. In the morning Kerry and Braden enjoyed a repeat of the night.

Today was the day they would begin their train ride to Nevada. Small Bird arrived at their rooms early to assist in packing and organizing the move to the rail cars. Small Bird also dressed Kerry and helped bathe and dress Bennett.



Braden was in and out of the suites coordinating the transferring. Edward, his valet and butler was in attendance early in the morning after leaving the rail cars to come to the hotel to pack for Braden.

Edward had been told of Kerry and her companion Small Bird yesterday. Braden had spent all of yesterday preparing the railcars with Edward. Braden also shared his deep feelings and hopes for the beautiful Kerry Blaine with Edward. Braden shared that he had fallen in love with Kerry; he hoped to marry her, and even his tricking her into being Bennett's governess to keep her nearby.

Edward hadn't even raised a brow when Braden told him that he would find Kerry in his bed for as long as he could keep her there. Edward was happy for his employer that he again found the happiness he lost when Laura had died.

When Small Bird entered the room holding Bennett's hand she looked directly at the manservant. Edward was the same age as Braden Wessex and just as handsome. Braden was tall, dark, and handsome with deep blue eyes. Edward was tall, blonde, fair skinned, and handsome with light hazel eyes. Small Bird felt the Great Spirit move her and accepted her fate immediately and without the doubt that always seemed to plague the yellow eyes.

Edward was not prepared for his reaction to Small Bird. Edward's eyes locked with Small Bird when she looked at him. He found himself feeling like he was falling into the deep brown eyes staring at him. Edward stared at the perfectly formed figure of Small Bird. She was about five foot, shiny long dark ebony hair, a body that was perfectly proportioned and perky breasts that enticed as they were revealed in the pretty saffron colored frock dress she was wearing. Suddenly, Edward needed and felt the same things his employer was defining yesterday.

Small Bird knew what Edward was thinking; she read it in his eyes and smiled.

Soon they were settled in the two private railcars Braden had purchased for the journey. Braden's horse Socks, had been secured along with the horses and carriage he had purchased for the ride from the rail stop to Geneva Ranch. The third car was directly behind the private rail cars and they were near the end of the train.

A bed had been previously placed for the governess in Bennett's compartment and left there. A larger double bed replaced the original one in his compartment that Braden had first bought for the trip. Braden found himself smiling in his compartment when the bed had replaced the other. His Kerry needed to be comfortable when she slept in his arms.

The compartments in the second railcar contained double beds in each. At the time, neither Edward nor Braden realized what the sleeping arrangements would work out to be. Braden's car contained a comfortable parlor and privy. The second car contained a privy and kitchen.

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The first night of the trip Bennett had been tucked in his bed and was sleeping. Braden and Kerry were already in each other's arms. Edward went to his compartment to find Small Bird on his bed waiting for him. Small Bird was wearing nothing other than her alluring smile.

"Madam, this is unorthodox." Edward exclaimed after he regained his breath.

"I do not understand this or..tho..docks.. you speak of."

"It is improper for you to be here, like.. like.. this!"

"Did I not read in your eyes this morning and all of today a hunger for me?"

"Read my eyes?"

"You spoke loudly that you wanted me, and I want you. Can you not see in my eyes?"

Edward could not respond. Small Bird was speaking the truth he did want her.

"It is a problem you yellow eyes suffer from. You deny what you feel and will not speak your heart." As Small Bird was speaking to Edward she walked to him and boldly placed her hands on the hard bulge protruding from his trousers. Small Bird unbuttoned the trousers and tenderly massaged his arousal. "You see, you desire me right now. It is wrong not obtain what you desire and that which can bring pleasure."

"Oh my God!" Edward groaned not even attempting to stop Small Bird.

Small Bird tugged on Edward's trousers until the hardened arousal was free and placed her mouth over it. Gently Small Bird suckled it and teased the growing crown with her tongue. "Do you deny you wish to place your man shaft in my womanhood?"

"No." Edward moaned losing every bit of his solid British reserve and control.

"That is good." Small Bird declared and started undressing Edward.

Edward assisted and soon was lying on top of Small Bird in his bed. Ravenously kissing her and all of her body, exploring all of it while her hands worked magic of their own. After holding his desire in check for as long as he could, Edward's man shaft entered the seductive and desirable Small Bird. Together they climbed the great mountain and soared into the skies of the Great Spirit. Edward would not deny this truth to himself. Small Bird had been right. *No wonder these red Indians are called savages. They can take a man and turn him into a savage lustful barbarian with a look. Ahh, but what a life that is!* Edward grinned.

The ten-day train ride was spent with Braden and Kerry spending their days with Bennett and their nights together. Small Bird and Edward attended to the needs of Edward's employer during the day and spent nights together. Kerry and Braden were so involved with themselves and their passions at night, they took no notice of Edward and Small Bird. Bennett enjoyed the attention of Kerry and his father during the day. Little Bennett had never seen and enjoyed



his father for such a great length of time and relished it as a small young boy would. Bennett also enjoyed the company of Kerry and learned all he could eagerly as she told him of Nevada.

All of the travelers wished the train ride would continue and not end. At the end of the train ride they were all aware that changes would take place and none were really sure what those changes would be.

It was early afternoon when the train pulled into the whistle stop. The train's crew were detached the three private cars and moved them onto the spur. While they were waiting Bennett was looking out the train windows in the parlor and turned to his father in excitement, "Papa, look there are three cowboys and two Indians with a little girl Indian."

Everyone went to the window and looked. Small Bird hugged Edward to the surprise of Braden and Kerry. They were still unaware of what had happened between those two since they were so involved with themselves.

"Edward, it is my daughter, Branch that Bends." Small Bird exclaimed. "She is brought by my brothers, Eye of Hawk and Little Bear."

Edward looked fondly at Small Bird, "Your daughter is as lovely as you are." Edward then hugged Small Bird. "We shall greet them soon."

"Edward?" Kerry looked at him and then looked at Small Bird. "Small Bird?"

"Shining Star, your vision has been dimmed by the glare of your own heat. It is the matter that Edward and I have chosen each other."

"Shining Star?" Braden asked quizzically as he looked at Kerry.

"Shining Star is my Sosoni' name, Braden." Kerry answered.

"You live with these people?"

"I live with my family and certain Sosoni are part of my family. I grew up with this family in particular. Their mother, Morning Song was my wet nurse and nanny." Kerry looked seriously at Braden and added, "Morning Song married my Pa and now she is my step mother, so you see Small Bird, her daughter and brothers are part of my family as well."

"Are those cowboy men out there your family or your suitors?" Braden queried with a tinge of hostility. The new knowledge of Kerry being partially related to red Indians didn't bother him; it was those handsome cowboys he had concern for.

Kerry tossed her head and laughed, "Can I hope that is a little jealousy?"

"I am not jealous, only interested." Braden denied with a great deal of emphasis. He was unwilling to reveal his feelings toward Kerry lest he suffer the heartbreak of her rejection or scorn.

"You see my Edward, how the yellow eyes will not accept what they feel?" Small Bird said with smugness.

Braden ignored Small Bird and looked at Kerry. "Are they or aren't they your suitors?"



"They are my three brothers for your information! Ayden, Ryan, and Dwayne." Kerry said testily and with her own emphasis on each name. She was a bit put out at Braden's tone. He denied he was jealous, and in her mind that meant he didn't care for her as much as she cared for him. Kerry was also becoming saddened realizing Braden would no longer desire her when her true identity was revealed. Kerry drew a sharp breath when she saw her father Grady ride up to her brothers. *My ruse will be completely revealed.* A tear welled in her eye and ran down her cheek. Braden will no longer be interested in Kerry McGillinen, daughter of a rancher. Braden was only interested in the accessible governess, Kerry Blaine. Kerry was convinced the interest Braden showed was lust only, and that she enjoyed more than she should have.

"What is it?" Braden asked Kerry in concern when he wiped the tear away. Braden felt a great relief when he learned the cowboys were his Kerry's brothers and his tone was again soft.

"Dust." Kerry lied.

When the railcars were secured Small Bird ran to her family. Eye of Hawk had been holding Branch that Bends and slid from his horse putting the little two year old girl on the ground so she could run to her mother. Small Bird scooped up her daughter and covered her with hugs and kisses. Edward came up behind her and Small Bird told her brothers in Sосoni' that this man Edward would claim her as his mate.

Eye of Hawk as the oldest brother asked if Edward had already joined with her. Small Bird smiled and answered with a happy yes. Small Bird then told her brothers they must wait to welcome him as the yellow eyes had strange ways and her mate must discuss their mating first with the man he called 'employer'.

Eye of Hawk acknowledged his sister's request with a nod and asked in Sосoni' why she chose a yellow eye when three warriors of his tribe had requested her and she had turned them down after the mourning period of her first mated, Running Water.

"This yellow eyes named Edward makes my heart sing and my body tremble." Small Bird answered in Sосoni'. "Our warriors never gave me the same feeling I had with Running Water. My Edward does."

Edward came up behind Small Bird and placed a protective arm around Small Bird's shoulder. Branch that Bends reached over to the strange looking man and touched his face in curiosity.

"Branch that Bends is curious of you." Eye of Hawk laughed and extended his hand in the yellow eyes fashion of greeting. "I am Small Bird's older brother, Eye of Hawk."

Little Bear slid from his pony approached and offered his hand in the same fashion. "I am Little Bear, Small Bird's younger brother."

"I am Edward Laurel."

"Welcome and happiness, Laurel."



Kerry and Braden did not notice the occurrences with Edward and Small Bird. No sooner had Braden lifted Bennett and then Kerry off the train, her brothers ran to her picking her up and twirling her about tossing her like a toy between them. Braden although knowing those were Kerry's brothers, still did not like her attention be drawn away from him. He feared this was the beginning of the end of his relationship with Kerry. Braden scowled as he watched Kerry bounced around in joy with her brothers.

"I sure missed you sis." Dwayne said as he gave her a big bear hug that left her breathless.

"Give me back my baby sister," Ayden blustered possessively and grabbed her from Dwayne.

"What did you do with your real clothes?" Ryan bellowed. "Them city sissified clothes aren't much good out here."

"We brought your colt!" Dwayne informed and walked to his saddlebag to pull out her gun belt.

"Give your sister some breathing space, boys!" Grady ordered and dismounted. "Come here baby!"

Kerry was put down and ran to her father, "Pa!"

Grady's large arms enfolded her with love and held on tightly as he watched Braden Wessex approach.

Braden offered his hand, "It is a pleasure to meet you Mr. Blaine."

Grady released one arm around Kerry keeping her securely tucked in the other as he looked quizzically at the man and asked, "Who the blazes is Mr. Blaine?"

"Aren't you Kerry's father?"

"Course I am."

"Then you are Mr. Blaine, or what do I call you?"

"Grady, Grady McGillinen."

Kerry's face went white. She had planned on telling Braden the truth before they arrived at Geneva; she had not anticipated her family meeting her at the whistle stop.

Braden glared at Kerry. "Miss Blaine, care to explain?"

"Explain what, Kerry?" Grady asked his daughter.

"I don't care to explain." Kerry blustered her temper rising and her stubbornness rising.

Braden kept controlled and introduced himself. "Mr. McGillinen, I am Grant Wessex's son, Braden Wessex and my son Bennett. My father wrote to you of our visit."

"Yes, we were wired that it was you accompanying my daughter."

"You were wired?"

"My sister in law, Audrey Astor wired of your departure from New York and your expected arrival date." Grady smiled down at his daughter cradled in his arm, "we camped here last night waiting for the train to arrive. We missed you so much, Kerry baby, we couldn't wait another minute to see you."



"I see." Braden replied and tossed another angry look at Kerry. "It seems I have been purposely misled or the brunt of some family practical joke."

"What are you talking about, Braden?" Grady demanded not liking the tone he used with his baby daughter.

"Your daughter accepted my employ as Bennett's governess in New York and she told me her name was Kerry Blaine. She also told me she lived in Nevada and was returning home the same time we were leaving."

"Back up, son!" Grady turned to Kerry, "what is this about hiring on as Bennett's governess? Kerry Blaine? What the devil?"

Both men were staring at her. "It isn't a joke, Braden Wessex!" Kerry roared angrily. "I just happen to love Ben and I had every intention of telling you the entire story before we arrived in Geneva. I also planned on helping you hire a real governess for Ben. A governess capable of taking proper care of Ben!"

"You pulled your Auntie Audrey into this ruse!" Braden accused hotly.

"Yes I did. I thought you might be upset to know that you offered the position of governess to the daughter of the man you were going to visit. You were already upset with what happened with Mildred Hudson, I was trying to be helpful and I wanted to take care of Ben. I truly did. Auntie Audrey knew that."

Kerry and Braden were involved with their personal turmoil and did not realize their brothers and father were listening intently to the heated conversation they were having.

"Who is Mildred Hudson?" Four voices asked in unison.

"No one!" Kerry and Braden both shouted together as they stared at each other nose to nose. Neither one relenting to the other hot and angry stare.

"Enough of this," Grady roared in intercession. "I don't want my baby upset on her homecoming. We'll sort this out in Geneva. Boys, help Braden with his luggage." Grady took his daughter's arm and led her away from the hostile glare of Braden Wessex. Grady had at first welcomed the visit of his close friend's son visiting the ranch, but now he was not so sure this was a good idea and he wondered if he could indeed be a good host to Braden and Bennett Wessex. Grady McGillinen did not take kindly to anyone that would upset his baby girl.

Ayden, Ryan and Dwayne assisted Braden in setting up the carriage and placing the luggage on the carriage. The brothers were civil to the stranger and guest of Geneva, but were none too happy at the confrontation he had with their baby sister. The brothers were always protective of Kerry and they would soon let this upstart Brit know that he dare not mess with their baby sister.

Braden saddled Socks and tended to the comfort of Bennett after he put his son in the carriage with Small Bird, Branch that Bends and Edward. Braden was aware of the subdued hostility of the McGillinen brothers. He wouldn't blame them, he was furious with himself for speaking to Kerry the



way he did. Truth be known, Braden was really upset about losing Kerry forever.

Kerry had returned to the railcar carrying her saddlebag. She was still angry at the way Braden confronted her and spoke to her in front of her family. After all, she couldn't understand why a last name would be such a big deal. Kerry was near crying that she had lost Braden and his love, she ran to the railcar to change and gain control of her emotions.

All eyes turned to Kerry when she appeared from the railcar a brief twenty minutes later.

"That's my little sis." Dwayne boasted.

Braden cocked a brow. Kerry's hair was flowing down her back tied with a bright blue ribbon. She was wearing a white cotton shirt, tight black western jeans, black cowboy boots and a gun belt on her hips. That outfit made him lose control and her visage produced an uncomfortable expansion in his loins. He mounted Socks quickly so hopefully no one would notice his manhood swell in lust to the comely daughter and sister of the McGillinen's. *God, this trip to the ranch is going to be Hell!*

Kerry mounted her horse, Maiden. Kerry did not say a word to anyone as she reined her horse in to ride with her Pa and brothers. To Kerry's surprise, Grady McGillinen reined Runner back and went to match the slow canter of Socks.

Grady rode with Braden to talk of Grant Wessex. It had been almost ten years since he had last visited Grant. Grady was hoping to get to know Braden better and try to understand the confrontation between the man and his daughter. Grady was going to make every effort to like the son of Grant Wessex and his new houseguest.

Braden found it difficult to maintain his conversation with Grady. Braden could not keep his eyes from wandering to his Kerry riding ahead with her brothers. Those clothes she was now wearing made him lust more for her than even the doeskins had. Her form was so perfectly revealed in her western clothes. Many times Braden shifted uncomfortably in the saddle to ease the pain of his swelling manhood. Socks felt the shifting of his master and snorted in reprimand.

Tat dusk the traveling group stopped at a Sosoni' camp that Eye of Hawk and Little Bear found as they scouted ahead.

Kerry disappeared into one of the tepees for the night with Small Bird, Branch that Bends and Bennett. They did not reappear until they began the journey to Geneva again.

Grady disappeared in the tepee of the chief of the tribe. It was apparent upon their entry into the camp that Grady and Chief Dark Stone were of long acquaintance.

Braden and Edward found themselves with Eye of Hawk and Little Bear in another tepee. Both men were holding back irritation. It was the first night they did not have the women they loved sharing their bed since the train

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trip to Nevada began. Eye of Hawk, aware of their plight, chuckled to himself as he covered himself with the buffalo hide.

In the morning after a filling breakfast, Eye of Hawk and Little Bear left the troupe and returned to their Sosoni' camp. The McGillinen and Wessex family continued on the ranch.

In the evening they arrived at Geneva, and Braden had his first glimpse of Geneva Ranch. The spread was huge, not at all like the image of a small and dirt floored cabin he had envisioned. The main house spread out like a giant castle with three floors and two wings.

CHAPTER 10

Braden continued to be surprised at expanse and extent of the ranch. Grady explained what each building was as they passed riding toward the main ranch house. It was not at all what he had been expecting. The ranch had three large barns, a large house for the hands, a huge stable and fenced exercising grounds. The ranch house itself was immense. It was as large or larger than his manor house in England. As the entourage approached the ranch house, Braden noted it was approximately three stories high and made of pine logs. Geneva Ranch house extended with two wings beyond the main house although massive pine trees hid the wings of the house. The windows appeared to be covered with curtains.

A woman appeared on the porch. She looked to be a little younger than Audrey Astor and had a strong resemblance to Audrey with the exception her hair was not dark brown but a lighter sandy brown.

The woman walked down the steps of the porch and greeted Braden. "You must be Braden Wessex. I am Alyson Jameson, Kerry's Auntie. Welcome to Geneva."

"Thank you." Braden answered and bowed politely as he took her hand for a gentleman's kiss. "It is an honor to meet you Mrs. Jameson."

"Surprised that my name isn't Blaine?" Alyson blurted out with a wicked smile crossing her lips and held back her chuckles.

Audrey Astor had sent a long letter to her sister telling the tale of Braden Wessex and their niece Kerry. Most of the letter had contained information on the little white lie Kerry had told Braden about her name. Audrey told Alyson about Bennett and that she did indeed believe that Kerry and Braden eventually would recognize their true feelings for each other and make the relationship permanent.

"You were a part of this charade?" Braden choked in shock.

"No I was not. Audrey informed me of it in a letter. I first received the letter yesterday." Alyson told Braden. "Now just where are you hiding that wonderful little Bennett of yours?"

Braden's brow furrowed in bemusement as he wondered just what Audrey Astor had written to Alyson Jameson.

Small Bird, Branch that Bends, and Bennett were just taken out of the carriage then. "There he is!" Alyson pointed. "Go fetch him Mr. Wessex and



introduce us. I was told what a precious child he is and I can't wait to spoil him as my sister did."

Kerry had dismounted and Charlie one of the hands had taken Maiden for her. Braden watched as Kerry spoke to the hand and saw he took both Socks and Maiden to the barn. Kerry then walked to Bennett and took his hand walking him towards her Auntie Alyson.

"Auntie Alyson, this is Ben Wessex." Kerry introduced completely ignoring Braden. Kerry was still angry and upset with Braden's reaction to finding out she was Kerry McGillinen and her little deception as his hired governess. Kerry was most upset that Braden was angry about it. In Kerry's mind if he really cared about her, it shouldn't matter who she was. The words still rang in her ears and plagued her mind he had spoken angrily at the whistle stop. Kerry wanted desperately to set things right and be folded in Braden's loving arms once more.

Alyson reached for Bennett's hand, "Come along Bennett, you must be starved. Dinner is waiting for us." They started walking towards the house when Alyson turned to tell Kerry. "The two of you talk this out and then come into dinner peaceably."

"She is as perceptive as Auntie Audrey." Braden said to Kerry.

"No, she's more perceptive. It runs in their blood." Kerry quirked a little smile. "Are you terribly angry with me?" Kerry asked Braden tentatively.

"I'm not sure angry is the word, although I was at first, but I find it is more concern as to why you felt you had to lie to me." Braden told her softly just above a hush of a wafting breeze. Braden wanted to embrace her in his arms and ravish her with his kisses but he himself was very unsure as to Kerry's emotions.

"I felt responsible for leaving you without a governess, and I really love Ben. I wanted to take care of him. We were headed for the same place. I just didn't know how you would feel if you found out I was daughter of Grady McGillinen." Kerry looked up at him. "How do you feel?"

"I'm not sure. I don't much understand this at all. My emotions are all mixed up." Braden confessed looking at his son skip along into the house with Alyson Jameson. "It is obvious my Bennett will not lack for care while we are here." Braden was feeling wounded that Kerry admitted she loved Bennett but did not include him in that admitted love.

Kerry was hurting because Braden didn't say to her that it didn't matter who she was, he still wanted her. Kerry was relieved that Braden could still talk to her. "Maybe we should go in to dinner. You must be hungry."

Braden grabbed her arms and made the mistake of silence. He was going to tell her he was still hungry for her. He waited too long to say it. Kerry's brothers saw him grab Kerry's arms and were between them in a flash.

"I wouldn't be putting my hands on sis like that Mr. Wessex." Ryan growled after he placed himself between Braden and Kerry.

Ayden had put his arm around Kerry and said quietly. "Let's go eat, sis." Ayden led Kerry towards the house.



Dwayne had stationed himself behind Braden, “Ryan’s right, you’d better listen or those hands of yours will be set in plaster for several months by a doc.”

“I wouldn’t hurt your sister.” Braden defended.

“That grabbing of yours was none to honorable.” Ryan warned. “We won’t let anyone near her that has less than honorable intentions. You see that you don’t get to close to our baby sister, cuz if she gets hurt... Well you’re gonna hurt real bad.”

Braden answered calmly, “I have no intention of hurting your sister, she means too much to my son.” Braden wasn’t entirely truthful, Kerry meant a lot to him and now he was even more uncertain he would be able to make Kerry his wife. *A country girl might leave her family for me. Why would Kerry want to leave this? This ranch is larger than all my family’s estates in England. Her house is twice the size of my estate. I can only hope she’s pregnant. I doubt if I’ll be able to get near her now. God, please let her be pregnant.*

Ryan was placated with Braden’s answer and asked, “Are you hungry? Would you like to come in for dinner?”

Braden nodded his head and they walked into the house. Braden was once more left breathless when he entered the main house. He looked at the entrance. It was inlaid with polished marble that reflected sparkles from the kerosene candelabras. On the painted blue walls in the hall were gilded mirrors of the finest quality. Even his estates could not boast of such mirrors or tapestries. The carpet was the finest of Turkish rugs. In the main hall a large parlor was off to the left and a hallway that he would learn led to studies and libraries. On the right of the hall was the formal dining room. Braden saw two separate staircases that were carved polished cherry wood. Each staircase led to a wing in the house. In the center of the semi circular stairs was the largest green plants he had ever seen. A polished marble statue stood in the center of the plants. The main hall boasted oil masterpieces he had recognized in art sales in England and France from masters. *What did Kerry say; the West really wasn’t a wilderness?* Braden was overwhelmed, if he did not know he was in Nevada and walked in a log home he would have sworn he was in a European Castle.

Braden was led to the dining room. The double doors were opened revealing the large formal dining room seating fourteen. Exquisitely decorated in natural polished woods and white flowered patterned cloth on the formal chairs and window draperies. Braden again noticed the oil and watercolor framed masterpieces adorning the walls. A large fireplace in the corner licked golden and red flames sending an inviting warmth to the room.

Grady rose from his seat at the head of the table to greet Braden. “You must forgive our manners. We do usually dress for dinner but we arrived here late and Alyson had the chef prepare the meal for our expected arrival.”

Braden was shown a chair next to Grady’s left. Kerry was seated to the right of her father. Alyson Jameson was seated at the opposite end of the table



facing Grady at the head of it. Bennett sat next to Kerry and then her brothers Ryan and Dwayne. Ayden sat to the right of Alyson and next to Braden were Small Bird and his valet Edward. Braden noted Edward was feeling uncomfortable with the situation. It was rare that servants ate at the main table. Braden whispered behind Small Bird to Edward. "It's alright old boy. We are allowed such convenience on occasion."

Edward relaxed notably after that and squeezed Small Bird's hand between courses.

Bennett was a chatterbox that all focused their attention. Bennett talked about the Red Indian village they stayed at, the train ride, the buffalo he saw and bows and arrows Eye of Hawk promised to show him how to use.

Grady enjoyed the little boy's babbling so much he encouraged it to the point he promised he would take Bennett and Braden to the Sosoni' lodges built on the Geneva spread.

Kerry had to remind Bennett to eat.

Braden was amazed at the dinner, the first course was an appetizer of escargot, the second course a fresh salad, the third course was a creamed soup, and the main course was lamb and the desert a flambé. "Who is your chef?" Braden asked Grady.

"Marseille Aumond. I obtained him in New Orleans. He was one of the finest chefs in Louisiana. I was fortunate he wanted to leave the city and live in the country. The restaurant business no longer enthralled him."

"Do you find our wilderness cooking to your liking?" Kerry asked sarcastically. "Did you think you'd have to eat rattlesnake, buffalo or bear?" Kerry could not refrain from the jibe. She was still upset from Braden's angry words at the whistle stop. Kerry wanted Braden to care for her, and hopefully apologize. That was if she could hope.

Braden feigned hurt, "Ouch, that hurt. An unfair wound, madam." Braden offered a wide grin. He was happy Kerry still spoke to him even if it was just a jibe.

"Young lady, where are your manners?" Alyson scolded.

Kerry's brothers just laughed and Ayden said, "You should try bear meat, it's tasty."

Dwayne offered the same ribbing, "Rattlesnake roasted is a feast as well."

"Buffalo steak melts in your mouth, but I prefer squirrel and rabbit. You forgot to mention those, little sister." Ryan snorted.

"Boys, if you don't behave yourself..." Alyson reprimanded. "Remember you aren't too old to be punished."

"Yes Auntie Alyson." The three boys answered in unison, but none of them were truly penitent.

Kerry rolled her eyes at her brothers barbs aimed for Braden, and was grateful Braden took it all in good jest, even her little barb.



After the meal Grady took Braden into his study and offered a fine French Brandy to him. "Now young man, tell be about Kerry Blaine."

Braden took a moment before answering as he scanned the fine brown leather stuffed chairs and the impressive striped blue wallpaper of Grady's study. Braden noted the bookshelves filled books standing against the walls. Grady's desk he observed was massive of the finest polished wood he had ever seen. A large globe of the world stood in an ornate stand near the heavy blue draperies of the window. Inwardly Braden groaned. *How could Kerry want me and leave all this?*

Braden attempted to explain his story, his meeting Kerry, Bennett and Mildred Hudson's parting the tale, leaving out the pistol aimed at his daughter Kerry. He told Grady about hiring Kerry as governess and why. Of course Braden left out his personal motives and the intimacy they had shared.

"Braden, I noticed you couldn't take your eyes off my daughter." Grady observed and stated quite bluntly after Braden had finished his story.

"If I have offended, I apologize." Braden said penitently.

"Offended? No boy. I am curious as to your feelings towards my daughter."

"I am captivated with her." Braden answered solemnly. "In confidence sir, I cannot keep my mind off her. Kerry is not only the most beautiful woman in your country, she is the kindest, intelligent, educated and talented woman I have ever had the honor to know."

"Do you love her?" Grady asked pointedly.

Taken aback by Grady's directness, Braden answered without hesitation. "I am madly in love with her."

"So, do you want my permission to court her?"

"Yes!"

"You have my permission." Grady launched the biggest smile Braden had ever witnessed. "Maybe now you can relax a little and enjoy your holiday. I promised Grant I would show you a good time. Alyson has already informed me she intends to spoil your son, Bennett."

Grady lit a cigar and offered one to Braden. Ayden, Ryan and Dwayne entered the study after they knocked and Grady told them to enter.

Grady's sons poured themselves brandies and lounged on the expensive stuffed leather chairs in the study. They talked late into the evening about Geneva, its finances, mines, cattle, horses and lands. Braden soon understood the great wealth of the McGillinen family, more wealth than his noble family in England. He learned how his father, Grant and Grady became friends and how they visited each other in the past.

Braden's father never told him that both Grant Wessex and Grady McGillinen had courted the lovely Ashley Stuart.

Later, Grady led Braden to his room with explanations of the sleeping arrangements, "normally the white room or earth mother room in the west wing is offered to our guests. The west wing is where my boys and I sleep, but



since Kerry and Alyson need to be near Bennett. we put him in the east wing's nursery and since I am sure you need to be near your young son we put you in the room across from the nursery next to Kerry's. Alyson's room is adjacent to the nursery." Grady then led Braden into the room. "We took the liberty of placing your clothes in the armoires and chests. I hope you find everything to your satisfaction."

Braden was amazed again. The room was huge with a large poster bed decorated in a deep blue velvet floral pattern. The rug was a rich Turkish design. A large divan and chair surrounded a table in a corner. The room was well lit with kerosene lamps and candelabra chandelier. Grady led Braden into a room behind the main room, it was the largest privy Braden had ever seen with a huge built in tub. The tub had faucets for running water. A large standing mirror was in the corner and shelf that contained fresh soaps, shaving equipment and large white and fluffy towels.

Grady lit the kerosene water heater above the tub and ran the water from the right faucet into the tub. "I am sure you want a bath right now. When the water is heated you will see steam come from here, then turn on the left faucet it will let the hot water in your tub."

Braden still have dumbfounded at the luxury in this house asked choking, "Where is Edward placed?"

"Ah yes, your man Edward is on the third floor. We have more guest rooms on the third floor and some of our servant's live there. Small Bird asked to have Edward share her room she uses when she stays with us."

"They aren't married." Braden stated somewhat surprised at Grady's casual comment of the shared room.

"Sosoni' do things differently." Grady replied nonchalantly.

"You condone this?" Braden asked in surprise.

"It is their way, not mine to judge. Small Bird is happy. Your man Edward seems happy. We should be happy."

Braden was envious. Edward was sleeping happily with Small Bird. Braden was now denied his Kerry. He changed subjects to thwart his frustrations. "How many house servants to you have?"

"We have twelve for the house. They are all valuable to us, extremely valuable. Monsieur Aumond has his own house behind us. He lives there with his wife and four children." Grady turned to leave and continued, "about half live here in the house on the third floor and the others have houses they have built near our main house that they may live with their own family at night."

Braden blinked, his estate in England had six house servants that lived in the manor only, and they certainly didn't hire more that lived on the estate even though there were some small cottages available on the estate. That was something he would consider when he returned to Brenham manor. "I cannot begin to thank you for your hospitality and I look forward to our ride tomorrow."

"Good. Take a nice bath and get a good night's rest. I'll see you tomorrow morning."

Braden undressed and carefully hung his clothes on the valet chair in the bedroom. Sitting on the tub he released the hot water through the faucet mixing it with the cold running water. Steam rose from the tub and he put some of the bathing salts he found in the privy. He slipped into the tub and relaxed. Braden was enjoying the soaking to the point of near sleep and he did not hear his door open and close. He did not hear Kerry enter his privy.

"Braden, do you forgive me? I can't sleep until I know you forgive me." Kerry whispered as she knelt by the tub.

Braden had his eyes closed and when he heard Kerry he moved in the tub with such a start he splashed water over her and the floor. "Kerry, what the deuce are you doing in here? If your brothers found you here, they'd break every one of my bones."

"If you want me to leave I will, but tell me you forgive me."

"Want you to leave? Damn it, I can't stand having you away from me." Braden protested. Immediately the flame of desire and passion swept his body and his manhood swelled immediately in proportion to his need.

"So I see." Kerry giggled.

Braden followed her stare to his enlarged manhood. *Why is it I can't even begin to control myself around her?* "He's waiting for you."

"Does he really miss me?"

"Last night I thought he was going to die without you."

"I missed him too."

"Then come in and surround him with your warmth."

"He looks hot enough."

"He doesn't think so."

"I don't want to abandon him." Kerry laughed quietly and removed her robe and nightgown. "Shall I join him in his bath?"

"Please."

Kerry stepped into the tub and slowly went to her knees. Braden put one hand on Kerry's waist and used the other to guide his arousal for entry as he sat her down. When she was surrounding him he let out a soft moan of pleasure.

"I missed you." Braden whimpered in pleasure and agony. He fondled those luscious and inviting creamy pink orbs revealed to his passion inflamed eyes.

Kerry leaned over for his mouth to access her breasts and cried in pleasure as his hand flayed the hard nipple of one and suckled the other. Kerry then began rising and falling on his hardened muscle. Kerry would rise from her knees to free all but his crown and then fall until he was deeply buried in her. Kerry did it slowly at first, she drove Braden crazy with lust and his arousal grew with each of her thrusts. Braden would not be able to control his climax much longer. Kerry increased her pace and suddenly her throbbing reached its peak and her body trembled in her climax.

It was the point of no return for Braden and he climaxed releasing a thunderous bodily shake of his own. It took all Braden had not to roar in

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pleasure. When Kerry collapsed in his arms, he held on to her tightly for a long time. "I missed you, my Kerry. I missed you so much," Braden murmured in her hair. His tongue laved her earlobe, moved to her neck, up to her throat and stopped at her lips as he savagely kissed her.

Kerry remained positioned on his manhood. She felt him inside her and commented such to Braden. "I missed you. You feel so wonderful inside. Do you know you are still hard?"

"Yes, unfortunately I do know and the water is getting cold."

"Perhaps we should continue this discussion of forgiveness in your warm bed."

"Excellent idea."

The sheets on Braden's bed didn't remain wet from their bodies very long. The heat of their passions turned the dampness to steam in short order.

Later as Kerry was cradled in Braden's arms he asked her, "Will you spend the night with me? I want to wake up to you."

"Nothing can keep me away."

"Your Auntie Alyson is across the hall next to Bennett."

"We'll be quiet. Won't we?"

"That is difficult to do with you under me." Braden added, "or on top of me."

PAYTON LEE





CHAPTER 11

Braden and Kerry were enjoying their morning consummation when voices were heard in the hall outside Braden's room.

"Auntie Alyson, have you seen sis? Is she up yet?"

"No Ryan, I haven't heard her stir. Keep your voice down, you'll wake little Bennett!"

"I'll go wake her up then."

Braden froze in the middle of a thrust and he felt Kerry tense beneath him. *God, not now, don't let us be found out now.* A sudden urgency filled Braden and his thrusting became faster and deeper. Kerry climaxed under him and murmured softly, her purring only increased his urgency.

"You will do no such thing! You will let Kerry sleep. It was a long hard ride." Alyson scolded her nephew.

"I'll wake up Wessex then, Pa is up and dressed waiting for him and breakfast is being made right now."

"You won't wake him up either. They need their rest. I'll go and explain to Grady, he'll understand and wait. You get downstairs before you wake Bennett!" Alyson ordered with no room for discussion and shooed him with her arms down the stairs following on his heels.

Braden smiled. *need rest?* This exercise is hardly restful and we are wide-awake. Two more thrusts with his rhythmic body movements and Braden expelled in blissful climax. Braden rested his head on Kerry's shoulder calming his rapidly beating heart and spoke softly to her, "Kerry, you are wonderful."

"You're not so bad yourself." Kerry teased.

Braden responded by devouring her lips in his and kissed her savagely. "Brat!" Braden stated as he returned to her swollen ravaged lips.

"Bully!" Kerry retorted. "I must get up and get downstairs while the escape route is clear."

"Kerry?"

"Yes?"

"Will you come back to my bed tonight?"

"Am I completely forgiven?"

"Completely." Braden answered gently circling her body with his finger tips free drawing on her thigh, arm, abdomen and breasts.



"Then I'll come back to your bed to keep you company tonight." Kerry answered and gently stroked the long sleek black hair currently hanging over Braden's eyes. Kerry was happy that Braden was showing her his loving passion once more.

"I don't want to get up, and I want to keep you here." Braden complained.

"I want to stay here, but there is Pa, Auntie Alyson, Ben, and.."

"**Ryan!**" They both said together.

"Why did the giant have to come after you?" Braden complained again.

"Ryan has always hovered over me more than Ayden or Dwayne. Ayden is the brain of the family, Dwayne is the lover, and Ryan is the rancher and protector." Kerry explained.

"Ryan is also a half foot taller and twice as broad as Ayden or Dwayne. Are you sure you had the same mother?"

"Positive! You dolt!" Kerry was laughing and she rolled out from under Braden and leaped off the bed. Kerry grabbed her robe and wrapped it around her body securing the bow sash.

Braden jumped from bed and gave her another kiss before she left him.

Braden dressed quickly in his riding clothes and went downstairs to the dining room. Grady was at the table with a beautiful Sosoni' woman that looked to be in her forties.

"Morning Braden. This is Morning Song." Grady introduced.

Braden bowed politely, "Morning Song, a pleasure. Kerry told me you were her nanny and currently her stepmother."

"Nanny?" Morning Song looked to Grady and returned to face Braden. "If nanny means Kerry suckled at my breasts and learned the life teaching from me. Yes that is I."

"Morning Song helped raise my children when Ashley joined the Great Spirit," Grady clarified. "Morning Song's first mate was Cougar's Paw, the Chief of their tribe."

"Cougar's Paw is father to Eye of Hawk, Small Bird and Little Bear." Morning Song said proudly.

"Eye of Hawk is the current Chief of the tribe. I will take you out to see them today." Grady told Braden. "Morning Song wants to take your son Bennett and Kerry out there later today."

"Bennett will be thrilled to see an actual Indian village." Braden said with true enthusiasm. "As will I." Braden remembered the stories his Papa had told him of Cougar's Paw and the tribe. He was anxious to visit the camp.

"I'm glad you agree to the arrangements. I wanted some quiet time to talk with you." Grady said surprising Braden.

"Talk to me privately?" Braden asked warily.

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"I'm not going to shoot you, I only want time to tell you a little history of my family, Geneva, and the Sosoni' that live here." Grady explained. Grady looked to Morning Song, "He is the one, isn't he?" Last night in the privacy of their bedroom Morning Song and Grady discussed the events at the whistle stop and the conversations later. It was in those quiet and personal bedroom talks that Morning Song reminded Grady of Tells the Truth prophecy for Kerry at her birth.

Morning Song nodded. "On her birth, Tells the Truth spoke of her spirit mate. He would be light of skin and dark of hair. Her chosen would not be of this land." Morning Song walked to Braden and looked into his eyes.

Braden didn't understand what was said and didn't understand the review Morning Song apparently was giving him. Braden looked at Grady. Braden noted that Grady understood these strange actions.

Kerry came downstairs and seeing Morning Song ran to hug her.

Morning Song responded as a true mother and hugged Kerry back, kissed her gently, held Kerry's head in her hands and smiled at her. A strange look came over Morning Song's face. Morning Song took Kerry and seated her for breakfast said a few words and then walked to Grady. Morning Song took Grady's hand and led him out of the dining room.

Kerry and Braden ate breakfast while they heard Grady's raised voice on and off for a half hour. It was apparent that Grady and Morning Song were having a lengthy and vigorous discussion in Grady's study. Grady and Morning Song returned to the table a few minutes after Alyson had brought Bennett downstairs. Ayden and Dwayne had joined them for breakfast shortly after Grady and Morning Song left the room.

Grady looked flushed, but he maintained control after the conversation with Morning Song. It was obvious something that was said had upset him.

Braden mounted Socks and Grady was waiting for him on his horse, Runner. The ride started in a quiet mode as Grady maintained an uneasy composure.

Braden tried to begin a conversation to end the silence, "This land of yours is beautiful and the air seems so fresh and clean. How much of this land we can see is Geneva?"

Grady stopped on a hilltop and answered Braden. "Geneva stops by the mountains to the East and West, Geneva extends from the limits of Ely to the fork in the river near Cherry Creek. We would measure it 30 miles in each direction of the winds."

"I see your cattle grazing in that pasture."

"That is one herd. We have twenty herds." Grady pointed to a place several miles away. "Over there is the Blaine mines."

"Blaine? That's what Kerry called herself and I mistakenly called you that."



Grady ignored Braden's enlightenment and continued. "I bought the Blaine mine two years ago, I also bought Duck Creek, Piermont, Ruby Hill, Melville and Hunter." Grady looked directly at Braden and asked, "Are you wondering why I bought those mines?"

"It seems odd to buy so many."

"A few miners work them still, but I bought them to protect Geneva."

"Protect Geneva?"

"I think I should share something with you, now that you have compromised my daughter." Grady replied in a controlled stern voice.

"Sir, I..." Braden tried to say something or anything, but nothing came out.

"You needn't stutter, boy. You are Grant's son and Tells the Truth had predicted this after Kerry was born." Grady sighed. "I am angry as any parent should be finding out some man took his daughter's innocence."

"Sir, how do you know?" Braden gulped and swallowed a hard lump.

"Morning Song smelled your man scent on Kerry and told me." Grady looked sternly at Braden. "When she told me, I was ready to thrash you, but it is fate and I have to accept it. My little girl is grown up you made her a woman. You did tell me you loved her."

"I do love her, but I fear she does not love me." Braden responded with dejection.

"Doesn't love you? She slept with you!" Grady snarled. "If Kerry didn't love you, Braden, you can be guaranteed you would never have touched her. I can tell you straight you would be walking funny for a month."

"Can I ask her to marry me? Do you think she will accept this widower with a child? An English widower?"

"If you don't ask her, you might regret it." Grady spoke the next words very softly. "Morning Song tells me Kerry is with child. Your child!"

"How can she know that? I have only known Kerry three weeks." Braden exclaimed. *Could it be true? Kerry carries my child?*

"Morning Song knows these things, she tells me there are signs." Grady answered and then turned to ask, "You do want this child and do the honorable thing don't you?"

"If Kerry will have me, nothing could make me happier. Yes, I would want my child." Braden sighed heavily. "I have been alone far too long. Kerry has filled an emptiness in my heart."

Braden was happy Grady would let him marry his daughter. Although Braden was doubtful that Kerry was pregnant with his child, he secretly hoped Morning Song was right. Everything he planned seemed to be happening.

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"Kerry will have you, I will see to it." Grady calmly implied. "You can take your time to bring her around, but don't take too long. I can't tell you what might happen if her brothers learn what happened between you. I'm not sure I could stop them from messing your face up a bit."

"Kerry's brothers really love her." Braden recognized.

"Love her and are extremely protective. There were a few suitors last year that pushed a little too hard and dared take trifle liberties with Kerry."

"What happened to them?"

"One was laid up for six months with a broken leg for stealing a kiss, and the other touched her breast not knowing Ryan saw him." Grady laughed, "Albeit to say, the man had both his hands broken."

"God!"

"You might need **His** help if Ryan finds out you've compromised his sister and you have impregnated her." Grady laughed again.

"I'll talk to Kerry tonight."

"I think tonight is a good plan, boy!" Grady's tone changed from light to serious in the next instant. "I need to tell you about Kerry's legacy."

"Please."

"I fell in love with and married a beautiful Bostonian Socialite named Ashley Stuart. Ashley was the youngest daughter of Harold Stuart, an English nobleman that left his estates in England under management to marry an American and live here. Those estates were bequeathed to his three daughters, Audrey, Alyson and Ashley. Audrey's husband and sons manage all the estates presently, but Ashley's will turned her estates to our four children. Kerry inherited a large estate in Lincolnshire."

"Kerry is of noble heritage?"

"Her title would be Duchess." Grady casually answered.

"Duchess?" Braden choked.

"There's more to this, Braden." Grady continued, "I have willed Geneva to Kerry. The man that marries my Kerry will see to Geneva's hope with her and this special magic of Geneva."

"I don't understand." Braden was more confused than enlightened.

"I don't expect you to understand at first, but the man that marries Kerry has to love Geneva as she does, and be as strong as she is to keep Geneva together."

"What of your sons?"

"Tells the Truth has told us that Ayden will be returned to the country of his mother's family. As the Great Spirit takes, it must also return. We know Ayden will return to England and take over his estate in Avon as Marquis after he marries an English woman he meets there."

"Marquis of Dunham?" Braden was truly shocked. The woman he fell in love with was descendant of bluer blood than his family.



Grady continued, "Tells the Truth is unsure of Dwayne but Ryan will not take an easy life from his father, he is of the land and a man of his own right. Ryan has already purchased property. Ryan has already started to build a ranch house on that property. It is on the other side of Cherry Creek and Tells the Truth has informed us Ryan will mate a Sosoni' maiden after a winter season."

"That is why you willed Geneva to Kerry?"

"Yes, and she loves this spread as she loves her life. She will protect and keep Geneva's hope."

"What is Geneva's hope?" Braden asked in great curiosity to the reference he had heard many times.

"Geneva was created to protect nature. It was created to be a barrier against greed, corruption and destruction. Geneva was created as a haven to the culture of the Sosoni' without the cruelty and starvation of a reservation." Grady waved his arm over the landscape. "That is Geneva's hope. Kerry understands this. Kerry's husband must also understand this."

"Teach me." Braden requested of Grady. Braden was overwhelmed with the philosophy of Geneva's hope. Braden had indeed been touched by the magic of Geneva when he first met Kerry. It was as if an unseen hand taken hold of his heart.

"We will." Grady turned his horse and started down the hill.

"When you say we, is that you and Kerry?"

Grady gave Braden a large grin. "We mean Morning Song and myself. Ten years ago after Cougar's Paw died of winter fever, Morning Song and I wed. You see I was empty when Ashley died and Morning Song filled my loneliness." Grady looked seriously into Braden's eyes. "I can understand the loneliness you felt and the filling of emptiness with the love of a woman. Perhaps that understanding has kept me from demanding satisfaction. You did after all, take my little girl and make her a woman."

"I love Kerry, she has become everything to me. I cannot apologize for that."

"We didn't expect you too."

"Why does Alyson run the household?" Braden asked as the horses continued on a well-worn trail attempting to change subjects temporarily.

"Morning Song does not care for the white man ways. Morning Song is uncomfortable running a house and ordering servants. It is not her way." Grady explained further, "When Alyson's husband John Jameson was killed in the Civil War she left her heartache in Boston and came here to be away from his family and her memories. John and Alyson were deeply in love but his parents never accepted her. They made Alyson's life hell on earth. It was worse when John was killed. I had four children to bring up and Alyson always wanted children. They were her sister Ashley's children so she came here to live. Morning Song was more than happy to

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let Alyson run the house and teach the children her city ways. Morning Song taught my children the Sosoni' ways."

"Kerry told me her Sosoni' name is Shining Star." Braden remarked thoughtfully.

"That it is." Turning slightly in his saddle to look upon Braden, Grady acknowledged his statement. "Kerry more than her brothers took to the Sosoni' and learned their language and culture. Kerry loves the Sosoni' and her step brothers and sisters as she loves her own brothers."

"Kerry is quite a woman."

"That she is, now!" Grady frowned as he replied sarcastically. Returning to a normal conversational tone, Grady continued to tell Braden more about Geneva, the history of his children and wife, the mines, cattle and horse ranching aspects.

One hour after they left the house Braden saw the cabins built on Geneva's land. Braden saw the Sosoni' and their children active in daily duties.

"The large cabin in the center is the lodge of Eye of Hawk, the tribe's Chief. He lives there with his mate Fragrant Flower and his two sons."

"I am anxious to visit the village."

"Eye of Hawk is expecting us." Grady told Braden and added, "Morning Song will bring Kerry and Bennett near to noon. When Morning Song told me of your man scent on my Kerry, it was agreed that we needed to talk privately. I had originally planned to bring Ryan with us, but with that tidbit this morning, I agreed with Morning Song that we talk alone."

"I appreciate your understanding more than I can express." Relief was evident in those words. Braden did not want to imagine that giant hulk of a brother being part of this conversation.

"I can tell you I'm not too disappointed in this match. It makes me happy to know that Grant's son will be Kerry's husband."

"I think my father will be happy your daughter will be my wife." Braden agreed with a huge grin of complete satisfaction. He was getting Kerry as his wife with her father's blessing. Now if he could only convince Kerry to be his wife. Braden thought about his proposal and knew she just couldn't refuse him if she was carrying his child. A smile spread across Braden's face, this was his plan and it appeared to have worked.

Grady deep in his own thoughts gave out a great laugh, "Grant and I will share a grandchild."

"And Bennett will have a sibling." Braden was still uncertain of the pregnancy but didn't doubt it would happen if it hadn't already.

"Alyson told me that Audrey predicted Ben would become part of our family in a short time."

"I thought Audrey Astor saw through my reserve into my heart." Braden remembered.



"The women of the Stuart family are like that. It's almost spooky how they can know these things." Grady admitted and flashed a larger smile. "Morning Song's visions seem to be even more powerful."

Their horses entered the compound and Eye of Hawk greeted them. Braden found himself surrounded by the children. The children touched his Black English riding boots and the older girls touched his brown velvet-riding jacket.

"Our young ones seem interested in your odd clothes." Eye of Hawk commented to Braden.

"I would prefer to wear your fine buckskin and I even asked Kerry about purchasing some." Braden told Eye of Hawk. "Kerry told me Sosoni' buckskins are not purchased they are gifts."

"She tells you true." Eye of Hawk grinned. "Our buckskins can also be trades. Perhaps we can make a trade."

"I would be delighted if that were possible."

"I think we might send you to Ely to pick out some practical western clothes as well." Grady suggested.

Braden was taught many Sosoni' wisdoms and some of the Sosoni' culture in the short time before Morning Song, Kerry, Small Bird, Bennett, and Branch that Bends rode into camp. Grady greeted Morning Song and lifted Bennett from her lap. Eye of Hawk met Small Bird and took Branch that Bends in his arms hugging her like his own daughter. Braden lifted Kerry from her horse. "We will have a lot to talk over tonight." Braden whispered to her.

Kerry smiled to Braden knowingly. She assumed the comment referred to her returning in stealth to his bed again tonight, which she enjoyed just as much.

Kerry and Braden both watched the excitement of Bennett and how quickly he adapted to the Indian camp. Bennett was soon playing with the Sosoni' children in the common language of fun that needs no interpretation.

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CHAPTER 12

“Come walk with me.” Morning Song invited Kerry taking her away from Braden's side. “There are things to talk with you this day, Shining Star.” Morning Song led Kerry out of the camp into an open meadow some distance from the camp. Morning Song wanted to make sure their conversation would not be overheard.

“You only take me on walks like these if you plan to reprimand me, second mother.” Kerry said to Morning Song as she remembered this was the custom of Morning Song when she would be called to task about something Morning Song did not want as open knowledge but needed to reprimand Kerry about.

“There is something this day you must hear.” Morning Song sat on a stump and motioned for Kerry to sit on the tree stump near her. “This morning with your hug I learned two things.”

“I am about to hear these revelations?”

“You tease me my second daughter,” Morning Song smiled in answer.

“Tell me, that I may receive my punishment and have it over.”

“There is nothing to punish. What I speak this day to you is happy news and the prophecy of Tells the Truth honored.”

“What?” Kerry asked in confusion.

“This man of yours, Braden.”

“He is not my man.” Kerry refuted while heaving a long sigh. “He still loves the ghost of his first wife.”

“This is not so, child. He loves you. I have seen in his eyes to his heart.” Morning Song reached over to take Kerry's face in her hand, “do not deny to me that Braden has placed his man shaft in your womanhood, he has broken your maiden skin and laid his seed within you.”

Kerry bent her head to avoid the gaze of Morning Song, “I will not deny this. I enjoy this pleasure we share.” Although embarrassing, Kerry was never afraid to speak openly with her stepmother.

“It is good you receive pleasure and the medicine is good between you.”

“You are not angry I have given my body to his?”



"I cannot be angry as I look upon you and see his child grow within."

"A child grows within? What are you saying, dabai 'hubia?" Kerry gasped in fear, terror, or surprise, she wasn't certain.

"You are carrying the child of Braden Wessex. It is his seed that grows in you. His man scent was strong on you this morning and your woman scent upon him." Morning Song asked in a severe tone, "How long have you been sharing this journey?"

Kerry never tried to lie to Morning Song. It was never necessary. "It is has been almost sixteen moons."

"And have you shared his man shaft every night of these moons?"

"I have my second mother. It was all these moons and sun rises also. My need for him is great and strong.

"Tell me true my daughter, have you had your flow this moon cycle?"

Kerry had to think for a few minutes before she answered since she had to calculate silently. "No, it is almost six moons late."

"Do you understand that when a woman has joined with a man and her flow does not come at the appointed time, she is with child?"

"I did not know this truth. No one had ever told me of such things."

"You know of it presently. Accept this great gift and share it with this man you love." Morning Song realized she had been too late explaining procreation to Kerry.

"What if he does not wish to share this happiness and retains his love for his first mated?"

"I see the way he looks at you, this will not happen." Morning Song rose from the stump and took Kerry's hand. "Soon you will show physical signs of this wonder. You must speak to your Braden of this miracle of the Great Spirit. This you must do quickly."

"Did you tell my father?" Kerry was beside herself with joy knowing she would have the child of the man she loved, yet fear of her father and his anger caused trepidation. Kerry hoped Braden would be honorable and marry her for the sake of their love child even if he didn't love her. Kerry also reasoned Braden didn't have to marry her if he did not wish it. Kerry could love and raise their child by herself with enough love for both of them, she would just have to deal with her father and brothers.

"I did tell my Grady. He is your blood father and he must know of this."

"What is he going to do?" Kerry murmured.

"Grady has already spoken to your Braden. Braden has been told of your child."

Kerry trembled. *Braden knows!*

Morning Song took Kerry's hand to lead her back to the camp. "Since both of you know of this you must speak to each other of it. We will give you this private time at the sunset."



A few hours before dusk, the family was called to return home to Geneva Ranch. Morning Song had a difficult time taking Bennett away from his playing with the camp children. Bennett was having so much fun it pulled on her heartstrings to end it. "I will bring you to play again on the next sun," Morning Song promised as she took him on the buckboard to return to Geneva. "It is time for the supper and then you will clean and be readied for sleep."

"I'm not tired," Bennett protested.

"I know my little Thundercloud." Morning Song consoled. "You still must eat and rest. It is the way of the warrior."

"I can be a warrior?" Bennett beamed.

"We will train you. Eye of Hawk will give you lessons with his two sons." Morning Song promised.

Bennett continued his chatter all the way home he was so excited. Bennett's constant chatter was the reason Tells the Truth had given him the name Thundercloud on this first trip to the camp.

Kerry and Small Bird rode ahead so they could talk alone. Kerry told Small Bird how Morning Song had recognized Braden was her lover. Kerry also confided in Small Bird that Morning Song told her she was carrying Braden's child.

Small Bird congratulated Kerry on her happiness and asked the Great Spirit to bless her love sharing with Edward Laurel as He had Kerry and Braden's. "I too wish to carry the child of my Edward Laurel."

"Do you share his love every moon?"

"I have since the our trail began on the great iron horse." Small Bird giggled and turned to Kerry, "Tonight he will ask your Braden if he can join with me as mate."

Kerry reached over and squeezed Small Bird's hand. "I am so happy for you my adopted sister and friend."

"Edward has accepted my daughter to my happiness. He calls her 'Willow'." Small Bird hugged her daughter tightly as Branch that Bends was sitting on her lap.

"Willow?"

"Edward tells me that Branch That Bends is Willow in his language. He fills my heart with such happiness."

"You deserve such happiness, and more."

"Tonight you must tell Braden this good news and I will express my joy for your joining with my Edward."

"I will pray for that." Kerry said as her doubts rose to the fore again.

Braden and Grady rode directly behind Morning Song and Bennett.

Grady leaned over Runner and affectionately stroked the horse's neck. Grady took this time to quietly tell Braden, "Morning Song said to me she has already talked to Kerry and told her that she carries your child. Tonight might be a good time to talk to Kerry."

Braden nodded in consent and said, "I will. I hope she will have me."

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Grady only smiled at Braden and prodded Runner to a gallop so he could ride next to Morning Song and Bennett. Grady took Bennett from Morning Song and placed the boy on his lap. "We will share this grandson in the next moon cycle," Grady said to Morning Song happily.

"Thundercloud brings fresh happiness to our families. He is the cord that wraps us in even more joy." Morning Song answered smiling to her husband.

Alyson was waiting on the porch for everyone to arrive; she ran to greet the returning party and going to Grady took Bennett from his lap. "Come inside Bennett, we've bought you some new clothes and toys."

Bennett looked at Braden as his father dismounted and bubbled, "I love it here, Papa. Can I stay?"

"We'll discuss that later. You run along and play with Auntie Alyson and be nice to Branch that Bends. Be sure to share those new toys with her." Braden understood his son's glee regarding Geneva Ranch. The ranch was touching his son with it's magic.

"I don't think that will be a problem, Braden. Your Edward went with us to Ely and bought new clothes, toys, and dolls for Willow." Alyson told Braden matter of factly.

Braden's eyes rounded in surprise. He knew that something happened between Small Bird and Edward, but this? Edward was taking Branch that Bends as his own.

Grady asked Alyson before she took Bennett into the house, "Where are the boys?"

"They are on the range, apparently some fences needed mending. They promised they would be back for supper."

Grady dismounted and handed Runner's reins to the ranch hand, George. Grady told George to take Kerry's and Braden's mounts also. Grady walked towards the house and told Braden as he passed, "We'll give you some private time with Kerry to make this right."

Braden took Kerry's hand and walked away from the house towards the trail they had just returned from. "Kerry, we need to talk."

Fear permeated Kerry; she knew what the talk was about. "Morning Song told me that Pa told you everything this morning."

"Not everything, that's for you to tell me. I want to hear you tell me."

Kerry's face flushed pink, "Braden, I didn't know this would happen. It was not done on purpose. I .. I ... I don't know about such things. I'm sorry. I'm sorry for my ignorance."

"That's not what I'm talking about. Your pregnancy was on purpose."

"It wasn't!" Kerry protested. "Just what are you talking about? What do you want to hear?"

In a soothing voice to Kerry's apparent trepidation Braden said, "I am not innocent on such matters. Do you forget I already have a son? I knew



pregnancy would be the result of our lovemaking. I took no precautions. I wanted you to get pregnant. That way I could persuade you to marry me.”

“Marry you?” Kerry gasped, she couldn’t believe her ears. Braden wanted to marry her. It was what she wanted and apparently Braden wanted the same thing. Kerry was so happy she thought she could burst.

Braden thought her gasp meant she had been offended by the idea of marriage to him. “I know that no woman in her right mind would want to take a widower with a son in tow. No woman that is as beautiful as you are, Kerry. You can have your pick of any man and have your own family, but I beg of you to consider me.”

“I think our innocence lies in different avenues, but innocence none the less.” Kerry beamed and her eyes sparkling as her hands took Braden’s face to tell him, “I love you, Braden Wessex. I have loved you since I first saw you in New York. I wanted to be your wife, raise Ben as mine. As we shared our love I knew I wanted to have our own children.”

“Kerry,” Braden choked and gathered her in his arms squeezing her against his long hard frame placing her head under his chin. “I love you with all that I am. I have loved you since I saw you on the floor playing with my son. Marry me!”

“Yes.” Kerry breathed pulling away to look at him so he could see the love and passion for him in her eyes.

Braden looking into her beautiful sparkling eyes sealed the engagement with a long passionate kiss. “We’ll be wed as soon as possible.”

They walked back together holding each other’s hands. That was the scene Kerry’s brother’s saw when they rode up to the house.

“Kerry, is that Brit giving you trouble?” Ayden asked.

“If he is let me know.” Dwayne yelled over to them.

“Better keep your distance, Brit. No more than hand holding if you don’t want to get hurt.” Ryan threatened.

Braden smiled. “Is it your way to keep every man away from your sister, even if his intentions are honorable?”

“Yep!” The three of them answered at once.

“Until there is a wedding ring on that finger of hers.” Ayden announced.

“And maybe not even then.” Ryan countered.

Braden released Kerry’s hand in feigned fear. “I guess I’ll wait until I slip that wedding ring on her finger.”

“You will not!” Kerry protested and grabbed Braden’s hand back in hers. “I want to hold his hand, brothers!” Kerry glared at her brothers defiantly and walked with Braden to the ranch house.

At the dinner table Grady noted the new clothes on Bennett. “I like your new look, Ben.”



"It's grand isn't it?" Bennett puffed out his chest showing off the new red cotton shirt. He was wearing new blue jeans and cowboy boots. "Ryan said he'll show me how to shoot a gun soon."

"Not too soon!" Alyson growled and glared at Ryan. "He's just a boy!"

"I think we'll teach him the bow first." Morning Song suggested. "Eye of Hawk is making one for Ben and his two sons."

"Can we go back to tomorrow?" Bennett asked eagerly.

"I already promised that, Thundercloud." Morning Song smiled to the boy. "I keep my promises."

"Braden, I think you and I will go to Ely tomorrow and get you some new clothes that will be more practical for the ranch." Grady told his future son in law. He could tell by his face that everything went well with Kerry.

"Indeed, and I would like your assistance to obtain the proper trading goods for Eye of Hawk. I would be able to trade for my own buckskins." Braden replied and squeezed Kerry's hand under the table.

After dinner the men relaxed in the study, while Kerry took charge of Bennett and prepared him for bed. Braden enjoyed the company, brandy, and cigar of Grady McGillinen. Ayden and Dwayne were discussing the ranch with Grady and Braden. Ryan did not participate in the conversation. Ryan merely nodded when asked questions, he was more interested in glaring at Braden.

Braden was convinced that Ryan was overly protective of his sister Kerry and Ryan's looks to Braden would have melted rock. *I would probably be dead by now if Ryan knew Kerry and I shared our love and created a child. Created a child, how wonderful. As soon as we are married I can tell Bennett he will have a brother or sister.*

"Thinking deeply are you?" Ryan sneered. "Wouldn't be about Kerry would it?"

"As a matter of fact, it is Kerry I am thinking about."

"I wouldn't if I were you." Ryan threatened.

"That's enough Ryan." Grady ordered his middle son. "It seems to me that Kerry likes Braden, and your sister hasn't liked any suitor before him."

"Kerry may like him, but that don't make him worthy." Ryan warned.

"Braden Wessex has formally asked me to court your sister. I have given him permission, that is enough said. No arguments."

"Hmpfh!" was all that Ryan said and walked out of the study.

"I think it is time for me to retire gentlemen." Braden excused. He was anxious to take his bath and when he finished he was hoping Kerry would join him for the night as she had promised in the morning. *Yes, Kerry is extremely addictive.*

When Braden went to his room he found Edward waiting for him and his bath was drawn. Edward began undressing Braden and when that duty was completed; Braden excused Edward, "Thank you, and Edward that will be all this evening. You may retire."



"Thank you sir, but I must talk with you about my employment."

That comment startled Braden. "What about your employment? You aren't planning on leaving me are you?"

"That sir will be your decision. I will be taking a wife and child soon."

"Small Bird and her daughter?"

"Yes sir. If you find it embarrassing to have a man in your employ married to a Red Indian, well then, I will volunteer to leave your service."

"I don't find that a problem. I'm happy for you!" Braden shook Edward's hand.

"You may find it difficult in England."

"Edward, I proposed to Kerry this evening and she accepted. Grady has given me his blessings and Geneva is part of the deal." Braden smiled.

"Once we marry, I will not be spending much time in England. We will be living here."

"I offer you congratulations!" Edward returned in true sincerity.

"Thank you Edward and happiest news of all, Kerry is carrying my child. Bennett will have a brother or sister in approximately eight months as Morning Song calculates."

"Salutations sir! I hope that Small Bird will make me as happy."

"Confidentially Edward, I had no idea that I would every be this happy again." Braden shared with his valet and friend.

"You deserve this happiness, sir. You have lived that tragedy for far too long." Edward advised and then took his leave to return to the warm and welcoming arms of his own love, Small Bird.



CHAPTER 13

Braden opened his eyes early in the morning and reveled in his good feelings and his future wife next to him cradled in his arms. Kerry came to his bed last night as she had promised and after he had his wicked way, he chuckled in his thoughts, they discussed their wedding and although he wanted to marry today, Braden conceded to Kerry's request to marry this weekend. There was no doubt in his mind that as wonderful and complete as Kerry made him feel, he would consent to her wishes whatever they would be.

Braden would be going into town with Grady McGillinen today and he looked forward to the time with his future father in law. Braden felt a strong bond with the elder McGillinen in the short time he had personally met him and Grady McGillinen truly did live up to his father's descriptions of him.

Kerry asked only for a few days to retrieve and clean her mother's wedding gown. That is what she wanted to wear. The dress was thirty years old, but had been taken care of by Alyson Jameson. Kerry and Braden agreed they would marry the end of this week.

Braden gently rubbed Kerry's arm as she slept in the crook of his arm, her head resting on his chest. He loved her scent and inhaled it with intoxication. Braden could hardly believe himself that Kerry was now his, his future bride. Braden wanted to tell Grady all the plans he and Kerry discussed last night. They also discussed Geneva and how they would live. Kerry agreed that in the winter when things were primarily closed and locked up in Geneva they would spend three months in England. It was only fair that his parents enjoy the grandchildren their love would provide, as well as her family. Braden also agreed to learn everything about running Geneva and learning everything from Grady about Geneva's hope. Braden had every intention of becoming a complete part of her family and their legacy. Braden also confessed to Kerry that the moment he stepped foot on Geneva soil he felt at home. It was true; he felt a belonging that was near paranormal. There was no doubt in Braden's mind he belonged to Geneva and Kerry.

"Mmm, Braden." Kerry purred in her sleep and snuggled more in Braden's protective arms.



Braden kissed Kerry's hair and then whispered, "I have to get up now, but you rest. I'll see you later today." Braden then silently slipped out from the sheets and dressed wearing the clothes Edward had laid out for him.

Grady noted that Ayden and Braden were approximately the same size and had Ayden loan jeans, shirt, boots and jacket to Braden. Braden admired himself in the full-length mirror in his privy. After Braden put on the hat, he thought he really looked like he was raised in America's West. Braden would have to thank Ayden for the loan of clothes. Today he would purchase his own but at least he wouldn't stand out like a dandy anymore.

Braden quietly closed his door and ran into Ryan.

"You're up mighty early." Ryan noted with sarcasm.

"I am looking forward to going into Ely with your father." Braden retorted ignoring Ryan's sarcasm. Braden didn't think Ryan would ever get along with him. Sometimes he thought Ryan considered him a competitor for his sister's affection and wouldn't approve of anyone no matter who it would be, to be good enough to court his sister. *Wait until he finds out I'm going to marry Kerry. Braden chuckled gaily with the thought.*

"At least you won't make a spectacle of yourself in those clothes." Ryan stroked his chin with his thumb and finger. "Those clothes look familiar."

"They are on loan from your brother, Ayden."

"I thought so." Ryan grinned. "Ayden always showed good taste in dress."

"Will you be coming to Ely with us, Ryan?" Braden tried to take advantage of Ryan's brief moment of good humor.

"Nope. I've got cow tending to take care of this morning." Ryan grinned, "Ayden and Dwayne are working the herd with me. I was thinking of bringing Kerry and Ben along."

Braden smiled back, "Morning Song has already made plans to take Bennett back to the camp."

"Real nice boy you have there. I found I like the kid." Ryan crossed his arms over his chest and remarked. "Ben is so happy, full of joy, energetic and just a bubbling artesian well of enthusiasm. Did you know that Tells the Truth gave him the name Thundercloud?"

"Yes, Bennett told me several times last night." Braden quietly considered his son for a moment. Bennett's fervor was a complete turn around from the sullen and remote child he brought to this country. "Bennett is really happy here. It's like he belongs here."

"I think he does belong here. We all think that. Lord knows that Morning Song and Pa have taken to him, not discounting Auntie Alyson." Ryan uncrossed his arms and began to move down the hall as he told Braden, "As a matter of fact, I came here to wake Ben for breakfast. I was going to take him with me, but I won't cross Morning Song."

"I'll get Bennett for you." Braden volunteered.



"No, you go ahead. Pa and Morning Song are eating breakfast already." Ryan insisted as he headed for Bennett's nursery door.

Braden went downstairs to the dining room for breakfast. Grady greeted him there and after a quick bite, Braden and Grady left for Ely. Runner and Socks had been saddled and ready for them.

Kerry was startled. A strong hand kept nudging her as she heard her name. Turning on her back she looked up to Ryan's angered face.

"Sis, what the devil are you doing here?" Ryan barked as he threw her cotton nightgown on top of the bed. "That bastard's compromised you, hasn't he?"

"Oh Ryan, don't be such a prude. You, Ayden and Dwayne often make use of the women in Ely's back alley district."

"That's different." Ryan snarled back.

"How different? Don't get self righteous with me big brother." Kerry growled back. "You don't have any feelings for them at all. At least Braden loves me."

"Men will tell women anything to have their way, sis."

"Is that your personal experience talking?"

"I'm not the subject. What did that lying snake tell you to get you in his bed?" Ryan roared. "I'm going to shoot the son of a bitch."

"You will do no such thing! Braden is my future husband, your future brother in law." Kerry retorted. Her anger was full fledged now and she was bright red with hostility.

"Married? That's what the bastard said to you? Well by God, married you will be."

"Married, yes I will be. Now Ryan, why in the hell are you in Braden's room anyway?"

"Watch your language, sis!"

"My language? After all the curses that just flowed out of your mouth? You didn't answer me. Just what are you doing in his room?"

"Ben wanted to use his Pa's spyglass. I came to retrieve it before he and Morning Song left for the camp. I was going to tend herd today, but I think Dwayne, Ayden and I have other things to take care of."

"What are you planning?" Kerry shrieked to Ryan, her anger in full bloom.

"Just going to talk to Braden, that's all." Ryan yelled back as he stomped toward the door to leave the room.

"Don't you dare hurt him!" Kerry screamed. "Braden and I are going to be married and he is the father of my baby." Kerry bit her lip as she realized what she had just said.

"What the hell?" Ryan shouted. "He impregnated you? That son of a bitch! I'll geld that bastard."



"You will do no such thing! I love him you big jerk!" Kerry was screaming at this point, her throat taut and her breathing erratic. "He's Ben's father, you can't touch him at least for Ben's sake."

The strain was too much for Kerry and she fainted. Ryan ran back to her side and realizing what happened, he went for Morning Song or Auntie Alyson. The latter were already on their way up after hearing the shouting.

"What the devil happened?" Alyson asked as she pulled out her smelling salts seeing her niece lying pale and breathing erratically in Braden's bed. It hadn't registered yet that Kerry was in the bed of Braden Wessex.

"That bloody no good bastard Brit got Kerry in the family way and look he has her sleeping with him." Ryan answered indignantly. "Look, look, she's she's undressed!"

"Family way?" Alyson gasped.

"Shining Star carries his child. This is true," Morning Song confirmed.

"You know?" Ryan roared.

"It is known to me." Morning Song answered quietly. She took Alyson's smelling salts to Kerry.

Alyson was in shock and found herself to stunned to move. Audrey had written that she believed there would be a permanent future for Kerry and Braden. There was never a word written that a possibility of intimacy was happening. "A baby?"

Ryan turned on his heels. "By God I'll take care of this."

Morning Song patted Kerry's hand as she came to consciousness.

Kerry opened her eyes to a vile sick feeling in the pit of her stomach. Grabbing the sheet and wrapping it around her, she jumped from bed and ran into the privy. Kerry was soon retching.

Morning Song followed her and soothingly stroked her back. "The sickness starts," she said looking at Alyson.

"My poor baby," Alyson consoled as she dampened a cloth and dabbed Kerry's face.

Ryan found Ayden and Dwayne and announced unceremoniously. "That no good Brit compromised sis. He also got her in the family way."

"That no good bastard." Ayden growled.

"Son of a bitch. I'll break every bone in his body." Dwayne snarled. "Where is that no good.."

"Braden and Pa left for Ely." Ryan told his brothers. Ryan was livid with anger. "We can catch up to him, and grab Reverend Weems while we are in town."

"He's going to have a mighty hard time repeating vows with swollen lips and a broken nose and jaw." Dwayne said in nearly as much rage as Ryan.

"Wait until Pa finds out." Ayden said as he grabbed for his jacket and gun belt walking out the door behind his younger brothers. "How did you find out?"

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"Kerry told me after I found her naked in that asshole's bed." Ryan answered.

"What?" Dwayne and Ayden shouted in unison.

"I'll tell you everything on the way."

The first goal accomplished upon arriving in Ely this morning had been completed. Braden sent a telegram to his parents in England. It was brief stating that Braden's father had been right in sending him for a holiday to conquer his grief over Laura. Braden told his parents he would be married this week and Bennett adored his new stepmother. Braden also told his parents he would return to England with his bride as soon as he could so they could meet his new wife, the former Kerry McGillinen.

Grady sent his friend Grant a telegram as well, telling Grant that his daughter Kerry and their son were very much in love and very happy together. Grady wrote that he loved little Bennett as a grandson already.

Neither one wrote that another grandchild was on the way. That information would come later.

Grady and Braden were ordering supplies in the general store after they had stopped at the mercantile to purchase more clothes for Braden and Bennett. They were unaware of what had happened in Geneva and were even more ignorant to the fact they were being watched in town.

"That's Grady McGillinen, the girl's father She ain't with him today." Joe Garner told the Easterner standing by his side. "Mighty unusual that she ain't with him. Don't know the man with Grady. Never saw him before."

Everett put a kerchief over his nose, the man smelled of liquor and tobacco. He had hired Joe Garner's and his two friends' services in his plan to kidnap Kerry. Everett wanted to stand far away from the foul odors of the three low life men he had hired. It was necessary now and then to abide their less than animal ways to obtain that which he felt was his alone. "I know him. I don't know what he's doing here."

"He trouble?"

"No trouble for you, he's a Brit."

"Don't look like no Brit."

"He looks like he decided to slum a bit."

"Huh?"

"Nothing! You assure me that obtaining Kerry McGillinen won't be a problem."

"Nope, you just have them fifteen thousand dollars available. We'll git her with no trouble." Joe Garner stroked the stubble on his face. "You ain't gonna hurt her, like you promised right?"

"Of course not. I'm just going to take her back to Boston as my wife. She belongs there with me. What does it matter to you anyway? You'll be paid well, the three of you."



"The McGillinen family is powerful here in Nevada. We'd be strung up high and quick if anything happened to the girl."

"Well don't worry about that," the voice said through the kerchief. "You just get her to me and us safely to California."

"You must be powerful in love," Joe Garner chuckled. "Yep, powerful in love to go against the McGillinen family."

"My family is twice as powerful as your McGillinens. Remember that and do your job."

"We'll keep an eye out and bring her to you soon."

"I don't understand why you just can't go get her from the ranch."

"We're greedy, not stupid. The girl's brothers and father are bad enough, but they got them injun Shosones up there protectin em too. I ain't gonna mess with no Shosone."

"Uncivilized living conditions, appalling clothes, and wild Indians. I must take Kerry away from all this savage environment." The Easterner was already contemplating how Kerry would pay for spurning him and returning to this detestable place. As he thought of how she would pay, a grin spread across his mouth and felt his arousal.

"Uh oh!"

"What is it Garner?"

"Them are the boys. They are lookin mean."

"Kerry's brothers?"

"Yep, the three of them. Ayden, Ryan and Dwayne. Wonder what they're doing here and lookin so mean about."

"If the father and brothers are here, why can't you ride to the ranch and get Kerry?" The Easterner divulged with his self-assumed perfect logic.

"I told you," Joe answered in exasperation. "There are cowhands all over that ranch and that doesn't include the hundred or so Shoshone injuns. I ain't messin with no injuns."

"What can those barbarians do to the likes of your kind? You're all heavily armed. Afraid of a bow and arrow."

"If you think it's so God damned easy. Why don't you just fetch the girl away from her injuns?" Joe Garner growled back. "You don't know nothin bout them Shosone injuns."

"Exactly what should I know?"

"Them injuns can out sniff a blood hound huntin dog. When they find you, they cut your flesh off inch by inch, while you're still alive. Besides, they got themselves rifles up on that ranch." Joe continued, "Them injuns can see without light and can walk up behind you without a sound. You think it's so easy. You go get her!"

"You've made your point." The Easterner replied angrily. "Don't make me wait too long. I can't abide this excuse for a country much longer."

"You'll git the Miss Kerry soon enuff."

"In the meantime I will wait for you in Virginia City at the Hotel Harte. I can't abide waiting in this backward slum you call a city."

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"What? You tired of Miss Lily's girls in the back alley already?" Joe Garner asked quietly so his partners didn't hear.

"I've had my fill of those contemptuous excuses for women. Just bring Kerry to me in Virginia City. I'm leaving today. I will give you only one month."

Gray eyes watched as the youngest brother, Dwayne he was told, reined his horse in another direction while Ayden and Ryan talked to some of the townspeople. Soon the older brothers dismounted and tied their horses in front of the general store where Grady and Braden were.

"Pa, I've got something to tell you." Ryan said as he entered the store.

"Ryan, I thought you were going to work the herd today." Grady turned in surprise to answer his son.

"I was, till I found out I should have words with this no good polecat here."

"What are you talking about, Ryan?" Grady demanded.

"Outside." Ryan ordered. "I'm not about to discuss this openly." Ryan saw Mrs. Becker and Mrs. Sims selecting fabric in the corner of the store. He was not about to say anything that those two gossips would use against his little sister. It was bad enough what that no good bastard did to his sister, Kerry. Ryan took Braden's one arm and Ayden took the other. Braden found himself picked up and dragged outside between the buildings. Grady followed suspiciously contemplating if or how the boys found out.

"What the Sam Hill is going on here?" Grady demanded of his sons.

"This son of a bitch compromised our baby sister, Pa." Ayden answered.

"Worse, he got her in the family way, Pa!" Ryan growled.

"I know that boys, let the man go." Grady ordered, knowing his suspicions were correct. The boys did find out. He wanted to find out how they found out.

"What?" Ryan shouted. "You know? Then you know there is going to be a wedding before I cripple the bastard."

Braden remained calm and gave no struggle as Ryan and Ayden held him. Ryan's hand was squeezing Braden's neck and Ayden's hand was pressing Braden's chest forcing his body against the outside wall of the next building.

"Braden has already asked Kerry to marry him and she has accepted. We just wired Braden's parents."

"You what? He did? She did?" Ayden gulped and eased up on the pressure he was applying to Braden's chest.

"Kerry and I will be wed this weekend," Braden strained to tell Ayden and Ryan. Ryan was still applying pressure to Braden's throat. "I happen to love your sister very much."

"Is that why you didn't shoot him, Pa?" Ayden asked Grady. "He's real agreeable isn't he?"



"Glad to hear that, Brit. I sent Dwayne off to fetch the preacher." Ryan released his grip, "You will marry sis today!"

"He and Kerry planned to marry this weekend, Ryan." Grady told his son calmly.

"He got her family way, Pa!" Ryan scowled angrily. "I found Kerry in his bed this morning. If he wants to play husband, he can damn well be one and then I can break a couple of his bones."

"You will do no such thing! Kerry likes him in one piece." Grady shouted at Ryan. "Don't defy me, Ryan. I can still take you on." Grady was still wondering how they found out about Kerry's condition after Ryan revealed he found Kerry in Braden's bed and that really didn't sit well with him either, but he knew they would be married. *God it is hard watching your little girl grow up. Just when did she become a woman?*

"Please don't fight on my account. It was Kerry that wanted to marry this weekend. Personally I would be glad to marry her today." Braden grinned and looked to Grady. "The sooner we get married the happier I will be and more secure to know she is my wife."

The men saw Dwayne and the Reverend approaching and called to them.

Reverend Weems rode up to the McGillinen family in his buggy and pointing at Braden asked, "Are you the groom?"

Braden smiled, "I am. Let's get Kerry and I married today." Braden led the way to the horses.

Grady put his arm on Braden and laughed, "Let's go son. I think you are an over anxious groom."

"That I am, Grady, that I am."

Grady watched as Braden mounted Socks and pulled Ryan back, "Just how did you find out about your sister's condition?"

"Kerry told me, Pa."

"Kerry told you?" Grady asked in surprise.

"Well, we sort of had a fight and she got real upset. I guess it just slipped out." Ryan explained. "Pa, I don't understand how you can accept this?"

"Morning Song is a strong influence. She reminded me that your sister is a woman and this was the prophecy of Tells the Truth." Grady patted his son's back, "I had to accept this regardless my paternal feelings. This is destined and I am afraid any resistance on my part could cause a rift between your sister and myself. I wouldn't let that happen."

"I still don't like it, it just ain't right." Ryan argued.

"I agree, but right or wrong your sister cares for Braden and she hasn't cared for anyone else." Grady explicated.

Ryan refused to be reasonable; instead he mounted his horse and prepared to leave with the family returning to the ranch.

GENEVA'S HOPE



CHAPTER 14

Cold gray eyes followed the McGillinen's and Braden Wessex as they left Ely. He had no interest in them. The Easterner was only concerned with getting Kerry. She would be his, one way or another. He walked to the Wells Fargo office to purchase a stage ride to Virginia City. There he would obtain passage to Carson City and on to California. His plan would be to telegraph ahead for passage on a ship bound for the eastern coast of the United States, primarily Boston Harbor. While he had Kerry on the ship he would teach her to be a good obedient Bostonian wife. *Oh yes, I have plans for you Miss Kerry McGillinen.*

The McGillinen family rode in silence back to the ranch. Reverend Weems rode in his buggy. The silence was broken only when Ryan ordered Dwayne to go to the camp and get Kerry.

"Are you sure she's at the camp?" Dwayne asked his older brother.

"Morning Song was taking Ben there, so I am sure she was planning to go." Ryan answered.

"She's there." Braden informed the youngest McGillinen. "Kerry told me that she promised Fragrant Flower she would show her how to work the sewing machine. Fragrant Flower is going to make the wedding dress for Small Bird."

"She told you all that?" Ryan growled. "Most likely in bed, right?"

Braden did not respond other than a side glance at Ryan.

"What's the matter, Brit? Feeling a little guilty?" Ryan taunted.

That last comment was a bit much, Braden turned to face Ryan. "Being in love with Kerry does not warrant guilt. My feelings are that of serenity, joy, and happiness when I'm with her. Those feelings I have not enjoyed in such thrilling force in my lifetime." Braden took another breath and said, "Kerry is the brightest star to ever shine in Bennett's and my life. Kerry is the most valuable jewel in my universe. I have treasured her and will treasure her. I cannot feel guilt for that." Braden turned back to face the road. Braden whispered to Socks and suddenly his thoroughbred was in full run leaving Ryan behind in a cloud of dust.

"He's getting away!" Ryan shouted and spurred his mustang.



"He's heading for the ranch you lummo!" Ayden chided and took off after Ryan.

Grady kept Runner in gait with Reverend Weems' buggy, "Over anxious boys, aren't they?" Grady asked the Reverend laughing.

Dwayne rode his pinto into the Sosoni' camp and Clear Creek took his pony. Dwayne spoke to him and found out Kerry was in the house of Eye of Hawk. When he entered he saw his sister bending over some type of machine, her legs pushing some type of metal treadle, and soft white buckskin under her hands on a small tabletop that held the noisy machine. "Kerry!" Dwayne called to her.

"Dwayne, what are you doing here? I thought you would be on the range today?"

"Something came up at the ranch today, you're needed back there."

"Is someone hurt?" Kerry got a sick feeling in the pit of her stomach. If Ryan hurt Braden she would personally tongue lash him mercilessly.

"Nope, no one's hurt. It's a family matter. You are needed up at the ranch."

"Are you going to tell me what this is about?" Kerry stubbornly demanded.

"Not yet!" Dwayne answered derisively. "Why don't you get on Maiden and come with me without questions for a change?"

"I won't budge until you tell me what this is about!" Kerry insisted.

"Fine, it's about Braden Wessex." Dwayne answered with his own stubbornness showing. "If you don't want Ryan and Ayden to hurt him, you'd better come with me."

"Of all the stupid...." Kerry shouted furiously. "If they hurt one hair on his head they'll have hell to pay." Kerry stomped out of the cabin, but turned to apologize to Fragrant Flower. "I'm sorry, can you manage the rest?"

Fragrant Flower smiled thoughtfully, "You taught me this machine well, Shining Star. Let the spirits breathe peace in your house."

Kerry understood her blessing and prayed to the Great Spirit for the same blessing. Ryan was a hot head and an overprotective brother at that. She wouldn't let Ryan hurt her Braden. Once Kerry mounted Maiden she rode like the wind back to the ranch. Maiden and Kerry had a special bond. Maiden must have sensed the fear Kerry felt inside. Maiden was pushing her muscles to their limit of endurance and speed. Dwayne's pinto barely kept up.

Old George took Maiden and Kerry jumped off and ran to the house. Bounding up the stairs and past the porch Kerry ran into the house calling for Braden.

Braden walked out of Grady's study responding to Kerry's call. Braden found himself engulfed in Kerry's arms in a breath and being checked all over for blood and bruises.

"Did that big dolt hurt you? What did he say? God, if he hurt you I'll..." Kerry blurted out continuous questions leaving her breathless.



"Calm down sweetheart. It's not good for you or my baby to be so upset." Braden soothed cradling her in his arms.

"You're alright?" Kerry asked looking up into Braden's loving eyes.

"Course." Braden answered as he hugged Kerry. "You won't be if you don't calm down."

"I thought Ryan, well you know he found me, well he knows, I.."
Kerry couldn't get the words out in explanation.

"It's okay sweetheart. I know what happened this morning and everything is fine. There is a little change in plans though."

"What change in plans?" Kerry's heart sank. Kerry was suddenly afraid that Ryan had frightened Braden so much that he wouldn't marry her.

"We can't wait for the weekend to be married." Braden spoke quietly into Kerry's hair, "Your brothers brought the preacher to take care of it today."

"Braden, I'm sorry. I'll explain to Reverend Weems. I'll take care of it. You don't have to be bullied into marrying me."

Braden picked up her chin with his finger. "I'm not sorry. I want to marry you today. I don't want to wait until this weekend. The sooner you are my wife, the happier I will be."

"You mean it?"

"With all my heart."

Kerry hugged Braden's waist tighter.

Alyson came down the stairs with a white satin gown. "Your mother's dress is pressed and ready, and my veil is clean. We can dress you for the wedding."

"So soon? How did you get them ready so soon?" Kerry asked her Auntie Alyson.

"I have cleaned them every six months since your eighteenth birthday. I have been waiting for this day." Alyson answered as she caressed the soft satin with fond memories dancing in her mind.

Braden pulled Kerry off his waist and smiled as he said, "Go get dressed my beautiful bride. I can't wait much longer to make you my wife."

Alyson and Kerry turned and went up to Kerry's room. Kerry was dusty from the ride and wanted a bath before she donned her mother's beautiful wedding gown.

"I want to fetch Bennett. He should be here." Braden directed as Grady came out of the study.

"I'll send Old George to get him and Morning Song." Grady responded. "We'll wait until they get here before we start the ceremony."

"Thank you." Braden offered to Grady in appreciation.

"Come back in the study and have a brandy. It will be some time before Kerry is ready anyway." Grady turned to Ayden. "Pour him a drink while I send George to get Ben and Morning Song."

"Sure, Pa." Ayden answered. "Come back in Braden, I promise I won't bite."

GENEVA'S HOPE



George was saddling his horse when Morning Song rode in with Bennett, Eye of Hawk, Fragrant Flower, Small Bird and Branch that Bends.

Morning Song walked in Grady's study holding Ben's hand. "I thought this would be when Eye of Hawk told me what happened in his home."

Bennett ran into his father's arms. "You look nice Papa, all dressed up."

"Kerry is going to become your Mamma today."

"You marrying Miss Kerry, Papa?"

"Aren't you the smart little boy? Yes, I am. Are you happy?" Braden asked.

"Yep, I love her as much as you do, Papa."

Braden folded Bennett in his arms and a small tear ran down his cheek.

Morning Song took Bennett's hand, "Come Thundercloud, we have to dress you all nice like your Papa."

Braden released his son and ran his fingers through Bennett's hair. "Be a good boy and go with Morning Song."

"I'm not a boy!" Bennett stomped indignantly, "I'm a warrior. I'm Thundercloud."

When Bennett left Grady remarked. "That is a mighty fine boy you have, Braden."

"He's never been happier." Braden declared standing tall with fatherly pride.

"Ben belongs here. He was born to be a part of Geneva." Grady affirmed.

"You are right." Braden agreed. "It's like Bennett didn't come to life until he came to Geneva."

"I think you didn't come to life either until you came to Geneva." Grady added.

"Partially true. I came to life when Kerry entered it."

"Kerry is Geneva and Geneva is Kerry."

"Maybe someday I will understand that." Braden hoped verbally.

"No mystery." Eye of Hawk explained, "The land is woman. A woman gives birth and nurtures its life, feeds it, watches it grow. We protect our women."

"The seasons are life, spring is her birth, summer her growth, autumn old age, and winter is the cold death blanketing all for the new birth in spring." Ryan continued philosophically, "That's why Geneva and woman are the same. They are precious to us. They are loved, honored, cherished and respected."

"Is that why you wanted to kill me? You were protecting her? You thought I dishonored Kerry?" Braden asked Ryan.

"What else could I think? She's an innocent and you, well you are a Brit."



Braden smiled, "I cherish Kerry more than you can begin to imagine. I will do everything in my power to be a good husband and father. I will protect Kerry and our children with my life."

"I expect no less." Ryan retorted.

"Give it up little brother." Ayden chided. "You're building your own spread and soon you'll take a wife. I'll be sure to come down on you with the same words."

"What about you big brother? Any plans yet?" Dwayne taunted.

"I'm not taking the bait little brother," Ayden responded. "I haven't found that someone special. Most likely I'll end up like Pa. I'll find some city sophisticate and fall head over heels."

"You hate the city as much as we do, remember big brother?" Ryan tossed out.

"I was a child, things are different. Now that Kerry is going to be married and Braden here can take over with Pa, well I've been wanting to travel a little."

"You're kidding us? Dwayne inhaled quickly.

"No little brother, I'm not kidding. It has always been me the brains, Ryan the brawn, and you the beauty. Braden can be the brains now."

"Beauty? Beauty? Why you..." Dwayne raised his fist ready to start a fight with Ayden until Grady stepped in between them.

"Stop it boys, no fighting in the house. Auntie Alyson will box your ears and that's after Morning Song skins you good."

Braden watched with delight. He had never witnessed or experienced such strong love and respect in a family. Braden had a brother he had never felt close to, but this type of love was never apparent or felt in their proper British household. Braden relished becoming a part of the McGillinen family. It was true that he was starting to come alive as his own son Bennett had. *Bloody Hell, life never felt so wonderful before. This family and Geneva are life giving and sustaining.*

Several hours and a few drinks later, Reverend Weems walked into the study. "The bride is ready and the parlor prepared."

The men left the study for the parlor.

Braden looked up to the stairway and saw Kerry. He stopped dead in his stride. Kerry looked like a heavenly vision. Braden closed his eyes and opened them again slowly trying to focus.

Grady pulled Braden's arm reprimanding, "Quit gawking boy, she's going to be your wife soon enough."

Braden smiled broadly, "Even a minute is too long to wait." He walked with Grady into the parlor and spying Bennett walked to his son. Braden went down on one knee to be at eye level with Bennett. Braden pulled something from his coat pocket, handed it to Bennett and then whispered. The McGillinen's watched as Bennett's eyes grew wide and bright and then nodded to his father.

GENEVA'S HOPE



In the parlor Reverend Weems stood in front of the fireplace, Braden to his right with Ayden, Ryan and Dwayne serving as grooms and Edward Laurel smiling for his employer and friend serving as best man. Bennett also stood by his father's side. Morning Song stood to the left and watched as little Branch that Bends sprinkled flowers on the carpet while walking to her grandmother. Alyson was sitting at the piano playing the Bride's march. Small Bird walked towards the Reverend and behind her was Grady holding his daughter's arm.

Braden forgot to breathe as he watched Kerry enter with her father. A fine veil covered Kerry's face. A diamond tiara sat on her veiled head sparkling rainbows throughout the room as the setting sun's beams shot through the windows and fell upon the diamond stones. Kerry's white satin dress sparkled with pearls and diamonds hand sewn on intricate lace appliqués. In her hand, Kerry held a bouquet of wild prairie flowers and tea roses from Alyson's garden.

Kerry smiled at Braden seeing the twinkle in his eye. She had no idea how beautiful she looked to him and the family wearing her mother's wedding dress and her Auntie Alyson's veil and tiara. Kerry knew she loved Braden, wanted to be his wife and couldn't believe this was happening. Kerry looked at Ryan and suddenly forgave him for forcing the issue of her honor. *I'm going to be Mrs. Braden Wessex, that's all that matters, and of course I'm going to his baby. Our baby.*

Braden and Kerry were staring so intensely at each other they barely heard the Reverend's words and responded almost unknowingly. They were so lost in each other they felt they were drowning, but it was so pleasant. Their personal bond was broken when Reverend Weems interrupted with asking Braden three times, "The Ring! Man, the ring!"

Groans came from the brothers and Grady.

"Good God, we remembered everything but the ring." Grady mumbled looking for something that would do.

"I didn't." Braden grinned and looked at his son, "It's time, Bennett."

Bennett pulled out three rings, two golden bands and a ring with a diamond the size of cherry pit.

Braden slipped the diamond ring and golden band on Kerry's fingers repeating his vows. Bennett gave Kerry the big golden band and she put it on Braden's finger while repeating her vows. When Reverend Weems told Braden he could kiss the bride he didn't wait while Morning Song lifted the veil, his hands pushed the veil back and encircling her with his strong arms pulling her towards his long hardened body relinquished a passionate kiss that embarrassed the staid Reverend.

Red faced, Reverend Weems cleared his throat, "I present Mr. and Mrs. Braden Wessex." Reverend Weems didn't wait for Braden to release his bride from his kiss. The good Reverend assumed it would be awhile and he didn't want to wait that long.



Ayden, Ryan and Dwayne interrupted Braden's kiss when they pushed him aside. "Enough already. We want to kiss the bride."

Grady pulled Braden aside, "Where did those rings come from?"

"I bought them in New York right after I met Kerry." Braden replied somberly.

"You were so positive she was going to be yours?" Grady asked.

"No, not positive. I was determined." Braden answered.

"Why you son of a bitch." Grady laughed and slapped Braden so hard on the back he lost his wind for a moment.

Morning Song took Grady to task. "Such language on your daughter's wedding day, for shame husband."

"I'm sorry love." Grady said contritely. "I am so happy that Braden is part of the family. He is a man after my own heart. Determined to get what he wants."

Bennett went to Kerry and pulled on her wedding gown. Kerry knelt to look Bennett at his own level, "Yes Ben?"

"Can I call you Mamma now?"

Kerry was so full of happiness, love and joy the tears would not be held back. They flooded her eyes as she held Bennett tightly. "I would be honored if you called me Mamma, Ben."

Marseille Aumond outdid himself in culinary arts for the wedding reception dinner. Champagne imported from France by Aumond from his family was opened for the toast. Escargot and brook trout shared the appetizer trays along with cheese and unleavened bread. Salads and creamed mushroom soup were served prior to Turkey, pheasant, and beef roast as the main entrees. Whipped cream covered cakes and crepe suzettes were dessert.

Braden could not keep his eyes off Kerry and really didn't even notice what he was eating. If he was eating that is.

Noting that Braden was lost in his own world, Ryan took advantage to tease as he watched Braden put a fork of turkey to his mouth. "Let me know if you like the rattlesnake. I shot it myself this morning on the way to get you. It felt good to shoot the snake, not knowing if I could shoot the bigger one I was heading toward."

Braden dropped the fork immediately and Ryan burst out laughing.

"Ryan!" Four voices at the table shouted.

Ryan laughed even more.

After the wedding cake was cut and toasts offered Braden pushed his chair away from the table and took Kerry's hand. "If you excuse us, we have a wedding night to attend."

Ryan got in his last shot, "Seems to me that was done already awhile back judging by my sister's condition."

Ayden cuffed Ryan on the shoulder, "Enough harassing little brother. They're married, have a little respect for the new member of the family."

GENEVA'S HOPE



"Like Hell!" Ryan roared. "You better take care of her."

"The Reverend!" Alyson admonished her nephew.

"Sorry Auntie, sorry Reverend Weems." Ryan responded but was unrepentant.

Reverend Weems nodded and watched as the newly married couple walked up the stairs. Kerry threw her bouquet and of course Small Bird caught it.

Edward put his arm around Small Bird, "You're next, only two more days for us."

Small Bird smiled and they were soon lost in each other's eyes.

Kerry and Braden's wedding night was magnificent. They did not rush this time; it was slow, tender and passionate. They didn't get much sleep either. The sun peeked through the windows before either were sated and fell asleep. The family didn't bother to wake them up. It was their honeymoon.

CHAPTER 15

Grant Wessex opened the telegram sent from his son; his eyes widened and rose quietly from his chair at his desk still clutching the unopened telegram from his friend, Grady, that he had received with Braden's telegram. Leaving his library in Morgan Castle and walking in quick long strides, he was soon in the parlor of the old estate.

"Celeste." Grant addressed as he entered the room.

"Yes?" The delicate, gray eyed, middle-aged woman responded as she looked to her husband; her eyes leaving the intricate needlework she was working on.

"I just received a telegram from the Colonies." Grant said walking toward his wife with the open telegram.

"Is it Braden? Everything is all right?" A telegram from Braden was not uncommon but it was unusual for Grant to bring it to her in the parlor during the day. Grant normally waited until after dinner to discuss news of their son, grandson, and their travels abroad.

"I can't believe it!" Grant coughed finding himself a bit choked and handing the telegram to Celeste.

"Oh God, what happened?" Celeste gasped in fear of bad news.

"I didn't mean to frighten you, my pet." Tall dark haired and blue-eyed Grant Wessex said when he placed the telegram in her tiny hand. "You must read this. I can't believe it."

Celeste took the paper with trembling hands and read the telegram once and then again and again. "I can tell you that I cannot believe it either, my pet."

"Grady's daughter?" Celeste looked questioningly at her husband. "What is she like Grant?"

"Ten years ago she was a pigtailed little girl that loved boys clothes, boys games, shot, roped, and enjoyed ranching chores with her father and big brothers."

"A barbarian for Braden?"

"Love, that was ten years ago. I have no idea what she has grown into, but she did resemble her mother and Ashley was beautiful woman, besides Ashley's sister Alyson came to raise the children and she was a genteel woman."

GENEVA'S HOPE



"But marriage?" Celeste breathed out quietly, "Since that tragedy three years ago Braden hasn't even looked at another woman. You know several women tried to win his heart and failed completely."

"The reason he went to visit Grady McGillinen was to get away from the haunting tragedy."

"I know love, but a Yank? What will people say?" Celeste was still mulling over a scene of her son walking in London with a breech clothed Yankee savage.

"I don't really care what they say, Celeste. The boy deserves some happiness. Braden was a walking dead man for three years and our grandson, Bennett, became so sullen, moody and unhappy. Bennett needs a mother."

"Of course you are right, love. I would just feel better if I knew what she was like before he brings her home." Celeste sighed. "Bennett needs a mother, but a Yank, a boyish Yank?"

"It's been ten years since I visited Grady, perhaps it is time to visit again." Grant mulled stroking his chin with his hand. "Then I can ascertain what Kerry is and the propriety to bring her to England or not."

"This time I will accompany you. We shall visit with Braden's new bride together." Celeste declared in determination. "A little tutoring might be helpful to prepare his new wife for the ton."

"What of this change of heart? You never wanted to visit with me before." Grant stood straight and agog with his wife's plan.

"Before I had children here to attend. Both of us are free now." Celeste replied succinctly.

"I will prepare for our departure. We could leave in say a day?" Grant asked encouragingly.

"We could. I am anxious to meet our new daughter in law."

Grant opened and quickly read the telegram from Grady McGillinen.

"I also received this telegram from Grady. He is delighted with the two being in love and looks forward to raising our grandson, Bennett. It seems everyone there seems to love him already." Grant related the contents of that telegram to Celeste.

"I'll be ready by tomorrow morning." Celeste stated adamantly rising from the parlor to begin packing. Celeste would not surrender her favorite grandson quickly to colonial western savages.

Grant Wessex chuckled. *This will be interesting, a battle of the grandparents.* Grant understood his wife's chagrin immediately, he felt somewhat the same, but he also knew what a good man Grady McGillinen was.

Two days later Braden and Kerry Wessex witnessed the joining of Edward Laurel and Small Bird. It was a lovely ceremony performed by the Shaman Tall Tree and the Reverend Weems in the open valley of Geneva. Small Bird wore a lovely white three-skinned dress with long fringes on the sleeve. The dress made for her by Fragrant Flower and the new machine. Beads. Silver and copper conches, and quillwork decorated the dress with holy

symbols. Small Bird wore matching leggings and moccasins. Edward wore his best suit. The contrast of the two societies was completely lost in the love shared between the bride and groom.

Little Willow stood by her mother's side clinging to her dress not really understanding what was happening during the ceremony. Edward reached down and picked up the little girl in his arms after the words were completed and held her to the delight of her mother and her people.

Braden kept his arm around Kerry for the ceremony and held her tightly as Kerry wept in joy for her dear friend.

"I know they shall be as happy as we are, my love." Braden whispered in Kerry's ear.

"That is such great happiness." Kerry replied looking up into her new husband's loving eyes.

"This would be a good time to tell you my news." Braden said quietly.

"What is that?" Kerry asked returning her attention to the newly married couple.

"Papa and Mama are coming to visit us and Geneva."

"What? When?" Kerry turned around to look at Braden in a start.

"They sent a telegram yesterday, the day before they set sail. They are on their way." Braden answered taking Kerry in his protective arms.

"When will they arrive?"

"My calculations estimate it will be about three to four weeks, depending on how long they wish to stay in New York City."

"There is so much to do. I have much to prepare." Kerry answered nervously.

"Papa has been here many times, there is nothing for you to do." Braden said as he held Kerry even tighter. "Mamma will be happy with Geneva. Besides, I don't want you to overdo."

"Are you talking about your baby, or me?" Kerry teased.

"Both. I vowed to take care of you and our children. I intend to keep that vow."

"Children?"

"As many as you will give me." Braden grinned wickedly. "We're only starting with this one."

"In that case you need be prepared for a large family." Kerry laughed and gave a playful punch to Braden's arm.

"You couldn't make me happier." Braden returned in laughter. "I am sure we will keep each other quite occupied every night."

Kerry glanced up to Braden's eyes with her adoring ones and immediately brought him back to the very important subject at hand that he had carefully diverted her from.

"I remember your Papa's visits, but I don't remember your Mamma. Did she ever visit with your Papa, or least come to the States?"

"Mamma never came to the Colonies with Papa."

"Colonies?"

GENEVA'S HOPE



"Sorry love, that's we call your States."

"That's funny, we haven't been the Colonies since the Revolutionary War."

"Old habits, love." Braden apologized touching the tip of Kerry's nose playfully.

"You must tell me everything that your Mamma enjoys in England. I want her trip here to be wonderful for her," Kerry insisted. "Your Mamma but have some of those residual old habits of thought."

"Meeting you will be wonder enough. I don't want you to overdo. This is a delicate time for you." Braden persisted in worry.

"I won't."

"Promise?"

"I promise I will not overdo. Now will you tell me what your Mamma enjoys?"

"Later, after we celebrate with Edward and Small Bird."

"Oh all right. Where is Ben?"

"Where else? With Grady and Morning Song."

"That's only because Auntie Alyson gave him up this morning."

"Bennett is being spoiled terribly." Braden commented.

"It's magnificent isn't it?" Kerry smiled with glee.

"Yes, it is." Braden hugged Kerry warmly. "Our child will be just as spoiled and it pleases me."

"You will tell me everything your mother likes?"

"I will, would you please give over on that subject? Look Edward and Small Bird are leaving the site, it is time to eat and celebrate!"

"Yes, until they leave for their quiet time." Kerry responded wistfully.

"Like a honeymoon as we call it?"

"Yes, like that."

"We didn't take one." Braden noted unhappily.

"We've celebrated our honeymoon since we met in New York." Kerry reminded him.

"Yes, but we will still have our honeymoon when our child is grown more in you."

Braden and Kerry started walking out of the meadow back to the camp for the feast.

"What honeymoon will we have?"

"I intend to take you back to England when Mamma and Papa return. It will be winter in Geneva while we are England."

"Perhaps I will meet my cousins and uncle there." Kerry said thoughtfully.

"Perhaps, and we might look at your duchy." Braden remembered for Kerry.

"I forgot all about that. I never dreamed of ever leaving Geneva."

"You won't leave Geneva. We won't leave Geneva. At least not for long." Braden told her for reassurance.



"I'm glad you are so understanding."

"Do I get a reward for that?"

"Of course you will, husband."

"I can't wait until tonight, wife." Braden snickered, "I will remind you of the due in our bed, wife."

Kerry and Braden walked into camp a few minutes later after a long kiss in the shadow of a large oak tree.

"Mamma, Mamma, come see me! Watch what I can do." Bennett bragged as he grabbed Kerry's hand and pulled her to a clearing behind the cabin of Eye of Hawk. There he picked up a bow and quiver of arrows. Bennett put the quiver of arrows over his shoulder and took the little bow. He held the bow and placed an arrow between his fingers as he pulled the bowstring taut and with his arms straight he released the arrow and it hit the target of straw.

"Well done Thundercloud." Eye of Hawk praised, he was watching Bennett and followed them to the back of his lodge. "You do well as a warrior."

Bennett beamed as he looked at his parents. "I learn fast, Papa."

"Indeed you do, son." Braden admired. "Soon you will teach me."

The couple looked at the young boy, Kerry elated to see Bennett so happy and proud. It was a good thing to bring Bennett here and here he will have a good chance to grow and learn as she had.

"Come Thundercloud, it is time to eat and celebrate such happiness." Eye of Hawk ordered. "We must attend the feast!"

Bennett put the quiver and bow on his back and strutted to Kerry imitating the walk of Eye of Hawk and Little Bear. Upon approaching Kerry he lifted up his arms and understanding what he meant, Kerry scooped him up and carried him. Kerry smothered him with kisses as they neared the table for the feast.

At the end of the day the Wessex and McGillinen family returned to the ranch house and retired. Edward and Small Bird left for their private place and Willow stayed with Grady and Morning Song. That evening Bennett shared his nursery with Branch that Bends. They slept snuggled together in the same bed.

In the morning Kerry woke up in the now familiar warm embracing arms of her husband.

"Good morning." Kerry smiled into his deep sparkling blue eyes. "What are your plans today?"

"Beyond making love to you?" Braden teased his wife fondling a handful of inviting soft breast.

"Yes, beyond that." Kerry giggled.

"Grady and I are going into Steptoe Valley to look at wild mustangs."

"The phantom stallion again." Kerry mused.



"The phantom again." Braden smiled. "Grady told me all about him. I can't wait to see that horseflesh."

"He is a magnificent animal." Kerry agreed. "I was fortunate to have seen him several times."

"What are your plans today my precious gem?" Braden returned the question.

"Morning Song is going to take Ben and Willow to the camp while Auntie Alyson and I go into Ely."

"Not by yourself you aren't. Two women unescorted traveling alone here is forbidden." Braden sat up in bed defiantly.

"Forbidden? By whom? By you?" Kerry responded changing her tonal inclination as well.

"Of course by me. Wait until tomorrow, I'll go with you. Why are you going anyway?" Braden argued with assumed spousal authority.

"I spoke with Auntie Alyson during the wedding celebration after you told me your parents are coming to Geneva. She is going to help me prepare for them."

"That is ridiculous. Geneva has more to offer than even the grandest estates in England. You needn't do anything for their arrival." Braden disputed with finality.

"That is where you are wrong! Auntie Alyson told me about England and of course there are even differences in luxuries between here and New York."

"Papa used to come here, remember?" Braden countered.

"But your Mama never did." Kerry protested.

"That's true, but I don't think she is coming here to compare estates and culture."

"Why then?" Kerry teased putting her finger on Braden's lips.

"To meet you." Braden chuckled and pulled Kerry close to him. "I was always her favorite. She wants to make sure you're good enough for me."

"Why you egotistical, self centered..."

"What is it Kerry?" Braden asked when she stopped suddenly.

"What if she hates me?" Kerry asked biting her lower lip.

"That my precious is impossible." Braden pulled her close to him and they snuggled before they arose from bed to dress for the day.

Alyson was at breakfast with Grady, Morning Song, Bennett and Willow. It was obvious how much they enjoyed their grandchildren and the grandchildren enjoyed them. Dwayne, Ryan and Ayden had already left for the day to check the herds.

Braden came down to breakfast first and immediately addressed Alyson, "Kerry tells me that you will be going into Ely today for shopping."

"We plan to do that, yes. I would prefer to go to St. Louis or visit Audrey in New York to do this shopping, but Kerry won't leave your side."

"I wouldn't let her anyway. I couldn't bear to be without her for a day."



"Not yet anyway." Grady teased.

Braden grinned back to Grady in affirmation. Braden then turned back to Alyson, "I don't think either of you should go without an escort. If you wait until tomorrow, I'll come with you." Braden was hoping he could persuade Alyson Jameson to wait for a day so he could accompany them. He somehow felt it would be better if they waited a day for them. Deep inside Braden had misgivings about this trip to Ely.

"We do have an escort, George is driving the carriage, and you don't mind if we borrow yours do you?"

"Of course not and I am glad to hear George is going with you." Braden relented.

"We needed some supplies, so George volunteered." Grady clarified.

Just then Kerry walked downstairs looking radiant after a brief bout with morning sickness.

"Kerry! Go right back upstairs and change. I will not go to town with you looking like that." Alyson snapped as she stared at the soft doeskin fringed shirt and trousers Kerry wore.

"What's the matter with what I look like?" Kerry baited, knowing full well Auntie Alyson hated it when she wore the doeskins or range pants.

"You know fully well what I mean young lady," Alyson stormed. "You are a young lady, about to be a mother, not a little pretty boy!"

"Now Alyson, don't get in a tetter. You know you always lose this argument." Grady suggested softly.

"Well this time she is a married woman!" Alyson protested vehemently.

"That won't never mind and you know it." Grady responded.

Alyson turned to Braden for support and pleaded, "Braden?"

"I want Kerry to be comfortable, and besides I think she looks beautiful." Braden answered and gave Kerry a little kiss on her cheek as she sat next to him.

"I give up! I truly do!" Alyson sighed in exasperation.

"Now Alyson. You made a lady of her; the clothes really don't matter here. She dresses like a princess in New York and you know it." Grady reminded his sister in law.

"I just thought it would be different now, with being married, the baby, and Braden's parents visit."

"It won't be different. I still am what I am, and although I want Braden's parents to love me as I love their son, they will have to take me face value."

"And they will love you as much as I do!" Braden added taking her hand in his and squeezing it.

"And love you as much as I do, Mamma!" Bennett chirped in.

Grady tousled his new grandson's hair and smiled broadly.

A short time later Grady and Braden left for the valley, Morning Song took Branch that Bends and Bennett to the camp, and Alyson left in the carriage

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with Kerry riding Maiden to Ely. George was driving the carriage and laughing at the inefficient transportation. It looked nice but was impractical; he would have preferred the buckboard.

Alyson tried to get one more excuse to Kerry before they left, "Did you think of the baby? A woman doesn't ride a horse in your present condition."

Kerry just rolled her eyes and smiled, "It's early in term."

Alyson entered the carriage with an 'Hmpfh.'

CHAPTER 16

As Braden was watching the mustangs, he suddenly had a feeling of dread. He suddenly thought of Laura and how she went off riding that day. *Why am I thinking that? Is it because Laura couldn't wait until the next day so we could ride together, just like Kerry? Is it because Kerry is early in her pregnancy like Laura was?* The shudders went up his spine and he wanted to turn and go to Ely. Braden contained himself reminding himself that was a silly notion and continued on with Grady to hopefully view the beautiful wild stallion.

"Look at that thing!" Jeb said as he stared at the carriage coming down the street in Ely as he jabbed Joe Garner in the rib cage.

"I'll be a horned toad, if that ain't the purtiest buckboard I ever did see." Seger agreed.

The carriage then came to a halt and they noticed the two women.

"Son of a bitch!" Joe Garner exclaimed as he saw Kerry in her doeskins dismount from her horse, Maiden. "She's alone and just in time. Ole lover boy sent a telegram that either we git her this week or he ended our contract and he would hire some one else."

"Let's go git her!" Jeb snarled as he started forward to cross the street.

"Not yet you idiot! The street is too crowded. We'd be noticed." Joe growled as he grabbed Jeb by the collar. "We'll wait to see where they're goin and then wait fer the right time."

"The Easterner is right, yer too damn careful! Yer going to blow this for us." Seger complained.

"You'll appreciate it when we collect the money and git outta here without hanging or gettin shot for takin that girl." Joe snapped at the two men. "You two are forgettin how important her family is around these parts, and how mean her brothers can be."

"All right, have it yer way," Seger grumbled.

"We'll stay close and watch them." Joe ordered.



The carriage had stopped in front of the Ely Mercantile. Kerry tied Maiden by the post in front and George tied the horses pulling the carriage next to Maiden. George then went to help Alyson down from the carriage. The two women went into the mercantile and George went to the General Store down the street to get foodstuffs.

"Look, they're alone now." Joe Garner advised his companions. "We'll wait on the porch till they come out and then we will git her. Have the rope and gags ready."

"We takin the ant?" Seger questioned.

"Hell no, just gittin her outta the way and givin us enough time to skeedaddle." Joe Garner enlightened his less than intelligent comrades.

Joe Garner had Jeb and Seger bring and tie their horses including one for Kerry in the alley between the mercantile and the blacksmith shop. Jeb untied Maiden and the carriage under the directions of Joe Garner. The men then took their positions on the porch and now fully informed of Joe Garner's abduction plan, they waited for the women to leave the store.

It had been a long wait, two or three hours, since Kerry and her Auntie Alyson were reviewing many catalogs, purchasing items and getting reassurances of timely delivery.

Alyson was the first one to walk out of the mercantile and Seger grabbed her pointing a gun in her back and warned, "Don't scream and you and yer purty little niece won't git hurt."

Alyson complied and remained silent but Kerry saw the terror in her auntie's eyes and recognized the man behind her. Instinctively Kerry went for her gun, "Seger, what are you doing with Auntie Alyson?"

A hand grabbed Kerry's just as it reached her gun holster. "Now, now little lady, we don't want any trouble here." Joe Garner took her gun and threw it to Jeb. He pointed the barrel of his gun at Kerry's back. "Let's go quietly to the alley and no one will git hurt."

Kerry and Alyson obeyed. As soon as they were out of sight Kerry turned to glare at Jeb, "Just what is the meaning of this?"

"Someone feels mighty strongly toward you little lady and he is paying us good to bring you to him. He promised us no harm would come to you."

Before Kerry could offer a larger amount a gag was placed over her mouth and her eyes widened in rage.

"Better put them ropes on might quick there, Joe. She looks madder than hell!"

Seger had already bound and gagged Alyson and laid her gently on the ground. "She'll be okay until we can git from here."

Just then George walked by and saw the women and the men in the alley. "What the Sam Hill is goin on here?" George asked as he walked up to them with his gun drawn. George didn't see Jeb in the shadows and the next thing George knew, it was black and he was unconscious with a blow to his head falling head first to the dust path in the alley.



Joe Garner mounted Kerry on the extra horse and tied her hands to the saddle horn. "Hold onto the reins while I git her horse and them carriage horses outta here," He said to Seger.

Walking up to the horses he slapped them hard and they took off. Maiden sensed something was wrong and high tailed it back to Geneva ranch, the carriage horses followed her lead.

Kerry was in a daze, *Abducted! Why?* What reason is this, that some man felt strong for her? *What is going on?* Kerry watched as Joe Garner gathered her reins and the four of them took off in a fast gallop from behind the mercantile.

I've got to remain calm; I have to remember all the things I learned from the Sosoni', especially how to behave as a captive. I must comply until I find a weakness. God, protect my baby. Kerry remembered she was pregnant she had to be very calm. Would this hard ride hurt the baby?

The four rode hard until sundown and then stopped in a heavily wooded area. Kerry realized they were heading southwest. *Calm yourself Kerry think hard. Pa and my brothers will come after me. They'll bring Tracker and he'll bring Hunter. I have to leave a good trail for them. Hunter will smell anything of mine. Yes, that's what I'll do. I'll leave a trail. Auntie's all right, she'll be found. They didn't kill George and promised I wouldn't get hurt.* Kerry's thoughts were interrupted.

"Well little lady we can take this off for a time. You can scream yer lungs out here. No one will hear you except the coyotes." Jeb chuckled.

"I have to relieve myself. Would you mind untying me?" Kerry asked quietly.

"Nope, you'll have to make do as is, and go over in that brush so we can still see you." Jeb said sternly.

"I can't have any privacy?" Kerry objected angrily.

"That's private enough, little lady. With them buckskins you have on you can manage it with your hands tied that away."

"Fine!" Kerry answered in a pique and stomped over to the bushes.

An hour later Joe Garner untied her hands and Seger handed her a plate of food they had fixed over the campfire. They kept their guns out pointing at her as she ate.

"You're a good cook, Seger." Kerry offered meekly. "I'm glad I am to be fed."

"We're hired to bring you in good condition." Seger responded.

"Then why point guns at me, are you going to shoot me if I try to run?" Kerry taunted.

"Don't push little lady. Your man wants you in good condition but if we have to we'll hurt you and we don't wanna do that." Joe Garner warned her.

"Who is this man?" Kerry wanted to know what was happening and why.

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"You'll find out soon enuff." Seger chuckled. "He shore has powerful feelins for you."

"I won't find out who he is until you deliver me?" Kerry asked trying to control her mounting anger.

"Yep, that's the way he wants it." Seger answered.

"Wants to surprise you with his feelins towards you." Joe said grinning.

"How much did he offer you?" Kerry asked controlling her seething anger. *Abducted by a man that wants to court me? How preposterous!*

"He's paying each of us five thousand dollars." Seger bragged.

"I'll pay you ten thousand each." Kerry offered hoping their greed would give her freedom.

"Can't do that now. No turning back. We took you and that puts guilt on our necks. No thank you missy. We will be long gone and outta this State before they come lookin fer us." Joe Garner retorted.

Fine! Kerry thought. Now I have to come up with another plan. Leaving a trail, that's what I'll do. I'll start with my comb. Bennett gave it to me. Certainly Hunter will find it and Pa will recognize it. I told him about it and how much it meant to me. Will Braden come? Braden will be worried out of his mind. Why don't you tell them you are married? Because I am afraid it wouldn't make any difference. They might even hurt Braden. Make me a widow.

"Do either of you have a comb? I would like to comb this mess my hair is in."

"Sure do, " Seger said and reached in his pocket to pull it out for her. "Brand new one, jest bought it yesterday."

"Thanks!" Kerry acknowledged and pulled out the ruby comb placing it in her lap Kerry began combing her hair until the tangles were gone and then tied it behind her head in a knot. She returned the comb to Seger who watched her while Joe Garner took her dinner dishes back to the campfire.

"Need a thong tie for yer hair, little lady?" Seger asked politely.

"Yes, do you have one?"

"Right here." Seger answered as he pulled out a leather thong from his vest pocket. "Time fer you to git some sleep. Bundle up cuz the nights are gittin cold."

Kerry tied the leather thong around her hair and then started getting up. No one noticed as Kerry stood and let the comb drop to the ground. *They didn't see it. Good!*

"Here you go, little lady." Seger said as he tossed her a bedroll and an extra blanket.

After Kerry arranged everything, and put the bedroll over the fallen comb. Seger ordered her to lie down in the bedroll and he retied her hands and tied her feet with more leather tie thongs he had in his vest. When he was finished he covered her with the bedroll and the extra blanket. Seger then went over to a log and rolled a cigarette. It was obvious to Kerry that Seger was the



first watch. There was nothing else for her to do but try to get a good nights rest even though she was trussed up like a calf for branding.

George finally came to and untied Alyson Jameson. "What happened?" George asked as he rubbed the knot in his head.

"I truly don't know other than those beasts took Kerry." Alyson bristled as she dusted off her dress.

"We got to get to Grady." George snarled. "Which way did they go?"

"I don't know. I was lying here facing the main street." Audrey complained as they walked to get the carriage. "It's gone!" she shrieked.

"Maiden is gone too!" George exclaimed. "Let's go get the Marshall."

George turned and started walking down the street headed towards the jailhouse when Alyson noticed the blood on the back of George's shirt and the blood caked on the back of his head.

"George, you're hurt. You need to be attended by a doctor."

"First lets get the Marshall and let him know about Kerry. We need to get to Grady, and pshaw, are you hurt any?" George questioned Alyson Jameson glancing over her person.

"Only my pride and dress." Alyson replied as she continued smoothing the wrinkles and patting the dust off the day dress of yellow butterfly pattern on deep brown taffeta.

"Well this little knock on the head can wait. How long was I out?" George asked gingerly touching the large knot on the back of his head.

Alyson looked at her brooch watch, "About three hours."

At the same time George and Alyson were walking to the Marshall's office, Braden and Grady were returning to Geneva ranch. They had been talking about the mustangs and Grady had shown Braden his mustangs that the hands were currently breaking before they returned.

"The mustangs aren't brought here until they're broke." Grady was telling Braden when they both turned to the sound of a running horse. "Maiden!"

"God no!" Braden choked, as he turned white and slid off his horse. Braden started walking unsteadily to Kerry's horse.

Grady noticed Braden's pallor and unsteady gait, it looked like Braden just might pass out. Grady jumped off his horse and walked to Braden grabbing his arm to steady him. "What is it boy?"

"It's just like Laura." Braden gagged on bent up emotion.

"What are you talking about?"

"Laura was only a few months pregnant, I asked her not to ride alone. I had business to take care of that day and I asked her to wait until the next day. She wouldn't. I loved her so much I could deny her nothing." Braden took a deep breath to continue, "Her horse came back and I went to find her. She had been thrown because a bolt of lightening had spooked her horse. I found her. Grady, her neck was broken. It's the same thing all over again." Braden's eyes



quickly filled up with pools of water about to flood over onto his grief stricken face.

"No it isn't Braden. This is Kerry, not Laura! If something happened Alyson would have told me. Kerry wasn't completely alone either, George and Alyson are with her." Grady tried to assure Braden and quell his own fears.

For the moment Braden felt a little relieved until they heard more noise and a carriage pulled in with two horses galloping. They both ran to the carriage, it was Braden's, but no one was driving it and there was no one in it. Now Grady was concerned and frightened. The horses were all lathered; they had been in a full run for some distance. Grady called to Malachi and Nathan to rub down the horses and put them in their stalls. Without words, Braden and Grady both mounted at the same time and headed towards Ely. On their way they ran into Grady's three boys and after a brief explanation the five of them headed towards Ely. Not far from the town they met Deputy Cliff Riggs.

Cliff reared up his horse next to Grady McGillinen. "Grady, is that Braden Wessex?" Cliff asked as he pointed to Braden.

Braden's heart must have stopped for a moment; he knew he didn't want to breathe. *God it can't be Kerry, not again.*

"Yep, what is it Cliff, what's happened? Maiden and the carriage came back to the ranch. We know something is up." Grady answered shielding the Deputy Marshall from his own fear. "Why do you want to know if that's Braden Wessex?"

Cliff turned to look at Braden and noted his white pallor. It had changed that fast from normal to white, "I'm sorry Mr. Wessex and you too, Grady. I was sent to fetch you."

"Is Kerry..? I mean did she..?" Braden was strangling on each word and he couldn't say it, he didn't want to think it. Not this time.

"Marshall Ewal wants you to come to Ely."

"Damn it! What happened?" Grady growled, his patience totally gone.

"According to your man and Miss Alyson, your daughter and his wife have been abducted." Cliff answered as factually as he could.

Abducted!" Braden shouted.

"Who the hell would have the nerve to take our sister?" Ryan roared.

"Everyone around here knows we'd kill any bastard that laid a hand on our sister." Dwayne snapped.

"I was only sent to fetch you and let you know what happened. Other than that I know no more than you do." Cliff responded.

"George and Alyson said someone abducted Kerry?" Grady asked for acknowledgement. He wanted assurance he heard it right.

"Yep, said three men jumped them in front of the mercantile and took Kerry off on a horse all tied and gagged."

"Why? Why abduct Kerry?" Braden asked in bewilderment and unbelief. "If it's money they can have everything I possess."

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"Miss Alyson said that some man said he felt strong fer her and wanted her." Cliff answered, "That's all I know."

"Ayden, go to Eye of Hawk's camp and bring Tracker to Ely. Tell Morning Song what happened." Grady ordered. "Let 's go!" was Grady's next order and they all went full gallop to Ely.



CHAPTER 17

Alyson ran into Grady's arms sobbing as soon as he entered Marshall Ewal's office. "Grady, thank God. They took Kerry!"

Gently stroking Alyson to calm her and his own fear Grady asked quietly, "They took her? Do you know who they are?"

"I only heard that one was Seger because Kerry had recognized him, the other was called Joe, I don't know who the third one was." Alyson answered trying to control her hysteria. Alyson's voice was scratchy and her breathing hard with turmoil.

"It's Joe Garner's bunch, Seger Chatel and Jeb Stone." Kent Ewal told Grady as he sat in his chair looking over posters that had just arrived in the mail.

"Joe Garner? Why would he take Kerry?" Ryan questioned. "That poor excuse for a ranch hand never had any interest in Kerry before."

"Who are Seger and Jeb? I never heard of them." Dwayne asked Marshall Ewal.

"They were hired by the Wicker Ranch, and let go shortly after." Kent grinned to Ryan, "they were poor excuses for ranch hands just like Joe Garner."

"Grady, I heard them say they were being paid to bring Kerry to some man that had strong feelings for her." Alyson broke in between gentle the gentle strokes on her head by Grady.

"Who would do that, Kent?" Ryan snarled he was losing his patience. "There isn't any man in this country that would touch Kerry and not know they would have to face us."

"We don't know Ryan, we were hoping you could tell us since you were your sister's self appointed bodyguard, or even you Mr. Wessex." Kent looked at Braden, "have any ideas?"

"I met Kerry in New York not quite two months ago. I never knew any of her beaus here and Kerry and I never discussed that." Braden replied. "I only met one in New York. Nasty man."

"Just who was it?" Kent questioned.

"It was Everett Mann, but he's in New York." Braden answered.

"Kerry told me about him." Grady interjected, "she didn't like him very much and he wouldn't leave her alone. He sent her letters at the ranch nearly every day after she left Boston when she graduated from school."

"But, he's in New York." Braden countered.



"Do you know that for sure?" Kent asked. "You're here and from your accent you come from England."

Braden looked at the Marshall in exasperation, "This is wasting time, why aren't we going out after them?"

"For once I agree with the Brit." Ryan scowled. "Let's get going!"

"For God's sake Ryan and you, Braden, it's almost sundown. We can't go hunting in the dark." Grady stated angrily not covering his own frustration. "Why do you think I sent Ayden to bring Tracker?"

"You sent for Tracker and his wolf dog?" Kent asked Grady raising his voice.

"I don't have much choice do I? We have to have the best to find Kerry especially with the head start they will have on us." Grady responded heatedly.

"Well if you got Tracker, I guess there is no use for me to get a posse together." Kent said calmly and rose from the chair by his desk. "I am coming with you, Grady."

"You're welcome too!" Grady answered knowing even he would need the cool hand of Kent Ewal to stop him from killing the men that took his Kerry. *God help them if they hurt her.* "We should get rooms at the Ely Hotel and get a good night's rest. Tracker and Ayden will be here by dawn. We'll leave then."

"That will be another day for them to be ahead of us!" Braden protested angrily.

"Braden, they have to bed down for the night like we do." Grady reminded Braden.

"I say we get going now!" Ryan growled in frustration.

"Where?" Grady roared back, "do we go east or west, north or south? Can you see in the dark, a moonless night like tonight? You want to waste time going the wrong way? We wait for Tracker and then we find them." Grady's reply left no argument. "Tomorrow you will take Alyson and George back to the ranch, Dwayne."

"Pa, I want to go after Kerry!" Dwayne protested.

"Where is George?" Grady asked suddenly realizing he wasn't in the Marshall's office.

"He is at the doc's." Kent answered. "He got hit pretty hard on the head. I'm told he needed a few stitches."

"Dwayne, go fetch George and bring him to the hotel." Grady ordered his youngest son.

"But Pa, I want to help find sis."

"I need you to take George and Alyson back to the ranch and I need someone to stay there and protect them. That's your job and no arguments."

"Why can't Ayden do it? He's the brain." Dwayne was still protesting.

"Ayden is the oldest and is the best and most trusted friend of Tracker. You know Tracker doesn't trust many whites." Grady reminded Dwayne.

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"Then why can't Ryan take care of George and Auntie Alyson? He's the hot head anyway." Dwayne started grasping for straws to help find his sister.

"I may need Ryan's strength." Grady stated firmly. "No more Dwayne. You will obey me."

Alyson left Grady's arms and the petite woman walked to her young nephew, "I want you Dwayne. I need you to take care of me."

"Unfair Auntie." Dwayne smiled to her and took her hand, "Let's go to doc's and get old George."

"Good boy, we'll meet you at the hotel." Grady said quietly. "Braden and Ryan, come with me, we'll get rooms. We need to get a good night's rest."

"Don't forget to fetch me when Tracker gets here." Kent reminded Grady.

"We will." Grady answered with a promise and then left to get the rooms.

Morning Song was about to return to the ranch with Branch that Bends and Little Thundercloud when she saw Ayden riding hard and fast towards her. Instinctively she knew something was wrong. "Little Thundercloud, take Branch that Bends to Fragrant Flower and stay there until I come and get you."

Bennett nodded and took Willow's hand; he led her to Eye of Hawk's lodge and Fragrant Flower. Bennett told Fragrant Flower what Morning Song had said and Fragrant Flower took them to join her sons in play while she made the dinner.

Ayden dismounted and ran to Morning Song, "Where is Tracker?"

"He is in his lodge with his family. It is near the sleeping of the sun and time for family to eat."

"I need him." Ayden told his step mother excitedly.

Morning Song grabbed his arm, "what is the trouble my second son?"

"Kerry has been abducted, we don't know why. Alyson said some man with feelings hired men to take her to him."

"I go with you to Tracker." Morning Song replied as she walked side by side to the cabin of Tracker.

Together Morning Song and Ayden entered Tracker's lodge. Tracker was sitting cross-legged on the rough cabin floor holding his young son, Trail Rider, and his daughter, Quiet Dawn by his side. "Ayden, my friend. You are troubled as you come to me." Tracker said in Sосoni'. Tracker had learned the American Language in an Indian school and he was beaten badly if he ever slipped and spoke his native tongue. It was because of this past he now as a grown man and in the safety of Geneva refused to speak anything but Sосoni'.

"My friend, my sister Kerry has been taken and harm may come to her. I ask you to bring Hunter and help me find her before they harm her." Ayden pleaded in the broken Sосoni' he had learned from Morning Song and the times he had spent in camp with Tracker, Eye of Hawk and Little Bear when they were younger.



"You have been and are my friend, Ayden. I have watched Shining Star as she has grown and the love our people have for her. I too have a fondness for your little sister. Hunter and I will find her for you." Tracker told Ayden. "You will have these evil men in your hand to punish. It is my oath to you."

Morning Song bowed her head to Tracker, "We are grateful."

"Mother of my chief need not bow her head to me." Tracker said speaking to Morning Song. "Your second son and my friend will leave before the moon retires and the sun rises. Hunter will come with us." Tracker looked at the wolf dog sleeping in the corner of his lodge. The wolf sensed Tracker's gaze. Hunter walked to his master and friend.

"I am grateful, Tracker." Ayden said and petted Hunter. "Wake me for our ride."

"Hunter will wake you, it is not many men that are allowed to touch him in familiar fashion." Tracker laughed. "Come, eat with my family, friend."

After Ayden accepted he asked Morning Song if Eye of Hawk would see her to the ranch.

"I will not return to Geneva with Little Thundercloud until his mother and father have returned." Morning Song continued, "Little Thundercloud is still affected by his mother's spirit. He loves Shining Star and it would not be good for him to know his new mother is in peril. Eye of Hawk and I will keep him here with his family to protect him from this pain until all is well."

"You are wise and true my second mother." Ayden said reverently. "To have one so young suffer so much pain would not be good." Bennett had already taken over the hearts of his new uncles.

"We will keep him happy and protected here. Eye of Hawk can say he is keeping him to teach." Morning Song said and then turned to Tracker. "My younger son, Little Bear will go with you."

"What do you see?" Tracker asked of Morning Song sensing in her voice that she was given a vision.

"You cannot enter into the white man city with Hunter and I see that Little Bear will be needed there." Morning Song answered in simple explanation.

"Your vision is heeded. Little Bear will come with us." Tracker accepted immediately.

"I will leave and eat with Eye of Hawk. We will keep Little Thundercloud. Go in wisdom." Morning Song blessed and then left them.

In the morning Jeb woke Kerry and he untied her hands so she could eat breakfast and redo the bedroll. Kerry was happy to do it, she would make sure no one spotted her hair comb. Kerry accomplished the task quickly because her breakfast was already whirling in her stomach. A few moments later she retched her breakfast in the bushes and the abductors were irritated with the delay.



Jeb helped her mount her horse and tied her hands to the saddle again. Joe Granger took her horse's reins. They rode hard and long until sunset again. The night was a repeat of the first night. Kerry remained silent. She watched the three men carefully looking for something she could latch on to and use for her benefit. Kerry said little; there was no point at this time. Kerry was hoping her brothers and Tracker would be on her trail, and her Braden. Kerry missed him the most, wanting his safe and comfy arms. With those thoughts Kerry drifted to sleep.

At sunrise Ayden was in his father's room waking him. Tracker and Hunter had already picked up Kerry's trail. Little Bear was waiting for them on the southwest side of Ely.

"Pa, Tracker and Hunter are on the trail. We need to get going." Ayden told his father as he woke Grady.

"I'm up." Grady responded immediately to his son's voice. "Braden, Ryan, Dwayne, get up."

The men all woke in an instant and started dressing.

As Grady buckled his gun belt he ordered, "Dwayne, go get Kent Ewal and then you can wake Alyson. I want you to take her with George to the ranch and stay there. You will protect Morning Song and Ben."

"Pa, Morning Song is keeping Ben with her in Eye of Hawk's camp. She doesn't want Ben to know what's going on. Morning Song knows it will be too much for him." Ayden told his father.

"Your wife is right, Grady. Bennett suffered as much as I over Laura's death, probably because of me actually. It's best if he doesn't learn of this." Braden agreed and buttoned his trousers. "How far away is Tracker?"

"He'll come back to find us. He and Hunter are already well on the trail." Ayden responded impatiently waiting to get going. "I've already told the smithy to have our horses ready."

"Which way do we go?" Ryan growled. His temper had been foul since he knew Kerry was in danger and might be hurt.

"Little Bear is waiting for us outside of Ely, southwest." Ayden answered his brother testily. "We will meet him there together little brother. We all want Kerry back safe."

"Little Bear came with you and Tracker?" Grady asked putting on his boots.

"Morning Song sent him. She said we would need him." Ayden answered brusquely as they all walked out the door. "Let's get going."

"We have to wait for Ewal." Grady grumbled as he stopped short in the lobby of Ely Hotel. "I promised, and it would be better to have the law there to arrest them."

"No problem Pa, as long as I get to geld the bastards first." Ryan sneered with massive intensity.

"Grady?" Kent Ewal called as he saw the group waiting for him.

"You sleep with your clothes on?" Grady jested.



"Old habits, I'm a quick dresser." Kent Ewal taunted back. "I'm assuming Tracker is already on the trail?"

"He is and we are gone!" Ayden answered and the men went to the livery and got their horses. Soon they were with Little Bear and on their way to meet with Tracker. Little Bear had followed the trail Tracker had left for them.

Tracker and Hunter did not show themselves until sundown that day. Tracker sat by the campfire and Little Bear handed him two plates, one had only meat. Tracker placed the meat plate in front of Hunter and the wolf began feasting upon it. It was soon finished and Ayden pulled meat off his plate and offered it to Hunter. When Hunter had finished Ayden gently stroked Hunter between his ears. It was never wise to approach a wolf dog eating.

When Tracker had finished his meal he looked at Ayden and said in Sосoni', "It is good you reward Hunter for his labors this day. He has found this." Tracker pulled out a hair comb.

Braden saw it and his heart stopped a beat. His mind spun in pain and thought his heart was being ripped from his chest.. "Bennett bought that hair comb for Kerry in New York. She's worn it everyday since."

Braden had no idea that Tracker understood and spoke English. Braden thought Little Bear was translating when he spoke to Tracker. Actually Little Bear said, "The husband is in great sorrow, although it is a valuable white man prize and can be traded for many things, it is the hair comb of his heart. Our Little Thundercloud bought it for our Shining Star. Will you give it back to him?"

Tracker responded, "I have no taste for white man treasure. You know this Little Bear. I see the pain in his eyes. He loves our Shining Star as we. I will give it to him to put back in her hair." Tracker rose and handed the comb to Braden. As Braden took it, Tracker could see the gratitude, but the pain as well. He almost spoke English for the man to tell him what he knew so far, but decided against it with so many at the campfire. Instead he turned to Little Bear, "Tell him his woman is uninjured, she is only bound."

Ayden jumped to hear this, "How do you know, Tracker?"

"Her tracks are different when bound and unbound. It is so for the balance changes she must make in her walk. They unbind her to relieve herself and at that place we detected no blood, Hunter told me of no pain."

Ayden looked to Braden, "Tracker says Kerry is unhurt."

Braden closed his eyes and a small tear squeezed out no matter how hard he tried to avoid it in front of everyone. He whispered silently, "Thank you God, thank you Tracker, and thank you Hunter."

Hunter heard his name and walked to the sitting Braden. To everyone's surprise Hunter nuzzled Braden and allowed Braden to scratch him between his ears.

Tracker promised in Sосoni', "Hunter says this Braden is a good man, he will find our Shining Star for him."

GENEVA'S HOPE



CHAPTER 18

On the second morning Kerry felt more confident to indulge in conversation. By watching her captors she had determined that Joe Garner was indeed the alpha male of the group. She smiled to herself on that comparison with a wolf pack. *Wolves have more honor.* Jeb Stone was the weakest link but the most dangerous because he was so weak willed that bravado made him feel more capable. If she were to get anywhere she needed to communicate with Seger Chatel. "Seger, is there any chance I can get into a stream to clean myself?"

"I don't think that's a good idea, little lady. You jest might tempt us and your man wants you to himself." Seger answered absentmindedly.

"I just need to wash. These doeskins would remain on." Kerry urged. It would be a chance to swim away and delay them for a little while if not escape completely. "Besides this man you speak of, would he want me to smell badly?"

"That one? I doubt it. We'll think about letting you clean up when we get you to Virginia City." Seger grinned to Kerry.

At least now she knew for sure they were headed for Virginia City. A big city, it would be hard for her family to find her once she was there. *I hope they get to me before these guys get me to Virginia City.* "Who exactly is this man that pays to have me taken to him?"

"That little lady he wants us to keep a secret."

"Why?"

"Don't know, don't care."

"I could give you a lot more money than he to return me to Geneva."

"Joe told us you would try to tempt us, it won't work. We already took this step in taking you. That is guilt. I ain't goin to jail for the hope of more money."

"But I promise."

"You promise? It won't be no never mind for your brothers or Pa." Seger laughed again. "Sides, I know them brothers of yers would hurt me pretty bad even if they didn't turn me into the law."

Kerry sighed. She knew Seger was right and had more intelligence than she gave him credit for. Her brothers would nearly kill anyone that took her whether they brought her back or not. She had to pursue her initial plan to swim away. Kerry knew they would do everything to avoid hurting because



they were afraid of this man and her family. Carefully she took care of her bedroll and dropped the small piece of lace she had torn off her broderie last night and left it hidden as a trail. She believed she was being followed. Kerry had to believe it. Kerry was given a few moments of privacy for her toilette and again her morning illness, and then they were off on a hard gallop again.

At this ride they would be in Virginia City in two days.

At Grady's camp all the men had eaten breakfast in silence. Braden fingered Kerry's comb repeatedly. It was Braden's symbol that Kerry was alive and well. Grady had watched him and wanted so much to make everything better for the man, but he himself was filled with too much fear.

Little Bear broke the silence, "Tracker and Hunter left before the sun rose and has left us a trail. I am certain they are headed for your Virginia City."

"We should ride hard and get there before them." Ryan stated angrily.

"Contain your anger, brother." Ayden warned. "This anger of yours could get one of us or Kerry killed."

"Damn it! If they hurt.." Ryan roared and was interrupted.

"We'll have them pay for the crimes." Marshall Ewal promised. "They will pay, but it is the law that will see to it. Not you!"

"I will ride ahead to Virginia City and wait for you there. I will watch for you." Little Bear said with an aura of unseen power.

"Don't interfere, you know what they would do to an Indian that touched a white woman there. You would hurt more than help." Marshall Ewal warned.

"This I know. I will watch only."

"Who would follow the trail of Tracker if you are wrong?" Grady asked in consternation. Even Grady found that his normal logic and serenity was lost in the fear for his baby girl.

"Ayden knows. Don't you?" Little Bear smiled looking at his good friend and second brother.

"I know. Eye of Hawk and Little Bear taught me the way of the Sosoni'. I have seen the trail Tracker has left." Ayden grinned. "I will know if Virginia City is the true destination by Tracker."

"I can get there sooner!" Ryan grumbled.

"No you can't little brother. You know very well that Little Bear's pony can take trails that our horses cannot, and his pony can endure more than ours with all our packs and our weight on them."

"But an Indian in Virginia City?" Braden questioned.

"It is more of a common sight there than Ely." Grady explained, "An Indian is more likely ignored than anyone of us there, and the Indians that go to Virginia City are considered docile."

"We all look alike to the white man, just as you do to us." Little Bear chuckled.

"What if Kerry sees you and recognizes you?" Marshall Ewal queried.



"Shining Star is wise, she would just be assured that we are near." Little Bear answered. "Enough of this asking. I must leave now to beat them to your big city." Little Bear left them.

Although Ayden watched carefully for Tracker's signs, the rest of the group left to ride on the main road for Virginia City. They would cut some time by taking the main road instead of the trail the kidnappers were taking to avoid contact with others. At night Tracker and Ayden would find his father's campfire.

Kerry was not given any reprieve during the day even though she asked for water or food. In the morning she would retch and then was put on her horse with no food or water during the day, but the men did not eat or drink during the day. Anytime down would waste time and they wanted to be far away when the McGillins would catch up with the Easterner. They were sure the McGillins would catch up with Kerry. They also thought that breakfast made Kerry sick because of her trauma. They wanted to give her as little food and water as possible during the day against the possibility of her retching slowing them up. They didn't realize she was only sick in the morning and not the evening, and not being married men they didn't recognize this symptom of pregnancy.

That evening Seger gave Kerry her meal and spoke to her, "Tomorrow morning I'll take you to the stream to freshen up. We should be in Virginia City by the day following and there is no stream to do it that isn't close to the city."

"Thank you Seger." Kerry said genuinely appreciative. She was feeling very grubby.

Seger untied her hands for her to eat and kept watch during her privacy later. He put down the bedroll for her. Kerry tore another piece of lace to leave behind then quietly accepted Seger tying her again. She laid down in her bedroll and went to sleep.

Tracker found Grady's camp and spoke to Ayden who was already with his family. "You know they head for your big city?"

"Yes."

"Where is Little Bear?"

"He left to go ahead into Virginia City to watch in case that is where they are truly headed."

"Shining Star left another piece for us." Tracker pulled out a piece of lace. "Hunter tells me there still is no pain or hurt."

"She remembers well the way she was taught by Cougar's Paw and Eye of Hawk." Ayden said proudly. "It gladdens my heart to know Kerry is unhurt."

"These men are careful with her, but she is also sick in the mornings."

"Yes, her baby would make her sick in the mornings."

"This hard riding would not be good for her."



"No, we have to reach her before something bad does happen." Ayden agreed.

"The deep pain shows in her man's eyes." Tracker recognized. "You will tell him nothing of this sickness?"

"No, I will tell him only that you and Hunter say she is still unharmed."

"This is good. Hunter and I will eat now. We will follow the men to the city to make sure no harm has come to Shining Star. If it has, I will kill the white men and no one will find them."

"This is something I must never know." Ayden admonished. "But it would bring joy to my heart if anything happened to my sister."

"Tell her man she is still well." Tracker ordered and he and Hunter sat down to eat.

"What did he say?" Braden asked anxiously.

"Kerry is still all right. She is still bound, but unharmed." Ayden informed the tormented man.

Braden sighed deeply. "How much longer before we reach her?"

"Not much longer, Braden. Not much longer." Ayden tried to reassure Braden as well as himself.

Grady also knew Sosoni' and he had heard everything that Tracker had told Ayden. No one would tell Braden the entire translation. They all knew it would have driven him crazy.

The next two days went by at a snail's pace. Kerry was allowed to go to the stream but Joe Garner had taken the precaution of binding her about the waist with a length of rope and knot she could not undo quickly. Her hope to delay or escape them did not happen.

"That's enough little lady," Seger yelled to her in the stream. "We break camp and tonight is the last night. We will be in Virginia City tomorrow."

Little Bear had ridden his pony hard through the night stopping only for a brief nap and reached Virginia City that next evening. Cautious of the city white men, he camped outside the city and went into it a little after dawn, walking his pony slowly and without any weapons. He wished to be completely ignored and draw no undue attention. Little Bear stationed himself on the outskirts of the city on a porch to a general store near the alley. If anyone approached he would quietly walk to the alley space and return when the people had left. He didn't have too long to wait. Shortly before noon he spotted the three men and Shining Star enter the town.

Because she was still in her doeskins no one paid attention to the fact she was tied to her horse. People thought a white squaw was being returned to her family and after being with Indians for a time, all white men thought that a woman would have turned into a wild savage. It would be necessary to restrain such a wild animal. *How ignorant these yellow eyes are.* Little Bear's eyes



followed them down the street and continued watching them until the group finally stopped at a Hotel. Little Bear left his pony behind a building and ran to the hotel porch, he made a sound like a bird whistle.

Kerry recognized the Sosoni' alert call and looked to find it's source. She spotted Little Bear and noted his warning look not to recognize him. Kerry moved her eyes to the front door of the hotel immediately and said nothing. A small grin crossed her lips as they entered the lobby.

"Something make you happy little lady?" Seger asked noting her smile.

"A hot bath and fragrant soap hopefully." Kerry answered with a half-truth. In full truth Kerry knew that her family was near and rescue near at hand.

Kerry was lead up the stairs to room 221 and Joe Garner knocked on the door. They heard grumbling and the door opened. There stood Everett Mann with a sheet around his body. Kerry gasped.

Everett smiled wickedly when he saw Kerry. "Bring her in."

Joe Garner did as ordered pushing Kerry in the room and then demanded, "I want our money now!"

"You already have \$1,000 each, I'll give you each \$2,000 now and \$2,000 when we get to San Francisco and the docks."

"Fine with me," Joe Garner agreed.

Everett moved to his coat and pulled out the \$6,000 handing it to Joe Garner.

The men left and outside the room Garner handed their share of the money to Jeb and Seger. Both Seger and Jeb said they would forget the rest and left. They had enough and there was something about Everett Mann that they didn't like. Especially when they saw the prostitute in his bed. This man professed his love for Kerry McGillinen but they found him in bed with a woman. It didn't sit right with them.

Joe Garner stayed and hoped he would collect the full \$6,000.

Kerry looked up to see the woman in the bed and she looked terrified.

Everett snarled at her, "Get out of bed Lucy, I've paid you plenty for my pleasure and it's over now."

Kerry watched as Lucy left the bed she had bruises on her back, buttocks, calves and thighs. It was obvious someone had taken a belt to her. Kerry didn't know if it was Everett or not, but guessed it was.

With fear evident Lucy gathered her lace broderie and dressed quickly. Just as quickly she tried to run out of the room.

Everett had been watching Lucy dress and just as she finished he grabbed her, pulling her back on the bed. "I changed my mind, I paid enough for one more time." He had a thought that this might be a good lesson for Kerry. He would demonstrate to her his strength, power, and domination.

Kerry watched in disgust as Everett raised Lucy's skirts, opened her broderie, dropped his sheets and took Lucy savagely.



When Everett was finished he turned her over and slapped her bottom several times while he laughed. "You're a good lay, Lucy. By George if you're not. If I ever come back to this city I'll be sure to take you again." Sitting on the bed he looked at Kerry. "Get out now Lucy, before I take you again. I should be concentrating on taming my little shrew over there."

Lucy got up and ran out the door, a look of pity was cast to Kerry.

Everett grabbed his silken underwear and woolen trousers. Slowly he put them on watching Kerry intensely. "Well my little shrew. I see your taste in clothes hasn't changed. I told you I would burn those clothes and I shall. I've already bought new dresses for you that you will wear."

Everett crossed the room to a trunk and pulled out soft silken knickers, chemise and petticoats. Then he pulled out a deep violet satin dress with square neckline and lace at the neck and wrists of the sleeves. "My lady will wear this. You have a choice to take those smelly rags off yourself or I will tear them off you."

"What do you want with me Everett?" Kerry asked coldly.

"I'd watch my tongue if I were you, my little shrew. You are mine now. I paid for you and don't think about screaming. This hotel caters to the unusual and is used to screams coming from my room."

"You beat Lucy with a belt didn't you?" Kerry accused hotly.

"Beat, no my little shrew merely applied obedience. Which you shall feel the application if you are anything but completely obedient." Everett warned with menace. "Now will you take off those animal skins, or do I"

"I would but I am tied."

"I will change that," Everett said as he walked to her completely naked and unashamed. He untied her and gave her a warning. "Completely obedient or you'll feel this." Everett pulled out his hidden hand and held a belt. Without warning he brought it down on Kerry's backside several times as he held her hands. "Is that warning enough?"

After her screams the tears ran down Kerry's cheek. Kerry was stinging in pain and nodded her head meekly. A belt had never touched her before. The only punishment she had ever received was a stern tone from her father. She had been right about the brutality she guessed was part of Everett Mann.

Kerry undressed under the lurid and lusty eyes of Everett. Completely naked Kerry asked meekly, "May I bathe, please?"

"Now that is the proper way to address your future husband." Everett gloated. "Go into the privy and see to it."

Kerry walked to the room and prepared the tub. Kerry felt Everett follow her but refused to look at him. She soaked in it and closed her eyes to forget the lurid stares of Everett Mann.

"Get out, Kerry!" Everett ordered after she completed soaping and rinsing her body. "We will eat and leave to Carson City immediately."

Everett watched as Kerry dressed in the gown Everett had laid out for her on the bed and when she was finished he grabbed her and kissed her



savagely leaving her lips bruised and swollen. When he was finished he took her hands and tied them to the bedposts. He again took his belt and used it on her several times until he seemed satisfied.

Kerry fought to retain her reason, she was afraid she would go mad. Kerry had never suffered such pain. Kerry thought of her baby she carried and cried softly against the bedpost. *Braden, I love you! Braden come and get me. I need your arms and security.*

"Remember these punishments, Kerry. You will receive them every day until I am certain you have become an obedient wife and carry my child." Everett laughed cruelly enjoying watching the aloof Kerry McGillinen whimpering against the bedpost. "I will get our carriage ready and the men. We leave shortly."



CHAPTER 19

Everett finished dressing and left the room. He left Kerry still tied to the bedpost. Kerry began sobbing. The hope she felt when she saw Little Bear had dwindled under the brutality of Everett Mann. *Where is everyone? Save me from this horrible animal.* Kerry sank to her knees and cried. She asked herself why hadn't she simply told Seger she was already married? Why didn't she tell Everett? Was she afraid they would kill her? The answer was, yes. Kerry admitted she didn't want to die yet. She wanted Braden and she wanted to have his baby. Kerry's tears came faster and her sobs harder.

Little Bear watched Seger and Jeb leave town, but did not follow them. He watched as Joe Garner took his horse to the livery and went back to the hotel. There he saw a tall man with yellow hair talking to Joe Garner. Garner went back to the livery and came out later with his horse, a carriage pulled by two horses and the driver. Little Bear had wanted to get Grady and Ryan, but stayed to watch Joe Garner.

Standing across the street he watched as Kerry was brought out and taken in the carriage by the yellow haired man. Kerry was wearing a white woman's dress. The carriage left town and Joe Garner rode behind. Little Bear thought it prudent to follow the carriage. A short distance from town he saw Hunter running on the ridge. Little Bear whistled and Tracker appeared. They rode their ponies towards each other to meet.

"I follow them, you go and get Ayden and the rest." Tracker ordered.

Little Bear didn't say a word but headed back to town and through it. At sundown he arrived at Grady's camp. He went to Grady; "They have taken Shining Star out of Virginia City in a black box pulled by horses. It looks like the black box that belongs to Braden." Little Bear explained.

"A carriage?" Braden questioned.

"Yes, like yours. The yellow haired man has Shining Star wearing white woman's clothes." Little Bear continued.

"Blonde Man?" Braden asked Little Bear interrupting again.

"Tall Man of yellow hair, big gray eyes, funny clothes like the ones you wore on the iron horse." Little Bear laughed.

"Everett Mann!" Braden screamed in rage. "That bastard."

"So it is the one. The one in New York." Kent Ewal snickered.

"I'll kill him. I swear I will." Braden swore hotly.



"I'd take exception to that." Kent Ewal said sternly losing his humor.

"Is Tracker following them?" Grady asked with concern. It was too dark to continue on, but if they were in a carriage and going on to Carson City they could ride all night.

"Yes, Tracker and Hunter follow." Little Bear said calmly. "They head to your other city, Carson."

"Let's go!" Ryan demanded.

"We can't travel in the dark." Grady growled at his son, "Tracker and Hunter can and will. We will follow."

"How long will they stay ahead, until it's too late?" Braden scowled. Braden was near fury with exasperation. They always seemed so close and then so far away.

"We'll get them in Carson City. I promise." Grady offered.

"How did Kerry look? Did she recognize you? Is she alright?" Braden demanded to know of Little Bear.

"Shining Star is no longer bound, other than white woman's clothes. She seems all right and was happy to see me. I gave her hope, but she does not look well. The strain in starting to show on her." Little Bear answered truthfully.

Those remarks made everyone unhappy and agitated.

"Why are you doing this, Everett?" Kerry asked as the carriage continued its rocking on the road to Carson City.

"You are mine, Kerry. I told you that before. Now you will believe me."

"Everett, I love another." Kerry said without thinking.

"You whore!" Everett roared and slammed his fist into her face.

Kerry felt pain and then blackness. Fortunately the blow rendered her unconscious. Everett picked up her limp body and laid it on the seat.

"You shouldn't make me hit you, Kerry." Everett whispered. "You'll learn to obey soon enough. Soon you will learn to be subservient and obedient. I will hear that you only love me. Don't do that again Kerry. Don't ever tell me you love another." It didn't matter to Everett that he had hit Kerry so hard he rendered her unconscious.

Everett rested on the other seat and would sleep until the next rest stop. The carriage and driver continued. Joe Garner had hitched his horse to the carriage and jumped next to the driver to get some sleep also.

Grady, his sons, the Marshall, Braden and Little Bear were on the road at dawn, they rode through Virginia City without stopping and rode hard for the rest of the day. They stopped to again camp for the night. Little Bear continued on following the carriage tracks and the marks left by Tracker.

Little Bear and Tracker met at the rest station. The carriage had stopped there.

GENEVA'S HOPE



"A man with yellow hair went inside and has left Shining Star in the black box. The man Garner guards the carriage with a gun. They rode throughout the night and stopped here to eat."

"Why does he keep Shining Star in the black box?" Little Bear asked.

"Hunter says that Shining Star is now hurt. There is blood." Tracker told Little Bear. "We must save her soon."

"I will go to Grady." Little Bear answered with anger in his heart. Little Bear worried for Kerry's safety..

"Hurry, soon they will travel again. I cannot go into the City." Tracker commanded the younger brave.

After the horses were changed Everett went back into the carriage with a basket and brought Kerry back to consciousness with smelling salts. Her Eye was badly swollen and she could not see out of it. The pain was tolerable but it did hurt.

"Don't make me hit you again, Kerry. From now on you will not speak until you are spoken too." Everett said quite calmly. "I have no problem with whipping you in this carriage as punishment if you disobey me."

Kerry nodded demurely. *Is there no end to this man's brutality?*

"I brought you supper. You will eat." Everett ordered.

Kerry ate slowly, her eye hurt as she chewed. *Where are you, Braden? Kerry's spirits were low. Did Little Bear follow? Does anyone know where I am?*

"You are learning obedience my dear Kerry. That pleases me. I would not like to hide you for weeks at a time because of your face showing the results of your shrewish tongue."

Kerry continued to keep her head bowed and slowly ate the food. She would try very hard not to irritate the violent Everett Mann. Kerry had her baby to protect and she did not know what other brutality he was capable of.

"Are you learning obedience, Kerry?" Everett asked raising Kerry's chin to look at him.

"Yes." Kerry said quietly.

Everett's hand slapped her with force on her cheek. "You will answer, yes sir!"

"Are you learning obedience, Kerry?" Everett repeated.

"Yes sir." Kerry responded even more quietly.

"That's better." Everett gloated and kissed Kerry tenderly on the forehead. "That's my good girl."

Inside Kerry was raging. She wished she had a knife to cut his heart out of his chest, slowly and painfully.

"Finish eating. We will continue on this evening to arrive in Carson City tomorrow."

"May I ask a question, Everett?" Kerry asked just above a whisper.

"I am feeling generous at the moment, you may." Everett answered with superiority.



"Where are we going?"

"It is my intention to take you to San Francisco, board a ship and have the captain marry us. After a while at sea and you are completely tamed, I will take you back to Boston as my wife. By that time you will be impregnated with my child." Everett waited a moment and then took her chin in his hand again. "That makes you happy doesn't it my good little girl?"

"Yes sir." Kerry answered terrified at the prospect of being at sea with this man.

"I knew you would learn to behave." Everett smiled. "I am certain only a few more punishments will enforce this wonderful behavior you are displaying."

"What would happen should I carry a child?"

"I did not give you permission to ask another question, young lady." Everett barked. "You will receive a reminder punishment." Everett removed his belt and grabbed her. Everett threw Kerry over his knees.

"I'm sorry, Everett!" Kerry cried in terror. She knew there was nowhere to hide in the carriage and no way to defend herself from another beating.

"Too late!" Everett snarled and began stropping her with his belt.

Kerry was crying and sobbing deeply when he finally released her. *Is there any end to this nightmare? How can I survive this?*

"Have you learned your lesson, Kerry?" Everett demanded placing her back on the opposite seat.

"Yes sir." Kerry replied demurely keeping her head bowed and catching her breath between her sobs. She was careful not to raise her head and let Everett to see the hatred in her eyes.

As Everett raised her chin again Kerry closed her eyes.

Everett tenderly kissed her swollen lips. "When you learn to be a good girl you will see I can be gentle." His hand circled her breast and squeezed it. "I will not wait until our marriage to take you. I have waited too long already." His hand opened the front buttons on the dress and his hand slipped into her chemise to play with the hardened nub on her breast. Suddenly he jerked her dress and chemise down to reveal her breasts. "They look larger than I thought, but very inviting." His hands played with the hard nubs, pinching and squeezing.

Kerry could barely tolerate the pain Everett was enjoying, when his hands left her breasts and his mouth closed over one. At first he only sucked and let his tongue play but then he bit down. Kerry screamed.

Everett released her and then came down on her mouth savagely against her swollen lips. "I'll have you in Carson City my love." He pulled her chemise and dress back up to her shoulders. Everett refastened her buttons. "You have been a good little girl. I may or may not punish you. Think about it Kerry, I don't want to punish you. Let me love you."

Kerry said nothing she kept her head bowed. Kerry would never have believed how much hatred she would be capable of.

GENEVA'S HOPE



"You want me to love you, don't you?" Everett demanded angrily.

"Yes sir." Kerry answered subserviently.

"Yes, that's my good little girl." Everett said pleased with himself. He pulled Kerry on to his lap and patted her head. "Go to sleep my good little girl."

Little Bear rode through the night to find Grady's camp and arrived just before dawn. For the first time he spoke in Sосoni' to Grady. "Shining Star is hurt. The man of yellow hair has hurt her. They will be in Carson City today. We must be also."

Grady nodded his head as his face flushed with rage. Whoever this blonde man was would have to suffer before he was turned over to Marshall Ewal.

"Little Bear, what did you tell Grady." Braden demanded angrily. "Something has happened to Kerry, hasn't it? That 's why you used your tongue to talk to Grady."

"Little Bear told me that we must ride hard and get to Carson City today." Grady intervened. It was difficult to control his inner rage but he managed.

"What's happened to Kerry? Damn It!" Braden roared belligerently.

"We don't know, but we will find out." Grady answered. "Ryan get up, we are leaving."

Braden was already mounted on Socks and reining him to a full run. He didn't know where Carson City was but figured the road they were on would lead him there. Little Bear took after him. Little Bear's pony was the only horse that would catch up to Braden's thoroughbred. Grady mounted Runner, but Runner was a mustang bred for endurance not speed and so were Ryan and Kent's horses.

In the morning the carriage arrived in Carson City. Everett ordered Joe Garner to watch the carriage and keep Kerry in it while he procured rooms at the hotel. In a few moments Everett brought a cloak out to the carriage and put it over Kerry. He covered her face with the hood and walked her into the hotel lobby up the stairs and into a room.

Tracker was watching from a distance on top of trees with Braden's spyglass borrowed to him.

When the door in the hotel was closed Everett ordered, "Remove you clothes Kerry, all of them. Fold them neatly on the bed."

Kerry obeyed and when she was finished Everett told her to lie on the bed. He then took her clothes and put them in a trunk that was brought in by his driver as she was undressing. He locked the trunk and put the key in his pocket. Everett pulled silken cords from his pocket and tied Kerry's hands to the headboard. He lay on top of her and kissed her passionately while holding her head in his hands. Everett rolled to her side and his hands explored all of her body. "Yes my good little girl. I will not wait to take you." He rolled her



over to her side and viewed the black and blue marks his previous beatings had left. A wicked smile erupted on his lips. "I will not punish you now, I will take you instead. I will love you and you will enjoy me, but first I will eat."

Kerry was not feeling well and wanted to retch but there was no food in her stomach so she lay perfectly still.

"I will return to you soon, my love. At least as long as you are naked I need not worry about you trying to leave me." Everett laughed as he left the room.

Kerry began to cry again, she felt so hopeless.

Tracker met Braden and Little Bear before Carson City near where he had been watching Kerry. "They are there. They have just arrived. I saw them enter the first hotel as they entered the town."

"Thank you, Tracker." Braden said as he reined Socks and went full run into Carson City."

In the distance Little Bear saw the dust of their trail companions. "I will get Grady and the others."

Tracker saw Hunter following Braden. "Hunter! Do not go to the city. They will fear you."

Hunter stopped and turned around returning to Tracker. Together they went to a hill that overlooked the city and using Braden's spyglass that he had been using, watched the hotel. He watched Braden enter it while Little Bear rode to meet Grady and Ayden.

Everett had finished his meal and left the restaurant. Everett did not notice Braden, but Braden saw Everett.

Braden watched as Everett went to his room and followed immediately.

Everett had removed his jacket, shirt, boots and was removing his trousers as he talked to Kerry, "Ah my love, it is time for me to have you." He removed his silken underwear and naked walked to the bed with his belt in hand. "First I must remind you of obedience." He raised his arm to bring down the belt on Kerry's back when he turned to the sound of his door being kicked in.

"You bloody bastard." Braden roared as he saw Kerry's black and blue back and Everett's raised hand with the belt in it. "I'll kill you, you damn bastard!"

"What the hell?" Everett snarled and balled the belt over his fist.

Braden was on top on him in a moment and slugging at him furiously. Everett received one blow after another. Everett was barely managing to get a punch at Braden.

In short time, Grady, Ryan and Marshall Ewal were in the room. Grady went to Kerry. Tears escaped his eyes as he looked at her back and when he turned her over he saw her blackened swollen eye. Grady gently covered Kerry with a bed quilt and whispered, "It's all over baby. We're here."

GENEVA'S HOPE



Ryan was on top of Everett as soon as Marshall Ewal had managed to pull Braden off and told him, "Go to your wife. She needs you."

Braden was still filled with fury but he wanted to hold Kerry and went to her.

Ryan was beating Everett mercilessly and screaming at him, "as soon as I knock you unconscious I am going to pull out my knife and geld you."

Marshall Ewal was trying to pull Ryan off Everett before he carried out his threat, "Grady, get over here and help me."

CHAPTER 20

Braden walked over to Kerry, his throat filled with bile when he saw her face. Kerry's eye was blackened, the side of her face black and blue and her lips swollen. He had already seen what Everett Mann had done to her back.

Kerry opened her one eye and it was filled with tears. "Braden? Is it really you?"

"Oh yes my love." Braden said tenderly. "I'm here my love." Braden sat on the bed and took Kerry in his arms being careful not to touch her bruises.

"Braden, I prayed for you to come. It was horrible. It was so horrible. Everett is a sick man. A really sick man." Kerry cried as she sank into the security of Braden's arms.

Grady had been able to pull Ryan back and Marshall Ewal had ordered Everett to dress and then tied him to a chair. Ayden and Little Bear had arrived by that time with the Carson City U.S. Marshall.

"Marshall Daily has already taken Joe Garner into custody and will take this man. Who is he anyway?" Ayden asked.

"He is Everett Mann." Braden answered still stroking Kerry's hair and holding her tightly in his arms.

Ayden heard his sister's soft sobs and saw her bruised back. Ayden walked to the man tied in the chair. "I'm Ayden, Mr. Mann. Kerry's older brother, pleased to meet you." A hard fist went right into Everett's face. Ayden looked at Marshall Ewal innocently. "I had to introduce myself, didn't I?" Ayden would have preferred to untie Mann and have at him with fisticuffs, it bothered him a little to hit a tied man, but only a little.

"Yah, I guess you did." Marshall Ewal agreed. It was only fair to let Ayden get in at least one shot since Braden and Ryan had nearly made mincemeat out of the man. And after all, the bloody bastard deserved every punch, cut, and bruise. Kent couldn't help but see what he had done to Kerry and was as sickened by the sight as her family.

"Ayden, can you get a doctor for Kerry?" Braden asked quietly. He was still holding Kerry and she was still sobbing in his arms. "I don't think we should move her until we find out how badly she is hurt."

"Doc Case is just down three buildings from here," Marshall Daily said as he took custody of Everett and untied him. Everett stood rather unsteadily and looked at Braden. "Why are you here? Are you my woman's assigned Knight in Shining Armor?"

GENEVA'S HOPE



Braden looked at Everett with pure hatred in his eyes, his voice restraining his seething anger, "Kerry is my wife and carries my child. You will pay for what you have done to her"

"Your wife?"

"Yes you maggot, my wife!"

"I wouldn't say any more if I were you." Marshall Daily warned Everett. "You are lucky they haven't skinned you alive. Lord knows if it were my wife and someone did that to her, I would have dropped my badge and skinned the polecat."

Ayden returned later with a Carson City Doctor and the doctor's wife. Doctor Case brought his wife along when he heard of Kerry's injuries and condition.

Doctor Case went to Kerry and asked Braden and the family to leave so he and his wife Jenny could examine Kerry.

It was a long hour before the doctor came out. "Jenny is going to stay with Mrs. Wessex for awhile. I gave Mrs. Wessex a sleeping powder. She needs to rest more than anything right now. The bruises will heal and there was no major damage to tissue."

"Our baby?" Braden asked worriedly.

"Mrs. Wessex is still with child and as far as I can tell the baby is doing well."

"When can we take my daughter home?" Grady asked solemnly.

"I would suggest that she rest here a good week," Doctor Case replied. "I also suggest that when you do return you take it very easy. She has been through a great deal from what I have been told."

"Did he? I mean was she?" Ryan tried to ask the doctor.

"Mrs. Wessex was not raped." Doctor Case answered reassuringly.

"Can I go in and stay with her?" Braden asked pleading. Braden needed to fold his wife in his arms and keep her there to reassure himself.

"Yes of course, but she needs to sleep. I will leave more sleeping powders with you." Doctor Case handed Braden some packets. "Make sure she gets plenty of rest."

"Her face, doc." Ayden asked genuinely concerned about his sister. "Will it heal right?"

"It will heal with no permanent damage. It will be difficult for her to eat for a time. I suggest you feed her rich broths and soft foods for at least a week."

"Is there anything else we should know?" Grady asked.

"Not that I can think of." Doctor Case responded. "My wife, Jenny, has volunteered to stay with Mrs. Wessex for a time to help in her needs."

"Thank you, doctor." Grady offered his hand. "Send all your bills to me, Grady McGillinen in Ely."



Braden had already gone back into the room and sat on the bed next to Kerry. He took her tiny hand in his much larger one and held it tightly. "I love you, Kerry. Thank God you are alive."

No one had noticed until later that Little Bear had left. They were not aware that Little Bear went off to find Tracker and let him know what happened to Kerry. The two men went into the mountains to find the herbs to make some poultices that Kerry would need to heal her bruises and give her strength.

In the morning Little Bear returned to the hotel and with him were various bags that contained Indian herbal medicines. Two were Arnica and Chaparral. Little Bear and Tracker had prepared the doses for pain, bruises and stamina. Little Bear walked into the hotel room where Kerry was sleeping. Jenny had opened the door and could not speak for the shock of a Sosoni' dressed in leather fringed breeches, moccasins, and calico shirt standing in the doorway. Braden fortunately had looked up from his vigil by Kerry's bedside.

"Little Bear come in." Braden invited.

Little Bear gently pushed Jenny Case to the side and walked to Braden. "Tracker and I have brought medicines for Shining Star." Little Bear went on to explain each one of the doses and poultice. One poultice of Arnica he and Tracker had prepared ahead of time and Little Bear put it gently on Kerry's swollen and blackened eye. "This will ease her pain and stop the swelling.

To Jenny's surprise a short hour later the eye was far less swollen. Kerry was awake now and Braden with the encouragement and instructions of Little Bear gave Kerry the medicines. Braden also helped Kerry eat the breakfast the hotel was ordered to send up. The hot mush soaked in fresh milk with sugar was 'horse feed' as far as Kerry was concerned, but Braden convinced her to eat it. Instead of her usual coffee, Braden made her drink the Chaparral Tea that Little Bear had prepared for her. Kerry was less hostile towards the tea because she was told Tracker and Little Bear had prepared it for her as Sosoni' medicine.

Grady, Ayden and Ryan came in to witness the faces on Kerry eating her *horse feed* as she called it.

Grady ordered Braden to go to the adjacent room, "Listen to me son, you're plumb wore out, you won't do our Kerry much good if you collapse. I am telling you to get to the room next door that I got for you and get some sleep. I'll stay here with my daughter."

"I appreciate your offer sir, but I am not about to let Kerry out of my sight." Braden protested.

"Well bro in law, you really don't have much say in the matter." Ayden said quite calmly. He and Ryan took an arm and literally lifted him away from Kerry's bed and carried him into the adjacent hotel room. The two brothers took off his clothes ignoring his protests and then picked him up and threw him on the bed. They took his clothes with them.



Ayden looked at the consternation of the naked man on the bed, "Your clothes need washing. We'll bring them back when they are clean. That gives you time for a good nap. Sweet dreams!"

That last comment was too much. Braden burst out laughing. In moments Braden was sound asleep succumbing to his body's exhaustion.

Grady talked to Kerry soothingly. "We sent telegrams to your Auntie Alyson and Dwayne that we have you."

"Jenny tells me that Doctor Case has instructed I stay in bed for a week before we return to Geneva." Kerry stated but it was more a question.

"Yep, and we are going to listen to Doc Case."

"How did you explain that to Auntie Alyson? She is going to worry herself sick." Kerry again showed more concern for others than herself. "Ben, my little one will not understand that we are gone so long."

"I didn't explain."

"Thank goodness you didn't say anything about these injuries." Kerry sank back into the soft large feather pillows in relief.

"When I saw you baby, it took all I had not to pick up my gun and shoot that bastard." Grady put his hand gently on Kerry's head and his long thick fingers gently stroked her forehead. "I can't believe that such animals live."

"Oh Pa, since Braden isn't here I can tell you that I was afraid that if Everett had gotten my on that ship I would never have survived his brutality." Kerry erupted in emotions and tears.

"What ship?"

"Everett planned to take me to California and then board a ship to Boston." Kerry answered with her head still swimming in the horror she had endured under the vicious man. Her body shook and in a trembling voice said, "he wanted to beat me into submission."

Grady took his daughter in his arms and hugged her tightly. "It's over baby, he didn't get away with you. You're safe with us, hush."

"Where is Everett?" Kerry sobbed in her father's shoulder.

"Currently he is in Carson City jail under Marshall Daily. Kent will be taking him and Joe Garner back to Ely this afternoon. Cliff Riggs is on his way from Ely with some deputies to meet him. Marshall Daily is sending some of his deputies with Kent until they meet up with Cliff."

"He'll be tried then?"

"Yes baby, he'll be made to pay."

Kerry finished her meal and picked up the Sosoni' poultice putting it back on her eye. "I'm surprised he's alive after Ryan getting to him."

"Well baby, fact is your man Braden, did the worst damage to the animal. Damn proud of him, I am." Grady smiled broadly.

"He did?"

"Yep, he did."

Kerry started laughing even though it hurt to do so, but the poultice was doing its magic and it didn't hurt quite so bad.



Grady smiled to his daughter, "Truth is that his face looks a hell of a lot worse than yours."

"Thanks, Pa. I needed to be reminded of the sight I am."

"Baby, you are beautiful even with that shiner."

Little Bear started chuckling from his chair in the corner, "I think the medicines are doing their magic. Our Shining Star's laughter is returning to us."

Kerry turned to Little Bear, "Thank you Little Bear and thank Tracker and Hunter for me."

"We protect our women, it was our duty. No thanks." Little Bear stated.

"Your face gave me hope in Virginia City. It gave me hope that I would live, Little Bear."

"That white man would not live long if you were hurt badly, Shining Star. You can believe that." Little Bear said with anger coloring his voice. It was difficult not to ride out to Eye of Hawk's camp and take custody of this Everett for tribal justice. Perhaps that was a plan. Little Bear excused himself. "It is time for Tracker, Hunter and me to return to camp."

"I know that look Little Bear. What are you planning?" Grady asked with skepticism.

"Eye of Hawk and Morning Song will be told all that has happened." Little Bear explained innocently, but as he walked out the door, "perhaps our discussions will include Sosoni' tribal justice."

Fear suddenly gripped Grady's heart and he got up to run to the door shouting, "Little Bear don't.." It was too late. Little Bear was out of sight.

"Pa, you don't think Eye of Hawk would take Everett do you?" Kerry voiced. "It would get his tribe into trouble with the law."

"Hopefully Eye of Hawk will be too wise to give in to emotion." Grady answered thoughtfully more for himself. "But there is a lot to be said for Sosoni' justice when it comes to one of their own and you are one of their own."

"Mr. McGillinen, I have to ask you to leave for a while. I need to help Kerry soak in her mineral baths." Jenny Case interrupted and requested politely as she walked into the room with fresh linens and towels just purchased at Braden Wessex's request.

The breakfast soon had its normal morning affect on Kerry. "Mrs. Case, the basin quick."

Jenny Case ran for the basin and had it in front of Kerry just in time. Grady left his daughter retching into the basin.

Grady looked at Jenny Case with frightened eyes. Jenny consoled him immediately, "It's morning sickness, and it just means she is still with child. She'll be fine. Now leave us."

Grady obeyed and went down to join Ayden and Ryan at breakfast in the hotel restaurant.

GENEVA'S HOPE



"Kerry okay, Pa?" Ayden asked directly as he watched his father approach.

"She's doing fine for the situation, son." Grady replied sitting down next to his sons at the table and then asked, "How is Braden?"

"Naked as a jay bird." Ryan snorted.

"What?" Grady looked astonished at that comment.

A waiter came to the table with a cup of coffee for Grady.

"Well Pa, we figured if he were buck naked he couldn't go anywhere other than to sleep so we kinda took his clothes." Ayden explained.

"Smart move, son." Grady congratulated his son's ingenuity.

"They did need to be washed." Ayden chuckled.

"And he is sleeping," Ryan laughed. "We checked on the jay bird."

"Did you see Little Bear?" Ayden asked his father.

"He, Tracker and Hunter are returning to Eye of Hawk's camp." Grady said after he took a sip of the coffee. "They are going to tell Eye of Hawk and Morning Song everything that happened and it will be a while before we get back to Geneva."

A while later, the McGillinens were joined in the restaurant by Doctor Case. "My wife has just told me that an Indian came in this morning and prescribed medicines for your daughter?" It was more a statement than a question.

"I was told Little Bear did just that." Grady answered factually.

"Apparently these medicines are working. The tissue swelling is down dramatically." Doctor Case acknowledged.

"Don't surprise me none." Ryan groused. Ryan was irritated at the Doctor for his surprise at the healing aspects of the American Indian's knowledge of herbs. "I'd personally trust Sosoni' medicine over white man's any time."

"Ryan!" Grady reprimanded. Turning back to the doctor Grady soothed, "We are glad those medicines are working and are very grateful for you care and Jenny's care of my daughter."

"Your welcome, but I would like to find out what is in those medicines and poultices. If your Little Bear would tell me."

"I can't help you right now, because Little Bear is already returning to his camp." Grady noted the disappointment in the doctor's face. "When we get back I'll have my wife, Morning Song translate the herbs and dosage and send it to you."

"Thank you Mr. McGillinen. I'll return again this evening. Jenny told me that your daughter Kerry is doing well."

"We'll see you tonight."

In the evening Ayden returned Braden's clothes, now cleaned. Braden completely rested had dressed and returned immediately to Kerry's bedside. Grady had the hotel send supper up for both of them. Kerry of course protested

PAYTON LEE



being given only soup and soft bread while Braden was sent a large steak, potatoes and buttered hard bread.

"I'm starved, and I need to feed two. Not fair." Kerry wailed in protest.

"Get better my love and I'll personally fix you a steak every morning." Braden promised.

"I am better!" Kerry pouted.

Braden just chuckled. Kerry was getting better and he was happy for it.



CHAPTER 21

Little Bear was sitting in Eye of Hawk's lodge with Morning Song. Fragrant Flower had taken the children outside so the adults could talk.

"My second daughter had suffered all you have told us under this man, Everett?" Morning Song asked in disgust and shock after Little Bear had explained Kerry's appearance and the medicines he and Tracker had prepared for her.

"Where is this man, Everett?" Eye of Hawk asked his younger brother with anger reflected in his eyes, his voice remaining impassionate as was becoming a chief.

"He is with the Marshall Kent Ewal on his way to Ely from the white man city of Carson." Little Bear revealed what he knew.

"You wish us to take him and punish him?" Eye of Hawk surmised correctly.

"He must be punished by Sosoni' justice. He has hurt one of ours. It is the way. The Great Spirit has told me this." Little Bear declared.

"This is a very dangerous path to interfere with the law of the white man." Eye of Hawk warned.

"My first son, listen to me. The Great Spirit has also told me that this man Everett will escape the white man law. He will not be punished by them." Morning Song agreed with Little Bear. "My vision on this is strong."

"I must not interfere in white man law." Eye of Hawk reasoned with his mind although his heart said differently.

"The vision has shown me how to punish this man." Morning Song offered, "without treading on white law."

"How is this my mother?" Eye of Hawk asked cocking a brow with great curiosity.

"I too have the vision, mother." Little Bear grinned with shared knowledge.

"You must share this vision with me!" Eye of Hawk commanded seeking the answer to punish the man without interfering in white man law.

"This Everett is a coward!" Little Bear responded as if that were the answer, and it was the answer.

Eye of Hawk smiled broadly, "Truly only a coward will hurt the woman like he has done. Fear will be his greatest punishment."



Morning Song nodded, "Fear of punishment and fear of pain." Morning Song then explained her plan in detail.

"To do this we must have the agreement of the Marshall Ewal." Eye of Hawk suggested.

"We will ride tonight my brother and meet Ewal at his campfire before he enters Ely with his prisoner."

"You must tell him of our vision, Little Bear." Morning Song told her youngest son. "He believes and understands our vision gift. He will believe us and let us take this Everett for the day."

"I will do so my mother."

"We will take Tracker and Hunter with us." Eye of Hawk ordered. "Come we go now."

"I will take Little Thundercloud to Geneva tomorrow. It will not be good for him to learn of this man Everett and what he has done to his mother."

"Return by the high sun my mother, for this coward Everett will be here and you will punish him with great fear." Eye of Hawk spoke with his emotion bridled to Morning Song, his mother. "It is your right for the pain he inflicted upon your second daughter and our second sister."

Eye of Hawk, Little Bear and Tracker with Hunter suddenly appeared at the camp Marshall Ewal had made near Ely. Everett watched as the tallest of the Indians squatted next to Kent Ewal and spoke to him. Little did Everett realize that he was the subject of their conversation.

The Marshall talked to the deputies and they were grinning and laughing. Kent started walking towards Everett and spoke somberly.

"I have a situation here, Mr. Mann."

"Just what is that?" Everett sounded just as pompous as ever, knowing his big city lawyers had been contacted.

"It seems those Indians are asking for justice."

"What does that have to do with me?"

"Seems that Kerry Wessex is their Shining Star."

"Kerry McGillinen is a half breed?" The shock of Kerry being half Indian was too much to believe. And he almost married a half-breed?

"Nope, she ain't no half breed, but she is considered blood family by the Eye of Hawk Shoshone tribe."

"That still doesn't tell me what justice they want of me."

"Tribal justice they call it."

"That has nothing to do with me."

"Oh but it does. If I don't turn you over to them tonight, we won't have our scalps in the morning." Kent lied skillfully with a straight face.

"What are you talking about? They wouldn't attack us. The U.S. Calvary would wipe out their entire tribe."

"Yep, they would. They would if they could find our bodies, but them Shoshone over there might make it pretty difficult to find bodies." Kent Ewal found it more difficult to keep a straight face.



"You aren't thinking of giving me to them are you?" Everett suddenly panicked.

"Well, Mr. Mann, I am thinking about doing just that."

"You can't turn me over to those red savages." Everett screamed in rage and fear.

"I can turn you over to them or we can all lose our scalps. I prefer to keep mine attached so I decided I can volunteer yours."

"You can't do that! My barristers would have your badge, the Calvary would find out they'd fight." Everett blustered in terror.

"Well Mr. Mann, you see I know Colonel Howell at the fort and I can tell you that he wouldn't consider you more important than his pony soldiers any more than I think you are more important than my deputies. We would both come to an agreement with them Shoshone, so don't you or your fancy Boston barristers count on it."

"You can't do this to me, you can't!" Everett twisted at his bonds and could not stop his body from trembling.

"Well Mr. Mann, I just did." Marshall Ewal nodded to Eye of Hawk.

The next thing Everett Mann saw was a wolf snarling in his face. The wolf's fangs were bared and looking very dangerous.

Little Bear tied Everett's hands and legs behind him. Another rope was tied to connect the ropes that bound his arms and legs. Everett Mann was trussed like a pig for roasting. A hewn tree limb was placed underneath the center rope and Everett Mann watched as each end of the pole was tied to an Indian pony.

The deaf ears of the deputies did not hear Everett Mann's screaming, cursing, and indignation.

Marshall Ewal mounted his mustang and followed behind the Indian ponies and Eye of Hawk. Little Bear and Tracker rode on either side of the ponies. They rode very slowly which added to the terror that Everett Mann was going through.

The discomfort of the pulling of his limbs against the movement of the ponies wasn't anywhere as bad as Everett's terror of being taken to an Indian village. *For what? Torture?* Shortly into the trip Everett's arms and legs had lost feeling. Everett kept hoping he would slip into unconsciousness. Unfortunately that didn't happen. The ride to the camp wasn't that long. Apparently they had been close to the Eye of Hawk camp. It was still night when the Indians took him off the ponies, carried, and tied him to a post in the center of the village.

Marshall Ewal stayed out of Everett's sight. Eye of Hawk wouldn't keep Everett long. Kent Ewal was told that. He would have his prisoner back next sundown. Kent Ewal had all he could do not to laugh at the fright in Everett's face as they tied him to that pole. It was real fun to see that pompous arrogant low life terrified.



Morning Song walked to Everett Mann and spat upon him. She looked at her son Eye of Hawk and asked in Sосoni', "What is this way of bringing him into our camp? I have never seen such a sight before."

"Just an idea Little Bear had to make his trip here uncomfortable and terrifying." Eye of Hawk said without changing his facial expression. Eye of Hawk didn't want a smile to ease the terror in Everett even if it was difficult for him not to laugh about the ingenious way his brother thought of to bring Everett Mann into camp.

"It is only a guess, but I think your brother's idea has been quite effective." Morning Song agreed containing her own laughter. Morning Song then scowled at Everett Mann and kicked him with force in his thigh. "I also have many ideas of fear to offer you." All conversation was in Sосoni' but Morning Song spoke directly into Everett's face with hostility not needing any translation.

Both Morning Song and Eye of Hawk could not hide the amazement in their eyes when they saw the water pooling and discoloring an area in Everett Mann's trousers. They both turned their backs and left quickly before they couldn't contain their laughter any longer. Everett Mann was left alone crying like a baby, begging for mercy and calling for his 'mommy'?

"Can one die of fear?" Kent Ewal asked Morning Song when they walked by him in the shadows of the tepee.

"I am told that can be, but I would not worry about that one." Morning Song replied trying to stop the laughter.

Kent Ewal couldn't contain his laughter either, "He is calling for his mommy!"

"We should get some rest. I will take Little Thundercloud to Alyson in the sun rise for keeping, and then I will return to here to place fear in his heart."

"What are you planning to do? What fear?" Kent asked unable to hold back his curiosity any more than he could hold back his chuckles.

"Many white people believe what they read and I have read many stories of the Indian. These stories brought fear into many white men's hearts although they were made up by the white man about us. I will use these stories now."

"What stories?"

"We would stake white men out in the sun without water to bake and die. It is said we squaws would cut a man's flesh inch by inch while he was still alive, and then there is how we would paint a man's face with honey and let the ants eat his brain after they entered through his eyes."

"You never did any of these things?"

"You read them too, Marshall?" Morning Song snorted.

"Yes, I did." Kent Ewal nodded laughing even harder. "I'll be damned! I believed them too!"



"We never did any of these things, but some other tribes did. They did after the white men had done it to our people. The white man showed us these evil things first."

"Our people did these things and then wrote down it was an Indian torture?" Kent Ewal asked in astonishment.

"That is a fact."

"What did your people do to captives before we showed you these horrible things."

"Captives might be beaten, tormented, but mainly captives were made to work and were used as barter with other tribes and nations." Morning Song explained to the Marshall.

"They were never killed or tortured?"

"That has never been our way, a warrior would die as a warrior, all other captives were valuable as slaves or commodities. They may have been tormented for a while but most would become part of a tribe eventually. The captives were mainly women and children. Our Great Spirit teachings give more value to life than the white man teaching and actions. We would not purposely take their lives other than retribution."

"Those stories you just told me are what you plan on doing to Everett Mann?" Kent asked Morning Song

"We will not do them to him, just make him think we are going to."

"Morning Song, that is delightfully wicked."

"Thank you, Marshall Ewal."

"Grady surely does have one fine woman with you." Kent honored Morning Song in admiration.

"Again I thank you, Marshall Ewal." Morning Song acknowledged the Marshall and friend of her husband, Grady McGillinen.

"Won't Eye of Hawk or Little Bear be doing any of this?"

"Captives were only handled by the women. It is beneath the warrior's honor and pride to deal with such lowly duties as slaves or captives."

"Everett Mann doesn't know this." Kent Ewal said.

"It is best that he suffer this fear from the hand of a woman, don't you agree?"

"There is a saying we white men have, Tit for Tat'. Yes I agree it is best he suffer fear from the hand of a woman."

Everett Mann had cried himself to sleep in exhaustion several hours after he had been tied to the post. Everett was afraid of dying and more afraid of the torture he would receive from the hands of these red savages.

He was awakened suddenly by cold water splashing on him. He focused his eyes in the early morning light to see several Indian women surrounding him. They were untying him, but their numbers and strength kept him from moving as they unbuttoned his shirt, removed it, opened his trousers and removed his boots. They retied him to the post and then put stakes in by his feet and tied his feet to those stakes.



Everett started screaming again and fighting his bindings until a tall fierce looking Indian wearing only a doeskin breechclout appeared in front of him. The Indian wore a magnificent beaded breastplate and a three tiered pipe bead choker around his neck. His hair was held in place with leather thong and a beaded ornament with one feather.

"You show great cowardice."

Looking at the fierce Indian, Everett Mann lost his voice. He was now even more terrified if that were possible. The next thing he saw was that same wolf snarling and growling. Everett thought the wolf was eyeing him as its next meal.

"Be still Hunter, we will feed you his bones." Tracker spoke in fluent American English.

"You speak white man's tongue?" Everett asked in surprise.

Tracker hated the white man's tongue but for this lowly life form he would be the one to enjoy telling him what tortures he could expect. "Yes, I speak your tongue." Tracker restrained the humor he was feeling. This would be a pleasure to watch this Everett suffer in fear.

"Good God Man, tell them to let me go! I'm an American citizen."

"A citizen means nothing to me. You are to be punished. It is the way of my people."

"You're punishment includes feeding me to your dog?" Everett raged.

"Your angry voice does not help your situation white man! Your cowardice is greater in this camp." Tracker knelt to pet Hunter. "I will not feed you to my wolf. My wolf will only feast on your bones."

"Why are you doing this to me?" Everett whimpered.

"You are a coward. You cowardly beat women, and you beat a women of our blood."

"You are going to torture me?"

"Warriors do not torture. Our women will offer you this torture you speak of. The close blood of Shining Star will give you what you deserve."

"Who is this Shining Star? I don't know any Shining Star."

"It is she that you took from her family, it is she that you beat. Her white name is Kerry McGillinen, now Kerry Wessex."

"But Kerry is a white woman!"

"Her blood is white, her heart Sosoni!"

"God, let me go!" Everett screamed and struggled at the bindings.

"The Great Spirit you call God will see to your punishment." Tracker said quietly and walked away. He would return when Morning Song returned and then their fun would begin.

Everett sat in the sun, but it was nearing Fall so he was not baking. Everett had read that Indians left their captives bake alive in the sun staked to posts. Is that what they were planning? Every hour an Indian woman came and brought him a bitter tasting water to drink, so they weren't trying to have him die of thirst. They didn't feed him but the bitter water took away his



appetite. This waiting was driving him crazy. When would these women come to torture him? *Torture? Oh God, what are they going to do to me?*

It was near midday when an older but attractive squaw approached him. Everett recognized her as the squaw that spit upon him and kicked him last night. On either side of the Indian woman were younger squaws. Both younger squaws carried pots and brushes. They placed the pots next to him. The older woman kneeled next to Everett and spoke in Sosoni', "Small Bird, give me the paint pot. We will first paint the fear onto him."

"I am relieved that Edward could not accompany me. This is cruel mother." Small Bird said seriously.

"You were told of his brutality to your second sister, my daughter." Morning Song chastised.

"I was not thinking this was cruel to him, but us. We would never do these things the white men invented."

"Let his fears of us burn into his heart so he will never forget and hurt another." Morning Song told her daughter and began chanting a holy write.

"Here is the pot, my mother." Small Bird conceded.

Morning Song began to paint rectangle lines forming boxes on Everett Mann's chest.

"What are you doing? War paint? What the hell is this?" Everett ranted in hysterics.

Tracker returned and smirked, "War paint is for a warrior. You are a coward."

"What the hell are these women doing to me?" Everett snarled in bravado.

"The woman is drawing the lines that she will use when she takes her knife and cuts your flesh in small pieces."

"What? God stop this!" Everett screamed and pulled harder on the bindings.

"The more you fight and pull, the tighter the bindings will become."

Morning Song stopped the painting when Everett started fighting the bindings. She slowly rose and took Fragrant Flower's and Small Bird's hand. They began dancing and chanting in a circle surrounding Everett.

Morning Song removed the knife from her belt. She left Small Bird and Fragrant Flower and carefully traced the point around the paint marks she had made on Everett's skin.

Everett began his screaming again.

Tracker just stood there watching with his arms crossed over his chest. Hunter was lying on the ground next to Everett and occasionally would lick Everett's arm.

Tracker spoke to Everett after Hunter had given one of those licks. "He is tasting you."

"God, oh God. Why don't you just kill me? Kill me please!" Tears were streaming down Everett's cheek. Everett was terrified.



"Oh I don't think so, our women are asking the Great Spirit to guide their knives and skin you painfully."

"Oh God no!" Everett fainted.

"This man is a true coward as Tracker and my husband have said." Fragrant Flower said in disgust. "I will get cool water to revive him."

Kent Ewal came from his hiding place and addressed Morning Song, "I think the man has had enough."

"I will not release him yet. I would still have Fragrant Flower paint his face with this honey. Tracker will then tell him of the horror of the ants eating his brain as they enter his eyes."

"He wouldn't be in that danger would he?" Kent Ewal became concerned for his prisoner.

"No Marshall Ewal, we have not placed him on an ant hill. Really, do you not look?" Morning Song chided.

Fragrant Flower returned and Kent Ewal returned to his hiding place. Morning Song threw the water at Everett and he woke up sputtering.

Fragrant Flower took the pot that had the honey and painted it on Everett's face.

"What is this?" Everett protested.

"It is the sweet of the bees, honey as you call it." Tracker answered.

"Why are they putting honey on my face? Oh God, ants! I read that you Indians put honey on prisoners to attract ants."

"That it will do and when they enter your eyes and begin to devour your brain you will go crazy." Tracker told the man tied to the post with a grim and fierce merciless face.

"Stop them, stop this!" Everett screamed.

"It cannot be done, but I must do my service to the Great Spirit."

"Your service?"

Tracker finished opening Everett's trousers. "A woman cannot touch this part of a man, only a warrior can."

Everett panicked. "What are you doing?"

Tracker smiled wickedly as he took his knife to the exposed male organ, "You will never again know a woman. It will keep you from the cowardice you show. You will never touch another woman."

Everett fainted again.

Tracker stood up and called for Kent Ewal, "You may take him back to your justice."

"His punishment is completed," Morning Song said laughing so hard she held her ribs because they hurt.

Eye of Hawk and Little Bear came into view from where they had been watching and laughing. "This man's heart is black, but his memory will be clear."

Kent Ewal remarked as he assisted in picking up the limp body of Everett Mann, "I do believe that family justice has been served, from what I witnessed Sosoni' tribal justice was not involved in this." Those words

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extricated the tribe from any wrongdoing. If Kent were called to court that would be his testimony, family justice.

"What think you of our family justice?" Eye of Hawk asked the Marshall as he, Little Bear and Clear Creek lifted the unconscious Everett Mann to the waiting buckboard.

"Eloquently dispersed, my friend. Eloquently." Kent smirked.

Everett woke up the next morning in the Ely jail cell. He did not know how he got there. *Was it a nightmare? No it was too real.* Everett opened his shirt and saw the painted lines. He ran a hand across his face and found it was sticky. He then opened his trousers. Everything was there. It wasn't a dream, but he was unharmed. He didn't know why the Indians did what they did, but he was away from them. He was away from the Indians and that's all that mattered.

CHAPTER 22

Kerry woke this morning to see her husband asleep on the chair next to her hotel room bed. It was now a familiar sight. Braden would not leave his wife's side no matter who gave protest. Early every morning he would go to the adjacent room to bath and shave and returned to join Kerry once again for breakfast. Braden would then spend the entire day with Kerry hovering over her, helping her to bathe, change her nightdress, and aid in her toilette including combing her hair. Braden also ordered her meals and saw to it that she ate the 'horse feed'. Braden would even oversee the hotel chambermaid cleaning the room and changing the bed linens.

This morning would be different. Kerry and her family would be returning to Geneva. With luck, they would arrive in time to greet Braden's parents. They had been gone two weeks because of the week of her abduction and now due to the recovery period suggested by the Carson City doctor, but demanded by her husband. Even though Kerry was feeling quite well for the past three days, Braden would not allow her to leave her room and insisted that she spend most of the day in bed. To Kerry's consternation her father and two brothers were no better in her recovery protests.

Kerry had been well taken care of with Braden attending to most of her comforts and needs. Braden had seen to it that her sheets were soft satin that he personally purchased in Carson City and given to the Hotel's chambermaids for her bed. Kerry's sheets were changed every morning. Unfortunately Braden also ordered Kerry's food and it was always soft food. Kerry's mouth was watering for a nice huge juicy steak.

Kerry got up from bed and stretched putting her arms well above her head and the soft cotton nightgown rising from the floor with them. Suddenly she felt hands on her waist and warm lips on the nape of her neck.

"Good Morning my love." Braden whispered into her ear as his kiss moved from her neck to her earlobe and he began to nibble.

Kerry folded into the curves of the masculine hard frame behind her and placing her hands on his giggled, "keep that up husband and I will get you back in my bed regardless of your protests."

"You're feeling better for certain." Braden said between his nibbles, "but you will have to wait a little longer. I want to make sure you and our baby are perfectly healthy. I won't take any chances until we are home in our bed."

"I could tempt you."

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"My love, you always tempt me." Braden answered touching the soft breasts of his wife and kissing her neck.

Kerry turned around and put her arms around Braden's neck. She rubbed her belly against his loins. "Could I be feeling that you just might need me right now?"

"Temptress!" Braden moaned. "God help protect me from this woman."

"Do you really want protection?" Kerry asked half closing her eyes and flitting her eyelashes seductively.

"Oh God yes." Braden groaned.

Someone up above must have heard him because after a brief knock on the door a tall brawny dark haired moose of a brother named Ryan walked in.

"Do you two always have to be doing that?" Ryan complained as his face flushed and he grimaced in disgust.

"Ryan, you have the worst timing in the world." Kerry chided and walked to her bed to grab her robe.

"If you want complete privacy, lock your door." Ryan growled.

"Just what is it you want?" Kerry growled back.

"Look sis, be nice. I just came to ask what you wanted for breakfast before we get ready to leave for Geneva." Ryan answered with a tenderness Kerry rarely heard.

"I'm sorry Ryan." Kerry apologized. "I know you must be anxious to get back."

"I love you sis, that's all I think about." Ryan said quietly walking to her and brushing her cheek with his hand, "and don't you ever get abducted again!"

"I don't plan to!" Kerry chuckled and stretching on her tip toes brushed Ryan's cheek with her lips.

"So little girl, what do you want for breakfast?" Ryan asked and slid his finger down Kerry's cheek.

"Two fried eggs, hard bread toast with butter and preserves, and a nice huge steak on the side." Kerry beamed as she gave her order. Her mouth was already watering. "Don't forget a huge cup of hot coffee."

Braden interrupted just then, "Make that a bowl of mush, one egg, soft toast and maybe some bacon."

"Braden! I'm feeding two and I'm starved. I am tired of horse feed!" Kerry said in exasperation.

"I conceded to the bacon!" Braden answered looking wide eyed and innocent.

"Braden, look at me. I'm fine. I'm cured! I'm well, Dammit, and I'm hungry!" Kerry snarled balling her hands into little fists, "and if I can't eat a decent breakfast someone here is going to get hurt!"

"Two fried eggs, hard bread toast with butter and preserves, steak and coffee coming up!" Ryan feigned fear and put his hands up in defeat.



"Ryan, she mustn't eat hard foods!" Braden shouted to his brother in law as he marched over to Kerry.

"Sorry old man, I fear a hungry sister more than I do you!" Ryan laughed and walked out of the room.

"Brat!" Braden scolded as he took Kerry back in his arms.

"Beast!" Kerry snapped. "Ryan knows how I can get when I am really hungry and fortunately for you, you won't find out!"

"I just want what's best for you." Braden said quietly as he hugged Kerry close to him.

"Starvation is not what's best right now. I can hear baby's tummy grumbling I'm so hungry." Kerry teased.

"Really?" Braden chuckled and put his hand over Kerry's belly. "I guess you're right. I think I can hear Christina's tummy growl."

"It would be Garrett's tummy, but right now that's mine rumbling."

"I want a girl!" Braden lightly protested taking Kerry's fingers and kissing them.

"I want a boy." Kerry grinned, "and even if I wanted a girl, I wouldn't call her Christina."

"Well, if it's a girl I will call her Christina." Braden responded stubbornly.

"We'll see, but I'm not too worried since his name will be Garrett!" Kerry retorted. "This subject is not up for debate."

Braden just made a face and put Kerry's head to his chest. God she felt good in his arms and to think he almost lost her. In reality he would allow her anything she wanted.

That same morning Everett Mann woke to Kent Ewal bringing in a water bowl and fresh towels. "You can freshen up and shave. Your breakfast will be coming in from the Ely Hotel in about an hour."

"Where are my counselors? Are they here yet?" Everett demanded.

"Oh they're here alright. Woke me up from my sleep last night. You'll see them this morning." Kent Ewal answered with irritation when he remembered his rude waking by them last night. He had just brought Everett back and locked up the bastard. Kent was already tired but had to make his rounds in the town before he went to bed. Kent was sound asleep when those peacocks banged on his door demanding to talk to him and find out how their client was. They even had the nerve to demand Kent get dressed and take them to see Everett in jail. That's when Kent got mad and pulled his six-shooter. Kent told them to get to their own beds right quick or they would be joining Everett in his cell as prisoners!

Everett took the opportunity with the hot water to wash and shave his face. Everett also washed all that Indian paint off his body. He shivered as he removed that paint and scrubbed his skin so hard it turned bright pink in irritation.



A short while later after Everett cleaned himself a boy came in with his breakfast and took out the chamber pot. It was a solid breakfast that Everett wasn't used to but he was so hungry he ate the fried eggs, hard bread, bacon and steak. He preferred tea but the hot coffee actually tasted good. Everett was feeling satisfied when his barristers showed up at the jailhouse and Kent brought them into the jail cells but made them stand back and talk through the bars as he listened.

"This is preposterous!" The older of the barristers complained to Kent as he removed his extremely Easterner bowler hat. The starched collar of his shirt wrapped with a tight tie cutting into his throat. "We demand privacy for our discussion with our client."

"Well, ain't that too bad. We didn't think to have a private room built in this jail." Kent Ewal sneered. These Easterner barristers were not any more likable than his prisoner.

"Fortunately we anticipated such barbarianism representing this country when we were first summoned," the second barrister boasted. "Here is our Writ of Extradition."

"That means.." the third barrister began.

"I know what it means!" Kent snarled. Kent wished he could take these three barristers as well as Everett and toss them to the Eye of Hawk Shoshone tribe, better yet the Comanche Apaches of Geronimo he had heard was causing some trouble in Texas and New Mexico. "Everett Mann is to stand trial for abduction in Ely. His crime was not in Boston."

"The Massachusetts State Judicial System deems otherwise Marshall Ewal." The first barrister said quite pompously.

Suddenly Everett Mann, now fully confident again of his power, shouted through the bars, "I want this Ewal's badge removed. He threw me to Indians for torture."

All three barristers glared at Marshall Ewal, "Torture?"

Kent looked wide-eyed and innocent. "I have no idea what this man is talking about."

"The Hell you don't. You gave me to those Indians so they could torture me."

"You were thrashing about last night, bad dreams maybe?" Kent smiled maliciously.

"Dreams my ass, they tied me up like a trussed roasting pig, did war dances, and painted my body to cut me up and then poured honey so the ants would eat my brain." Everett snarled.

"These are serious charges, Marshall." The second barrister condescended with statement and look.

"Don't know what the man is talking about." Kent answered hiding the grin trying to cross his lips. "I don't see any broken skin nor paint marks. Don't see no ants on his face neither. Must have been a real bad dream."

"We need to examine our client." The third barrister demanded.



"No problem. Drop yer drawers, Mr. Mann." Kent ordered barely containing his laughter.

"Enough of this. Release our client." The first barrister demanded.

"Can't do that! The extradition just means the prisoner is transferred to a jail in Boston, not released." Kent said stubbornly.

"We'll change that. Where can we find your judge?" The first lawyer churned in red-faced anger.

"You'll find Judge Adams at the courthouse," Kent offered nonchalantly. "Course you won't find him as friendly as me with your arrogant ways. We barbaric folks down here don't take kindly to abductions of women. The McGillinens are also well thought of folk in these parts."

"That's precisely why we obtained the Writ of Extradition. A biased court." The second barrister bragged.

"I think you may just make Judge Adams a bit irritable if you accuse him of not offering a fair trial, but you'll find the courthouse on the main street just down yonder."

Everett sat on the cot in his cell and groaned. He couldn't wait to get out of this village and back to the safety of his city. This was a nightmare he did want to wake from. The other thing he was sure of was he never wanted to see or think about Kerry McGillinen again. The worst was to find out she had married Braden Wessex after knowing him for only a few weeks and he had courted Kerry proper for over a year. Everett's pride was wounded as much as his pride was wounded when he showed just what a coward he was in the Indian camp. That was not a dream but a living nightmare and Everett Mann had no way to prove it.

A short time later the barristers came back, red faced and disgruntled. "I'm sorry Mr. Mann but Judge Adams will not release you into our custody with bail."

"I cannot expect justice in this place." Everett complained vocally.

That riled Kent Ewal, "seems to me that you have been treated too kindly because of the law. Just some twenty years ago your justice would have been a quick trip to a hanging tree, or shot, or gelded. It would depend upon what the family wanted."

"As soon as we get you to civilization Mr. Mann, we'll get you released." The first barrister sneered ignoring the statements of the Marshall.

"We are leaving on the afternoon stage, Marshall Ewal." The third barrister addressed, "you and two deputies will accompany us to the railhead where we will proceed to Boston."

"I have no desire to share your company, sirs." Kent argued.

"That was a written demand by your Judge Adams, Marshall Ewal."

"What?"

"Here is your documentation Marshall." The third barrister opened the paper for Kent to read.



"Damn!" was the only thing that came out of Kent's mouth. He did not want to even think about spending about a week or so with these arrogant and obnoxious Easterners.

Kent turned on his heels and spoke to Cliff Riggs. Kent had to tell Cliff he would be in charge until his return from Boston. Kent had Cliff find Ray and Jimmy his other deputies and tell them to pack up for a trip to Boston. When Cliff found them, they weren't too happy about the trip anymore than Kent was. Kent had finished his packing by the time Jimmy and Ray came with their valises. The unlikely and incompatible group got on the afternoon stage headed for the railhead in Utah.

Kent was thinking about how true were the visions of Morning Song. Kent knew that when they got to Boston this polecat would get off without punishment just as Morning Song had said. He certainly would never question Morning Song's visions ever again, and he was glad he believed this one. A smile crossed his face when he thought of that night and day at the Eye of Hawk camp.

Two days later a shiny black carriage pulled up in front of the Geneva Ranch House. Alyson Jameson was prepared after receiving their telegram last week. The ocean crossing had taken only ten days and they did not stay in New York long, but took a train to Nevada. They had arrived several days earlier than expected by their son Braden.

Grant stepped out of the carriage and then assisted his wife Celeste. Bennett saw them through the window and ran out the door, "Grandmamma! Grandpapa!" Bennett's exuberance was at a peak.

"What's this?" Grant turned to his grandson and opened his arms as Bennett literally jumped into them.

Bennett was all smiles and immediately began his babbling in excitement. Bennett's eyes were bright and twinkling. Celeste noticed those happy eyes immediately. She also noticed how healthy he looked. Bennett's cheeks were rosy and she noted a slight tan. Celeste had never seen her grandson so happy and healthy before. This revelation did not pass Grant's notice either.

Alyson Jameson and Morning Song McGillinen soon appeared on the porch and followed Bennett to the Wessex family.

"I'm Alyson Jameson and this is Morning Song McGillinen, Mrs. Wessex."

"I'm pleased to make your acquaintance." Celeste responded politely. "My husband had told me many wonderful things about you."

"Nice to see you again, Morning Song and Alyson." Grant greeted extending his hand.

"Where are my son and his new bride?" Celeste innocently asked looking around.

"Mamma and Papa have been away." Bennett answered with the same innocence.



"Ben, why don't you come with Morning Song and let us go with George to take care of the carriage." Morning Song offered to Bennett extending her hand for him to take it.

"Why don't you call me Little Thundercloud?" Bennett looked up at his new Grandmother questioningly.

"I wanted to wait to tell your Grandmamma and Grandpapa our special name for you, but come. We will go to tend their horses." Morning Song said as she took Bennett's hand and led him to the barn following George.

"Little Thundercloud?" Celeste questioned Alyson.

"I'll explain that later, first I must tell you about Braden and Kerry."

"Where are they?" Grant asked this time.

"On their way back from Carson City. They should be resting in Virginia City today."

"They didn't get our telegram last week?" Grant quizzed.

"I didn't send it to them in Carson City. Kerry was too badly injured from what Grady wired me, that I thought it best not to let them know you would be here sooner."

"Kerry injured? What has happened?" Grant was concerned with an ominous feeling looming in the pit of his stomach



CHAPTER 23

"Come in the house and I'll try to explain things from the little I have found out." Alyson suggested walking towards the ranch.

"Dear God, is Kerry alright?" Celeste asked with great concern following closely in Alyson's steps. "Braden must be out of his mind in worry."

"He was, but he has Kerry again." Alyson answered as she walked into the house. "First let me tell you that we have not let Bennett know anything that has happened. He has only been told that his parents are in Carson City and will be coming back soon."

"What in God's name has happened?" Grant demanded. "Braden lost his first wife in a horrible accident. He went through three years of mourning and sorrow. I don't know what he'll do if something happens again. He could lose his mind."

Celeste clung trembling to Grant's arm terrified for her son. "The wire he sent us told us he was deeply in love with Kerry. We thought he would actually have joy in his life again."

"This was no accident. Kerry was abducted and beaten." Alyson replied quietly with anger at the abduction but the need to explain it was not an accident.

"Dear God, by whom?" Celeste gasped bringing her hand to cover her mouth.

"A former suitor that wouldn't take 'no' for an answer." Alyson informed with fervor to her voice.

"You said Bennett was told they would be back soon. Does this mean that Braden is bringing her home?" Grant asked.

"Yes, Braden and Grady and her brothers are bringing her home. Kerry was captive for a week until our family and Braden caught up with the animal. Because of her injuries Braden has kept Kerry to recover in Carson City for a week, and being careful for the baby's sake they are taking their time returning."

"Baby? What baby?" Celeste caught that word and questioned Alyson.

"Kerry is carrying Braden's child." Alyson looked to Celeste and answered not knowing if she should have been the one to tell Braden's parents, but it had slipped out.



"Oh God!" Celeste gasped in shock clinging to her husband's arm to steady her, "it's just like Laura."

"No my darling, it's not like Laura. Braden has Kerry back you heard that. They're coming back." Grant reassured his wife and squeezed her hand. Grant turned to Alyson, "when do you expect them to return?"

"Normally the trip is about five days, but Braden and Grady are taking extra care with Kerry. We shouldn't expect them for about a week."

"You still haven't told us of her injuries. Was the child harmed?" Celeste asked only somewhat relieved and reassured this was not a repeat tragedy.

"I was only told that Kerry was beaten and her bruises and swelling extensive. I have been reassured that because Kerry was still so early in pregnancy the baby was unhurt."

"What of this suitor, has he been apprehended?" Grant wanted to know. If the perpetrator hadn't he intended to have him found and brought to justice.

"Everett Mann is his name and yes, they caught him in Carson City. Our Marshall Ewal brought him back to Ely to stand trial." Alyson replied indicating contempt when saying Everett's name.

"I'm surprised Braden didn't kill him. In England he would demand satisfaction and the courts would have allowed it, I'm sure." Grant mumbled angrily.

"The United States doesn't allow duels of any kind any more. The courts must handle these things. I was told your son did major damage to Everett's person with pugilism. Morning Song told me that Grady wrote her Everett's face was ten times worse than Kerry's and Braden might have killed Everett with his fists if our Ryan had not pulled Braden off to get in his own punches." Alyson related to the couple.

"I had no idea our son could show such violence." Celeste inhaled sharply in surprise.

"Any man would if he was pushed to it, and from what we have heard Braden was pushed to that limit." Grant interjected thoughtfully. "Braden took lessons from champion pugilists in England for recreation. It appears that recreation has been useful."

Bennett ran into the room followed by Morning Song and was called to Celeste. "Come to Grandmamma."

Morning Song looked to Alyson, "have all things been told?"

Grant returned the answer, "Yes Morning Song, we have been told. Now tell us about our Bennett and Little Thundercloud?"

Morning Song smiled and while tea was served a happy family conversed about their adored grandson.

Braden was cuddling Kerry in his arms as the carriage swayed in a rocking motion on it's way to the next stop.

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"You know Braden this is one of the nice things about this abduction." Kerry started to tease.

"There was nothing nice about this abduction." Braden retorted sharply.

"I think so. I have not enjoyed the comfort and security of your arms this much for such a continued length of time."

Braden tightened his hold on Kerry a little more. "Really?"

"Really. Always during the day you had something to do, some business to attend, well just always something to do."

"As if you didn't!" Braden teased back. "There were wedding dresses to make, weddings to attend to, and let us not forget the time you take playing with Bennett. Your interest in Geneva and running it takes a lot of your time as well my selfish wife."

"Touché mon cheri."

Braden picked up Kerry's chin with his thumb and looked into her sparkling gray eyes, "I adore you, and do you know that?"

"I need to hear you say it." Kerry grinned, "and I adore you my love."

"I also need to hear you say it." Braden responded followed by a passionate kiss.

When Kerry's breath returned she changed the subject. Kerry wanted Braden right then and there but surrounded by family the carriage would not be the best place to make love. "Do you think we will have some time to ready Geneva before your parents arrive?"

Braden was relieved to have the subject turn to his parents; he was hurting right now because of that kiss. Braden had felt the swelling response immediately and at this moment could use a good cold dip. This subject would help cool him down, "I keep telling you not to worry about their visit. Papa has been to Geneva many times, even before it became the palace your Papa has made it into now."

"How do you know what he thinks of Geneva?" Kerry asked creasing her brow.

"Because as a child all I heard about was this wonderful place in America called Geneva. Papa told us of the land's beauty and the his adventure here."

"Adventure?"

"As grown men we still hear the stories from Papa. How your Papa met Ashley. Papa knew your Mamma and the friendship that developed with the three of them. The first ranch in Geneva and what it was like. Papa told us of the red Indians here on the land and how that came to be. Yes, we heard many exciting stories."

"Did your Papa ever talk of me?"

"In passing as one of the children. He referred to you as a skinny little girl with boyish qualities."



"That is why when you first heard I was going to Nevada and knew the McGillins you did not even guess it was me. Even my doeskins did not give me away."

"I was too blindly in love with you to think or reason clearly. The fact I took you as governess in that second night attests to the fact I was mindless with passion for you." There was no mistaking the grin on Braden's face and how quickly his heat began again. To change the subject once more, "Papa even told us stories of Cougar's Paw and Morning Song. I am sure everything he said had been embellished, but they were fascinating stories."

"Ben is even more tantalized then you were."

"Bennett doesn't have just stories. He has the real thing, and of course he loves it. What little boy wouldn't?"

Kerry's face suddenly became solemn and wrinkles appeared on her brow. "Do you think Ben might worry too much over what has happened and why his Papa and I are not there to share his excitement?"

Braden smoothed the wrinkles on her forehead. "Bennett does not know what has happened. Morning Song told Little Bear she would keep all this from our son."

Braden's words brought a joy Kerry could barely contain, *our son*, was Braden's reference to Bennett. Tears started to well up in Kerry's eyes. Those words meant that Braden truly loved and accepted her as his wife and mother of his children. Those tiny doubts of sharing her bed with a specter named Laura were completely erased.

Braden saw the tears, "What?"

"You've made me so happy my darling, " Kerry answered and put her arms immediately around Braden's neck and pulled herself close to him. Kerry snuggled into his hard muscular chest.

"Whatever I said, I'm glad I said it." Braden said to himself aloud embracing Kerry.

After a full day of travel they were at the next stop. It was only a rest station but everyone ate a tasty hot meal. When the wife of the owner at the stop learned Kerry was carrying a child she made sure that Kerry had extra of everything served on her plate. In the morning she even packed a basket of food for Kerry to nibble until they came to the next rest stop or hotel.

Kerry was getting anxious to return to Geneva and became vocal about the slow movement deferred for her sake.

"I'm not Chinese porcelain you know!" Kerry protested as the group pulled into a small mining town where they had a hotel. It wasn't even sundown yet, but they had stopped.

"That's where we disagree with you, sis." Ayden chided. "After all, who got herself abducted anyway?"

"Are you insinuating that I am some sort of weak female?"

"Don't get your ire all up!"



"You just listen here, Ayden McGillinen. I had no choice but to give up my gun and go with the louts. Remember Auntie Alyson was with me and they got to her first. I had to give up to protect her."

"No one is faulting your sensitivity. A guy just wouldn't let other guys get the jump on them, that's all."

"Why you pig headed, arrogant, ooh, you man you!"

"What's this shouting about?" Grady came out to the carriage after obtaining rooms for the night and asked.

Kerry was flushed with anger, "Ayden just called me a weak female."

"Did not, just said a guy wouldn't get trapped like a girl would, sensitivity you know."

"Ayden, don't go upsetting Kerry. You have to remember her condition." Grady reprimanded.

"Condition? Condition?" Kerry was furious now and her voice was raised to just short of shouting. "I'm not going to break and Lord knows I've a long way to go yet before I even show it."

"I don't know about that, sis. Your middle is getting a little thick, course with all the food you've been eating."

Kerry cut him off, "I've been eating a lot of food because you cads starved me for over a week. You eat horse feed that long and see how hungry you are!" Kerry then walked stubbornly over to Ayden with a balled fist and was about to let him have it when Grady caught her arm.

"Calm down girl! That's an order." Grady ordered with a fatherly tone that gave no quarter. Kerry had not heard that tone in several years.

"Pa!" Kerry protested.

"No!" Grady answered a little more gently as his eye caught Braden coming out of the hotel. "Braden, come get your wife and take her to the restaurant, we'll unpack and meet you there."

"Getting cranky again, woman?" Braden teased.

"Cranky? Cranky? I'll show you cranky." Kerry went to slam her fists on Braden's strong chest but he caught her wrists and bent over to give her a warm kiss.

"Let's get you some food before you turn into a shrieking banshee." Braden chuckled and lead Kerry to the restaurant.

"I just want to get home, Braden." Kerry murmured contritely as he led her into the restaurant.

"So do I, my love, but you have to take it easy. Your body has been through a lot even if you think you are completely recovered. I just won't take the chance with that. I couldn't bear to live if anything happened to you and our Christina." Braden patted Kerry's belly.

"Garrett!" Kerry snarled. "Are you all purposely trying to irritate me?"

"It doesn't take much lately."

"Are you telling me that I am grouchy all the time?"

"Well, yes. Especially if you aren't fed on a regular basis."



"Have I been that bad?" Kerry asked penitently.

"Yes, you have, but I love you all the same."

"God, what will your parents think of me? I can't seem to help it."

"They'll love you as I do and understand your condition." Braden pulled out a chair for Kerry to seat herself and the waiter came over immediately. "Bring us some butter and bread right away and two beers, please."

"Beer, Pa never let me drink beer before. Are they both for you?"

"No my love, beer is good for your condition and when you feed our baby. I just hope you can learn to like it. You seemed to like whiskey enough and I'm sure your Pa didn't know you learned to drink that."

Kerry flushed pink remembering that night in Braden's New York hotel suite. "I already like beer and no Pa doesn't know I drink anything other than coffee, tea or milk."

The waiter brought over the butter, bread and beer. Kerry began to eat the bread and drink the beer immediately. Braden ordered their meal and it wasn't horse feed. They were just about finished with their meal when Grady, Ayden and Ryan entered the restaurant pulling chairs up to sit by them.

"Where do you put all that food?" Ryan teased Kerry. "A little thing like you could burst if you eat another thing."

"Thanks Ryan, Ayden thinks I'm getting fat."

"You're supposed to, aren't you?" Ryan asked innocently.

Kerry choked on her beer. "Later, not immediately. God do I look fat?"

"No you don't but since when does my little girl drink beer?" Grady asked her.

"Since my husband said it's good for me." Kerry retorted.

Grady looked directly at Braden with his piercing gray eyes.

"It's true Mr. McGillinen. Mead has always been suggested for breeding women and nursing mothers. It's from the medieval midwifery."

"It's true Pa. I remember reading something like that." Ayden verified.

"Well I guess I can't say anything anymore. Braden is your husband." Grady stated with a little sadness. "You aren't my little girl anymore. I just should be glad you don't drink whiskey."

With that, Braden choked on his beer and immediately had Ryan pounding his back. "You okay Brit?"

The next several days lasted too long for everyone. They were all anxious to return home. Kerry talked incessantly of everything that needed to be done to prepare for Braden's parent's visit. It was a shock when the carriage stopped in front of the ranch house and out came Grant and Celeste Wessex to greet them.



CHAPTER 24

As Braden opened the door to the carriage he had every intention of assisting Kerry from it until he saw his mother and father approaching.

"Mamma! Papa!" Braden yelled to the pair and began running to them. He took his mother in his arms and hugged her. Grant put his arm around the son and mother and patted his son on the back.

"Son, it is so good to see you. You look healthy." Grant Wessex appraised his Braden.

"I'm not sure I like this new style of clothing you have acquired, Braden." Celeste reproved as she scanned her son's clothing of denim trousers and deep blue cotton shirt.

"These are a necessity for working the ranch, Mamma." Braden explained. "Actually I prefer these clothes to English attire, they are practical and more comfortable. I have even acquired buckskins."

"Buckskins? That sounds positively horrible! Wearing skins? Oh Braden!" Celeste bemoaned.

"Wait until you see what it is before you pass judgment my love." Grant gently reprimanded Celeste. "I visited here quite often and I understand the need for practical clothing."

"Besides Mamma, in a manner you wear skins. The fox fur, minks on your coats, the beaver trimmings, those are skins."

"I'm sorry Braden," Celeste apologized flushing with the realization of the truth in her son's statement. "You do look so happy and that is the most important. You are happy aren't you?"

"Happier than I have been in my entire life, Mamma, and more happiness to come."

"That is wonderful, Braden!" Celeste exclaimed, "and does this happiness have anything to do with your new wife, Kerry?"

"Everything Mamma, come and meet her." Braden turned back to the carriage.

Grady was helping Kerry out of the carriage and Ayden and Ryan were already unpacking the trunks. Morning Song was already by Grady's side. Alyson also had placed herself near Kerry and could be heard issuing orders.

Kerry seemed incognizant of everyone around her. Kerry was concentrating on her husband Braden and the two people he was with, his parents!



Braden walked to Kerry with great strides and had her in his arms in a breathless moment. "Mamma, Papa, I am proud to introduce my wife, Kerry Wessex."

"You've changed a great deal over these ten years, Kerry." Grant Wessex noted approvingly. "All for the better, I might say."

"Thank you Mr. Wessex." Kerry said with appreciation, or at least she thought she appreciated it.

"Welcome to our family my dear." Celeste told Kerry. Celeste took Kerry's hands and pulled Kerry forward to her for an embrace.

Celeste released Kerry and holding her arms asked, "Is it really true, do you already carry Braden's child?"

"Yes Mamma." Braden answered before Kerry could move her mouth. "We are very happy about it. Bennett doesn't know it yet, but he will soon have a sister."

"Brother!" Kerry countered. Before Kerry could continue the original object of their conversation ran out to greet them.

"Papa, Mamma!" Bennett shouted as he ran into Kerry's welcoming arms. "You've been away soooo long. I've missed you. I have much to show you. Eye of Hawk is teaching me to ride a pony. I have learned to wrestle."

Kerry beamed with pride at her adopted son, he was learning quickly and Kerry enjoyed his exuberant babbling. It was obvious that Bennett was very happy here on her Geneva. "Now that we're all home again, perhaps Ayden and Ryan can show you how to rope a steer, shear a sheep, and mend fences."

Bennett was about to ask Kerry what was mending fences when he saw the fading yellow and blue colored bruises on Kerry's face. Bennett carefully and gently touched Kerry's face, "What happened Mamma? Did someone hit you, did Papa?"

"Papa would never hit me, Ben. I was hit by a very bad person, but the law put him in jail and he can't hit anyone anymore." Kerry explained softly and with as much reassurance she herself could offer. Kerry was brave and strong for her father, brothers, and Braden, but the beatings did leave a scar on her emotionally. Kerry wondered if it was the same type of emotional scar Mildred Hudson could have left on Ben. That question was answered immediately.

"You mean a bad person like, Madam. Hudson?" Ben whispered near Kerry's ear.

"Yes sweetheart, that same type of bad person." Kerry's heart sank a little knowing that Ben had been just as scarred emotionally. It is something you do not forget.

Bennett hugged Kerry tightly. "I'm sorry Mamma. We won't let that happen again!"

Kerry hugged Bennett back, "No we won't Ben, and no we won't."

Braden fought back the emotion he felt. Braden knew that both Kerry and Bennett had been beaten; it was a private emotion that only the two of them



could really share and understand. Braden plucked Bennett from Kerry's arms and held Bennett in one arm keeping Kerry in the other and they started walking to the ranch house. Braden was quite shocked at Bennett's next question.

"Papa, you promised no one could hurt us. Why did you let Mamma get hit?"

Grady and Morning Song were behind Braden as well as Grant and Celeste. Grady heard the innocent question and answered immediately. "No matter how much we try to protect those we love there are sometimes just too many bad people, Ben. They sneak into our lives unaware."

"But you catch them? And punish them back?" Bennett asked his grandfather peering over his father's shoulders.

"Yes Bennett we do." Grant answered his grandson.

The family had returned about the time for the noon meal and Alyson had to rush resetting the table and make other preparations for the return of the entire family. The one thing that everyone wanted before the meal was a chance to wash the road dust off and put on fresh clothes. Small Bird assisted Kerry in Kerry's old room, while Edward assisted Braden in the Master Suite.

"We are relieved to have you and your ladyship back safely, sir." Edward said as he helped Braden remove his boots. "We have all been besides ourselves with worry."

"No one can be happier than I to have my Kerry safely home with me." Braden responded sighing heavily.

"Of that I am certain your lordship. I was afraid you might not survive another tragedy."

"Truth be known, Edward. I don't think I could have survived losing my Kerry. Not this time." Braden went into the prepared hot bath and soaked. The bath felt wonderful after the long rides and comforting to be back home serene and peaceful. When he closed his eyes the nightmare of tracking Kerry, not knowing if she was dead or alive, the horror was all gone.

Small Bird couldn't hold back her gasp when she saw Kerry's back.

"Is it really that bad Small Bird?" Kerry asked calmly.

"It is healing my sister." Small Bird answered staring at the yellow, black, and blue welts on the ivory skin of Kerry's back. "It is good that Everett Mann was brought to our camp for justice."

"Everett Mann was brought to Eye of Hawk's camp?"

Small Bird nodded and started laughing. When Small Bird could control her laughter she told Kerry everything that happened to Everett at the camp beginning with the degrading and humorous way Everett Mann was brought into there.

When all was explained Kerry was laughing so hard tears were streaming from her eyes and her ribs hurt from laughing with Small Bird. "He wet his pants?"



"It's true!" Small Bird laughed. "We never touched him, but his terror was the punishment we sought and it worked. I was against the things that Morning Song had created to terrify him because those were white man tales. I now see your back and know this punishment was justice earned. Morning Song was right."

"I wish I could have been there. I would love to have seen this." Kerry responded still laughing at the story.

"You will have to be satisfied with my stories, little sister." Small Bird smiled wiping the moisture of laughter from her own eyes. "You just relax in this nice hot bath and rest from your long journey. Our noon meal will be ready soon."

Kerry did just that. She closed her eyes and soaked in the hot water and it felt wonderful. Kerry was happy to be home, happy to be with her family and happy to be back in Braden's arms.

Dwayne had waited until after the meal while everyone was drinking coffee before he gave the family the bad news. Dwayne really had no choice after Grady had commented that he was planning to ride into Ely tomorrow to check on the trial plans of Everett Mann.

"Pa, Deputy Cliff came to see me about a week ago." Dwayne began to let Grady know what happened.

"What did he have to say? Anything about when the trial will begin?"

"Actually, to tell us that them big city barristers had a Writ of Extradition." Dwayne squeaked out knowing exactly what his father's response would be.

Grady turned crimson, "Writ of Extradition to where?"

"Well Pa, it seems they took him back to Boston for trial." Dwayne gulped seeing his father's face get redder. Dwayne thought for certain a cannon was going to explode in the dining room in the next minute.

"Kerry, Morning Song, Alyson, Small Bird, Mrs. Wessex, please leave the room and take the children." Grady ordered leaving no quarter.

Morning Song recognizing Grady's tone took Ben's hand, Small Bird picked up Willow. Alyson also acknowledging Grady's command took Kerry's hand. Grant Wessex knowing his friend nodded to his wife Celeste to leave with them.

When the women and children left the room Grady folded his napkin placing it on the table and that's when the cannon exploded.

"What in the Sam Hill happened Dwayne? Why the Hell didn't you wire me?"

"Pa, I.."

"Don't Pa me!" Grady roared. "Where the Hell was Duffey? "

"Pa, we were.."

"Damn it Dwayne!" Grady's fist slammed on the table.

Grant Wessex rose to meet Grady eye to eye, "Grady, let the boy talk!"



Grady growled, "Talk boy, cat got your tongue. Explain this to me."

"Pa, Cliff came to me after Judge Adams sent Kent off with Mann to Boston. They were already on the train before anyone bothered to tell us."

"Judge Adams? You mean to tell me he went along with this?"

"Wasn't anything he could do, Pa." Dwayne explained, "Them barristers had it all the legality wrapped up in a pretty package before they got here. They got here the same day Mann was brought in and left the next day with him in tow."

"Damn it! How could that son of a bitch get away with that?" Grady was furious.

Braden was red faced but silent. Ayden and Ryan were beyond furious into strap on your gun and shoot him mode.

"All legal talk, Pa. But them barristers got Judge Adams real angry saying that Mann couldn't get a fair trial here." Dwayne tried to continue but Grady interrupted.

"The man doesn't deserve a fair trial, but Judge Adams would have seen to it, the bastards."

"Well Judge Adams did take offense to that so when the barristers asked for bail, Judge Adams nearly threw them out of his courthouse himself."

"Bail? Let him loose?" Ryan yelled rising so fast from the table he pulled the cloth and dishes fell and smashed on the floor.

"Don't you ever listen big brother?" Dwayne answered with exasperation present in his voice. "Judge Adams denied it. Instead Adams sent Kent Ewal and two other deputies with the barristers and Mann returning him to a prison in Boston."

The quiet rage in Braden's voice was frightening even to his own father, "With Mann's money and family background in Boston they'll let him off!" The cords in Braden's neck were taught and his hands balled into fists were only two of the physical signs of fury. Braden's color was crimson and his eyes were glassy when he stated quite calmly, "I will go to Boston and hire our own barristers, I will spend my fortune bribing judges and officials if I must."

Ayden broke into Braden's wrath with his calm and logic, "You belong here with Kerry, and I don't think you want to take her with you to be anywhere near Mann."

Braden's glare softened at the mention of his wife and Ayden's reminder that she needed him and he belonged with her.

Ayden continued, "Auntie Audrey has a stronger name in Boston than Mann's family and even though it is being a cousin, her name carries weight. I'll go to Boston, let me handle it."

"As I remember Audrey, she is a force to be reckoned with." Grant agreed.

Braden's demeanor softened more, "Audrey Astor is most certainly a force to be reckoned with. I have learned first hand."



"Then let me go, Braden. I'll take care of this." Ayden requesting permission from his sister's husband knowing it was Braden's right to demand justice.

"I'll accompany Ayden." Grady spoke up suddenly, his own rage calming with the composure and logic of his eldest son. "I have friends and markers I can use in Boston."

"You should stay with Kerry." Ayden reiterated to Braden. "Pa and I will handle Everett Mann."

"I'd like you to stay here with us, son. Your Mamma and I would like to get to know our new daughter in law better and I want you here." Grant offered in support of Ayden and Grady.

"Why don't I just go and shoot the bloody bastard!" Ryan snarled.

The other men just looked at him. Ryan had voiced what was their wish, but unfortunately, it was not the way to handle it.

Grady was the first to respond to Ryan, "I need you here to run the ranch and teach Braden all of it. You're the most capable to educate with hands on experience."

Ryan just grumbled.

There could not have been a worse moment for the Everett Mann's barrister to show up at the ranch house, but that is exactly what had happened.

Braden's valet and friend Edward answered the door. Standing next to the stranger was Deputy Marshall Cliff Riggs.

"Sorry to bother, but Mr. Smee here needs to talk to Miss Kerry." Cliff requested politely but obviously feeling quite nervous and unhappy about this.

The funny looking rotund man with a bowler hat and starched collar in a tweed suit entered without invitation. "I understand that Kerry McGillinen will be returning home today from her sojourn in Carson City. I am under orders from Mr. Everett Mann's law firm to obtain her deposition on the alleged abduction."

"Mrs. Wessex has returned." Edward replied coldly. "She has not had time to rest, so I suggest you leave and return another day."

"I am here to see Kerry McGillinen, not a Mrs. Wessex." Smee retorted sharply.



CHAPTER 25

Edward bristled with Smee's tone. "Miss McGillinen is Mrs. Wessex. It is you that have the incorrect name and person."

"For a butler you certainly are uncouth. Where did you receive your training?" Smee snickered arrogantly.

"My training apparently has been inadequate as I was always in the presence of gentlemen. I have never had the experience of dealing with bourgeois demeanor."

"Why you..you.." Smee stuttered angrily.

"If you would be so kind sir as to leave this domicile and come back another time I would be most appreciative." Edward uttered icily.

"Don't just stand there! Do something!" Smee shouted at Cliff Riggs.

This din drew the men from the dining room and the women from the parlor.

"What is it Edward?" Braden asked looking at his valet and the man standing in the doorway.

"This barrister is requesting a deposition from your wife, sir." Edward replied in a monotone. "He represents Mr. Everett Mann."

Ryan stepped in front and pulled his colt pointing it at Smee, "get out now while you can".

Grady put his hand on Ryan's shoulder, "put it away son. We don't need to scare Easterners."

Cliff spoke to Braden directly, "I have come along with Mr. Smee to obtain depositions from Miss Kerry, sir".

"Mrs. Wessex!" Braden corrected the young Deputy Marshall. Braden then turned his gaze and addressed Smee, "we have first returned, and it is my wish that my wife rest. Can't these depositions be postponed a few days, and why my wife?"

"It is imperative to our client's case that Kerry McGillinen give deposition in regard to her alleged abduction." Smee responded smugly.

"Alleged?" Ryan shouted. "We didn't chase your client over half of Nevada to rescue our sister from an alleged abduction, you ass."

"That sir is for a court of law to determine!" Smee replied sarcastically.

Grady and Grant both had to restrain Ryan from taking a swing at Smee.



"I wish to speak to Miss McGillinen, if you please." Smee demanded.

"That is Mrs. Wessex," Braden growled completely irritated that he had to keep reminding Smee Kerry was his wife and under his protection.

"Indeed? If it is Mrs. Wessex, was that before or after the alleged abduction?" Smee rebuked with scorn.

"It was Mrs. Wessex before your client abducted my wife." Braden snarled, "And you can just come back another day! My wife is still recovering from the brutality of your client".

None of the men were aware that the women had left the parlor and were watching the scene until Kerry walked to Braden and took his arm.

Smee looked at Kerry and sniped, "If you are Mrs. Wessex you do not appear brutalized, but the charge is abduction only as I recall".

"We'll see to it that is changed since I have written documentation from a doctor in Carson City as to my wife's medical treatment." Braden said, as he stood staunch with ardor and his arm going protectively around Kerry's shoulder.

"We would require the name of that physician sir, as your documentation is inadequate and we would require a sworn deposition as to you allegations." Smee responded triumphantly thinking he had the upper hand.

Braden bristled with fury, "I would be more than happy to give you the physician's name and his wife that tended the battered body of my wife. Since I believe that is the only thing to placate your interest other than baring my wife's injuries to your perusal. In which case I would more prefer to see you drawn and quartered sir!"

"Be that as it may, since your wife is currently capable and able I would like to obtain our needed deposition." Smee demanded with smugness. Smee was well aware that agitating a normally calm person to intense anger usually won his cases in court making them look like babbling idiots. "Mr. Mann is awaiting these depositions as he awaits the charges of this allegation to be brought to the attention of a Boston Court."

"Boston Court?" Kerry looked at Braden and asked with confusion.

"Mann was sent to Boston with Marshall Ewal under a Writ of Extradition." Braden explained gently and saw immediately the change in his wife's eyes and body as she tensed.

"Get out Mr. Smee." Grady ordered no longer willing to tolerate Smee's presence in his home. "It appears there are some legal details that need to be addressed and discussed with Mr. Duffey our legal representative. I will not allow my daughter to give deposition without benefit of our Mr. Duffey being present, so leave now!" Grady turned to Cliff Riggs, "I believe we can demand to talk to our counsel?"

"You're right Mr. McGillinen", Cliff smiled back broadly. "Let's leave Mr. Smee, you can come back another day with Mr. Duffey, the McGillinen counsel."

At that point, Smee huffed and turning on his heels walked out to the carriage he had arrived in.



Cliff dipped his hat and with a large smile said, "Sorry to waste your time".

When they heard the carriage leave Grady told his youngest son, "Dwayne, ride into Ely and bring Duffey here".

"Right away, Pa." Dwayne left out the door in a dash not needing a second bidding.

"Bring him back tonight and tell him we need him to stay here for a few days." Grady added as Dwayne was going out the door.

Dwayne nodded in understanding and left to get his pinto.

Braden looked at Kerry, her appearance was pale, her body rigid and her eyes luminous pools reflecting something deep and unseen before. "It's alright my love, perhaps you'd better take a rest right now."

"No Braden, I don't want to rest." Tears started to well in her eye as she choked back her anger. Kerry couldn't believe that Everett Mann was sent back to Boston for trial. In her heart, she knew that in Boston, Everett would not be held accountable for what he had done to her, and it wasn't just her. Kerry remembered the prostitute in Virginia City. How many women had suffered and been beaten by that man and how many more would there be? Kerry was furious and rest was not what she wanted or needed right then. Kerry appreciated now more than ever the terror Morning Song and Eye of Hawk gave to Everett. Kerry could only hope that terror would stop him from brutalizing another, but she doubted that. Everett Mann needed to pay for his crimes.

"Sweetheart, are you alright?" Braden asked worriedly as he watched the flush deepen on Kerry's face.

"Oh I'm just *fine*. *Furious, angry*, perhaps *livid*, but just *fine*." Kerry replied to Braden and then turned to her father and unable to contain her anger. "Pa, when Duffey comes I want to be there. Don't try to keep me out or shield me, understood?"

Grady recognized the stubbornness in his daughter and complied. "We'll let you know as soon as he gets here."

Celeste Wessex was aghast at the temperament of her new daughter in law, but was also proud of it. Kerry may look like a delicate flower but she is a pure strong willed iron woman. *She will make Braden a very good wife indeed.* Celeste had discovered how much Kerry loved Geneva and that she enjoyed horses as much as Celeste after they had time to talk when Grady asked them to leave, which prompted Celeste to ask, "if you're feeling well enough, I would appreciate it if you rode with me to show me some of Geneva."

"Mamma, I don't think that is a good idea", Braden tried to protest. "We just got back from a long and tiring trip."

"Really Braden, I'm quite capable and not the least bit tired." Kerry grinned mischievously, "the way you hovered over me and protected me from being overtired obviously worked."

"But!"



"No buts, Braden." Kerry interrupted Braden and then looked at her new mother in law, "I'll be dressed and ready to ride in an hour".

"I'm coming along!" Braden insisted.

"We'd love to have you." Celeste smiled knowingly to Kerry. "I'll be ready at the same time."

"I'm coming, too! I'm not going to let you out of my sight for quite awhile, sis." Ryan interjected. "I'll get the horses ready."

"Have you always been this over protected by your brothers, Kerry?" Celeste asked as they walked up the staircase to change into riding clothes.

"Always, which is why your son's doting is nothing new and just as easily ignored." Kerry replied.

The two women could be heard laughing all the way to their rooms.

"Do you want to go with them, Grant?" Grady asked his good friend.

"No way. I have a feeling Celeste and Kerry are going to be good friends and that is a pair I don't want to handle at the same time. The boys are younger and can better learn from it."

"Are you saying, we're too old to deal with it?" Grady chuckled.

"Just have more experience with it and don't need to learn any more about formidable women." Grant chortled with a snort. "I would prefer a nice brandy with one of your excellent Virginia cigars."

A leisurely ride is just what Kerry needed to gain control of her anger and all her conflicting emotions. Kerry found Celeste a comfortable woman to be with and soon forgot she was her mother in law. Although Kerry had been afraid that Celeste would be a snobbish English woman or have haughty airs like many of the upper class she met in Boston and New York, she was delighted to find out that Celeste was a kind and gentlewoman not lacking in common sense and common courtesy.

Celeste on the other side of the picture began to enjoy Kerry more. Celeste was learning about the history of Geneva and finding out Kerry's devotion to the land. Celeste realized that this devotion Kerry was capable of was also directed to her son, which pleased Celeste greatly. Celeste noted Kerry's intelligence and sensitivity. Celeste was also aware of Kerry's maternal feelings towards her grandson and approved. *Yes, Kerry is a good mother and will provide us with many more wonderful grandchildren.* Celeste couldn't help herself when she told Kerry, "I am happy Braden found you."

Kerry's eyes twinkled as she quipped, "I am glad he found me, too! I never thought about a woman ever being this happily married."

Hearing his Kerry's statement, Braden blew Kerry a kiss and Ryan rolled his eyes.

When they returned to the ranch house they found Duffey in the parlor with Grant and Grady.

Duffey had never married and was happy to spend as many nights as needed at the Geneva ranch. He was enjoying the aroma of the supper being prepared and knew this meal would be a feast for a king, since it was always a



feast. Duffey stood up as the women entered the room. "Good evening, ladies."

"Mr. Duffey, I was hoping I would be told when you arrived." Kerry said as she cast a disapproving eye towards her father.

"Don't get into a huff baby. Duffey hasn't been here that long." Grady attempted to placate.

Kerry ignored that remark and went directly to the McGillinen counsel. "What has been discussed so far?"

Celeste was wise to know this was something she should not get involved in and asked, "Where is Morning Song?"

Grady looked up and responded, "She's upstairs with Ben in the nursery. Telling him Sosoni' tales I believe."

"If you'll excuse me, I will join her." Celeste turned quickly raising her deep blue velvet riding habit to climb the stairs.

"Kerry, don't you want to go with Mamma?" Braden asked hoping he could continue to shield Kerry regardless of what she had stated previously.

The glare Kerry tossed Braden was his answer. Braden snaked his arms around her waist and pulled her to sit on the settee with him in concession to his wife's strong will.

Duffey finally had his chance to talk to Kerry, "We have only discussed this discrepancy of abduction charges not including battery. It appears the full report did not have time to be submitted to the court by Kent Ewal before Mann's barristers took him to Boston with the Writ of Extradition."

"What exactly does this mean to our case?" Kerry asked with irritation.

"It means that he will only face an abduction charge in Boston, not battery." Duffey took a sip of brandy, "the good news is, it leaves us the opportunity to file charges for battery should he slip through the charges of abduction."

"Just how can he not be punished for what he did? God, we hang cattle rustlers, but men that abduct and beat women get off?" Ryan growled.

"I want him to punished, Duffey." Kerry gritted. "I am not the only woman that felt his brutality. I wasn't the first and unless he is punished I won't be the last. I won't stand for it."

"The abduction really doesn't upset you as much as the beating?" Duffey asked pointedly.

"The abductors weren't frightening or abusive. I was uncomfortable but never mistreated by them. When I was delivered to Everett was when I felt terror and abuse." Kerry choked and tried to gain control. Braden started rubbing her back gently. "Everett Mann is sick and perverted."

"Then I promise you if criminal charges are dropped, we will pursue with civil charges." Duffey promised.

"You keep talking like he is going to get off!" Ryan growled.



"With everything I have read of the Writ of Extradition, talking to Judge Adams, Cliff Riggs and your father, that is something we may have to face." Duffey said regretfully.

"What can you do with civil charges?" Kerry asked.

"We can embarrass and humiliate him as well as put a large dent in his pocket." Duffey offered.

"Do you believe you can really do that?" Kerry asked with more determination.

"Yes, I know I can." Duffey took a puff of the cigar, "now you tell me why you believe he is an abuser of women?"

"Not withstanding what I endured, I saw the bruised body of a prostitute he had in bed with him when I was delivered to him in Virginia City." Kerry answered deceptively without emotion. In reality it took all Kerry had to keep the bile forced down in her throat and not begin retching.

The men gasped in shock. Braden dropped his hand from Kerry's back hoping he wouldn't retch at the thought of another woman, even a prostitute as badly bruised as Kerry.

"I see you still bear the marks of abuse." Duffey noted the yellowing marks below Kerry's eye, "I have read Doctor Case's medical report." Duffey nonchalantly asked Kerry, "Did he rape you?"

"Although he had every intention of doing so," Kerry took a deep breath. "No, he did not rape me and fortunately Braden came in and stopped him before he had the chance."

Braden's protective instincts came out again, "Do we have to go through this?"

Duffey looked lazily to Braden, "Yes, dear boy, we must."

"It's alright Braden." Kerry reassured her husband. "I'm a big girl, a big *angry* girl."

"Good, stay angry Kerry." Duffey responded. "Unfortunately a prostitute is not a reliable witness. I will hire detectives to find other women in Boston and New York that have suffered under Mann."

"Spare no expense and bill me." Braden offered his teeth grinding in ferocity.

"If you insist." Duffey chuckled at Braden's reply. *That boy is going to get justice for sure, one way or another.* "We need to discuss Smee and the deposition."

"What exactly is he after?" Grady questioned.

"First, you did the right thing by refusing his deposition without my presence and a qualified and unbiased secretary." Duffey went on, "I warn you Kerry, Smee will ask you questions that will try to trick you, enrage you, lose control and use all of it in his defense case."

"You mean like indicate I am a hysterical woman and intimate that I make things up or exaggerate." Kerry replied coolly.

GENEVA'S HOPE



"Exactly. He will do everything to irritate and antagonize you. I do need to be there with you." Duffey warned. "But once that is over Smee will go to Boston and your father, brother and I will follow."

"It won't be necessary for me to go and testify?" Kerry questioned.

"No my dear, your deposition will be enough, which is why it is so important I be there for it." Duffey reassured her.

"I am relieved to hear that." Braden heaved a sigh of relief. "Although I am furious Mann's trial was taken to Boston. I am eternally grateful there are several hundreds of miles between us."

"No, he's lucky there are hundreds of miles between us." Ryan lamented. "I still want to geld him with a quick shot."

"Now I know why Grady and Ayden are going to Boston with me." Duffey teased.

Alyson entered the parlor to inform everyone that dinner was served.

CHAPTER 26

That night Kerry was already asleep when Braden came to bed. He had wanted to make love with her. He had not since before she was abducted, but he did not have a heart to wake her. Kerry looked like a cherubic child sleeping on the white lacy muslin pillows. Her hair was spread across the pillow framing her face. He sighed heavily and climbed into bed next to her carefully pulling her to his side and his arm embracing the soft lilac scented cotton nightgown she wore. This was the first night he allowed himself to sleep with her in bed since he found her in Carson City and she felt so good in his arms. He had missed this and swore silently they would never be parted again. "I love you, Kerry." Braden whispered in her hair.

Kerry responded in her sleep by snuggling into Braden's muscular chest with her head and issued a soft contented purring sound.

Braden response was a painful swelling that he had to deny and it seemed to take him forever to finally fall asleep.

The morning however found Kerry wakened by the gentle removal of her nightgown between the passionate kissing of her husband. She let him think she was still asleep as she responded to his passion with her subtle movements and pleasurable moans. When he mounted and entered her she flung her arms around his neck and touching nose to nose looked him in the eye, "it's about time, husband!"

"Vixen!" Braden laughed responding with a hard thrust against her loins.

Together they rose in ecstasy to throes of their passion and climaxed together in languid ardor. It was while they were clinging to each other the knock on the door disrupted their pleasure world of each other.

"Braden? Kerry? Time to get up, breakfast is ready and Duffey wants to begin preparations for the deposition. Braden? Kerry?"

"Ayden, go away!" Braden groaned as he moved off Kerry. Turning to his bride he muttered, "I want to build our own house, Kerry. This family of yours is too big and too annoying!"

"What are you going to do in your own house when our children climb on top of us and don't bother to knock?" Kerry asked wickedly.

"Children?"



"I know you want more than just the one we have growing. I can tell by your lustful needs."

"And yours."

"And mine."

"Vixen!"

"You'd better believe it, monsieur!"

"God, I love you Kerry!"

"And I love you, Braden!"

Kisses sealed their vows and then were up getting dressed and down the stairs to breakfast with the family.

"Where's Ben?" Kerry asked noticing he was not at the table.

"Ben is on his way to Eye of Hawk's camp with Morning Song, Celeste and Grant."

"Mamma is going to the camp?" Braden exclaimed in absolute surprise.

"You should see her new duds, Braden." Ayden teased. "You wouldn't believe that an older woman would look that good in jeans and plaid woolen shirt."

"Mamma?" The shock was evident in Braden's voice.

"Your Pa liked it well enough, kinda matched what he wore." Dwayne chuckled, "Heard him say to her that she looked real sexy and that he knew of a nice secluded place near the camp.."

"Enough!" Braden choked out. His face was flushed crimson in embarrassment. Discussing his mother in terms of sexuality was more than he could stand.

Duffey only aided Braden's embarrassment, "Your Mamma is a very attractive woman. She must have been mighty young when she bore you."

"She was seventeen when she married Grant, and I as recall you were born when she was about twenty two." Grady said to Braden teasing him more. "That makes her about forty nine or fifty, correct?"

"Yes. Can we lead onto a different discussion now?" Braden answered irritably His mother was about fifty four but he did not want to continue this subject any further. He did not understand the continued enjoyment the family had in teasing him. Braden had not been in Geneva long enough yet to know that a true member of the family was always teased mercilessly when a sore spot was found. In their own way, the McGillinens were showing Braden how accepted into the family he had been.

After breakfast Duffey took Kerry into the library and shut the doors. It was an eternity for Braden as he paced back and forth in the hall for nearly three hours. He heard shouts, he heard Kerry crying, he heard anger and then laughter, it was hell on earth, but he could not go in. Duffey had locked the doors with the admonition that no one would be allowed in. Kerry rushed into Braden's arms when the door was open and Duffey followed.



Braden picked up Kerry's face to see those beautiful gray eyes of hers reddened and full of tears. "What did you do to her?" Braden demanded of Duffey pulling Kerry closer to him.

"I prepared her for the deposition, now nothing will shock or surprise her. She will not be used." Duffey replied with assurance.

It was just in time. Edward announced the arrival of a Barrister Smee, Deputy Marshall Cliff Riggs and Judge Adams along with Martin Andrews, Judge Adams' bailiff to scribe the deposition.

"Take them into the parlor for tea." Alyson commanded. "Kerry needs some time to calm down before she must face what is next."

"I'll take her into Grady's study." Braden told Alyson. He kept her tucked in his embrace and led her to the temporary haven. When they got into the room he pulled out the whiskey he knew was there and poured her a glass. "Here love, we won't tell your Pa, but I think you need it right now."

Kerry took it and sipped it. "Braden, it was awful. The things Duffey said to me, what they would say, it was horrible."

"If you want I can tell them to go away. We'll go to England, away from this." Braden offered as he knelt at her feet wanting to make all of this disappear.

Kerry brushed Braden's cheek with one hand, "I am stronger than it appears. Everett must pay, he must be stopped regardless the pain to me. Duffey reminded me of that."

"You shouldn't have to be strong. You shouldn't have to suffer." Braden said as he laid his head upon her lap. "You are not the criminal, Mann is!"

"Sometimes I think it is a small price I must pay for having gotten you. A price for all my childhood happiness and now married to the most wonderful man I have ever known." Kerry said thoughtfully. "If it is so, it is a small price to pay."

Braden took her hand and kissed it gently. "No one is more grateful than I to marry such a kind, gentle, loving and beautiful woman."

"Where is she?" Kerry joked.

"Vixen!"

"And you love me for it."

Braden rose to give her a gentle kiss.

"One more drink and then we shall go into the lion's den." Kerry said giving her empty glass to her husband.

Braden complied and refilled her glass. This time he poured himself a glass of brandy. Braden didn't think he could ever acquire a taste for American whiskey.

About a half hour later Kerry and Braden entered the parlor. It was a comical scene Kerry mused. Duffey and Smee were glaring at each other with each of them sitting at opposite corners in the room. Judge Adams and Martin were engaged in conversation with Alyson and Cliff Riggs sitting on a settee looking quite out of place and uncomfortable.



Duffey rose immediately and walked to Kerry's side. "Are you ready for the depositions, Mrs. Wessex?"

With the same formality Kerry replied, "Yes, Mr. Duffey. Let's have this over with."

Smee stood up and sniggered, "Good, let's have at it. The Library, gentlemen?"

Judge Adams and Martin excused themselves politely from Alyson and Cliff Riggs stood and walked toward the door.

Three hours later a very red-faced Smee stormed out of the room. All of the usual tactics had not worked for him. Kerry did not break, quiver, or relent to his strategic brow beating. Smee grabbed his bowler from the coat tree by the door and left without a by your leave. Cliff Riggs came out grinning with Duffey behind him showing the same grin. Judge Adams and Martin merely left the room clutching the papers of deposition that would be twice copied signed and one sent with Smee to Boston. Kerry left the library with a straight posture and a comment to Duffey, "You did an excellent job, Duffey. Nothing Smee tried worked. You prepared me sufficiently. I thank you."

"You're welcome Mrs. Wessex." Duffey acknowledge with a note of pride. "We can go to Boston shortly and make sure Everett Mann will pay, if not a prison term, his pocketbook will."

"You will pursue the civil action?" Braden asked the McGillinen counsel.

"To his last penny and shred of reputation. You have my word on it." Duffey responded. "Is lunch ready yet? Or did we miss lunch and go to dinner?"

"Lunch has been held for you." Alyson chuckled taking Duffey's arm. She led the group to the dining room minus the huffy Smee.

Grady and the boys returned to the ranch in time for dinner. They stopped at Eye of Hawk's camp after repairing some fencing and told Alyson that Celeste and Grant would be spending the night in the camp with Ben. Morning Song had returned with Grady and was changing before dinner.

Grady asked if Smee had turned up for the depositions and was told everything during dinner. When Grady heard about the brow beating and questions of Smee he was furious. "Sometimes I think Ryan is right. There is justice and then there is justice."

"It isn't going to be much better in Boston, Grady. Actually it is going to be worse." Duffey warned. "That's one of the reasons I decided to stay over another night. Tomorrow I have to prepare you and Ayden."

"We have the trip to Boston to do that. Are you sure it isn't the great food here?" Ayden teased.

"To deny my palette is tempted would be a lie, but this preparation is for the train trip with Smee." Duffey snorted.



"We still have my parlor cars at the Nevada whistle stop." Braden reminded the family. "You can use them for your comfort."

"That would be delightful considering Smee would not have such luxury available to him." Duffey laughed. "I rather enjoy that thought. Thank you, Mr. Wessex."

The next day Dwayne returned from Ely with the news that Smee had booked passage on the stage for the railhead in Utah, just as his client and jailers had.

Arrangements were made immediately and the next morning Grady, Morning Song, Ayden and Duffey were on horses with luggage and ranch hands to return the horses once everyone was on the train.

The group camped with a Sosoni' tribe as Braden had when they first arrived and camped again the next night as the train pulled in the following morning. It had stopped because the flag was up indicating they were to pick up passengers. Quickly with the help of the ranch hands the parlor cars were attached and they were on their way to Boston. When the train stopped at the Utah railhead, Duffey spotted Smee and couldn't help but go to antagonize the stuffy Eastern barrister that looked rumpled, dirty, and agitated.

"Well, well Smee. Fancy meeting you." Duffey chortled as he purposely ran into Smee as the train started to move. "You look a little trail worn, my boy. Haven't had a bath in a while?"

"Not that it is any of your business, but no and I am looking for the porter to try to obtain one." Smee snarled as he looked at the impeccably clean and dressed lawyer from a cow town. "Why are you here?"

"Well my boy, it seems my clients do not want to miss your client's trial in Boston and I am accompanying them." Duffey snickered, "amazing isn't it that we will share the same train to Boston?"

"How did you get on board?" Smee asked with irritation and impatience, "and just where can one get a bath?" Smee couldn't help but feel envious of the freshly dressed and clean smelling Duffey.

"There's a whistle stop in Nevada just north by one day's ride of the Geneva ranch." Duffey just had to rub that short ride compared to the four-day ride on stagecoach to the Utah railhead. "A shame you didn't ask anyone about it."

Smee was gritting his teeth in fury when he hissed out, "Where does one find a bath on this train?"

Duffey lit his cigar and after a few puffs, "Don't really know, you will have to find the porter."

"Where did you take your bath?" Smee all but growled.

"It seems my clients have private parlor cars, nice of them to share it with me. We have luxury beds, food and bath." Duffey then purposely used incorrect English, "ain't that nice?"

This time Smee did growl and hauling his carpet valise continued on to find his sleeper berth.



In Boston Grady McGillinen was greeted by his sister in law, Audrey Astor. Audrey had seen to it that a carriage was waiting at the depot for their arrival. Grady had put Morning Song in the carriage and was now directing the placing of the luggage when Smee saw him with Duffey. Ayden went on ahead with his Auntie Audrey in her carriage.

"Private cars and now private carriages, you are spending a bundle Mr. McGillinen." Smee commented.

"Not a dime so far, this carriage belongs to my sister in law." Grady replied rather factually. "The parlor cars belonged to my son in law, Braden Wessex."

Duffey could hardly resist adding, "His sister in law is Mrs. Astor, surely you have heard of the Astors?"

Smee paled. Did his law partners realize that their client Everett Mann had offended the Astors? The Manns were an old family in Boston but not nearly as old and powerful as the Astors. He would have to discuss this with them. Smee had also learned that Kerry McGillinen was indeed married to English aristocrat, Braden Wessex. Their client was accused of abduction of his sweetheart, Kerry McGillinen. The knowledge that Mann was accused of abducting a married woman, which Smee was sure would be brought up in court would not be good.

The trial was delayed by several months and winter was approaching. Everett Mann had been released on bail and the private detectives had still turned up nothing. Apparently Everett was kept in control by efforts of his family pending this embarrassing court case that the newspapers had indeed picked up on. Grady and Morning Song returned to Geneva leaving Ayden and Duffey to handle anything that needed to be done. Grady and Morning Song missed Geneva and did not want to miss the annual Celebration of Nevada Statehood on October 31.

Grady had made arrangements with his friends in Boston to transfer funds, as needed for Ayden's expenses and the private detective costs. Duffey was working with an Attorney Partnership he had investigated at the recommendation of Grant Wessex. The legal partners had affiliates in England and had been recommended highly from all sources of Duffey's in New York. The partners were more than happy to follow the case through to civil litigation if necessary, since their London partners had told them of the Wessex family.

In Geneva, when Grady had returned and told Grant of Biddle, Smyth and Daily that Grant had recommended to Duffey. Grant wired his London firm to work with the American firm and send all bills to his accountant at Morgan Castle for payment. The London firm was pleased to serve the Wessex account and so informed the American firm.

PAYTON LEE





CHAPTER 21

The trial finally was held in Boston court and due to the secret maneuverings of the Mann family lawyers Everett was vindicated. His family had spent a small fortune to achieve it, but he was exonerated. He went back to his old lifestyle immediately to the delight of the private detectives. Within a week a civil litigation with ample evidence supporting it was brought against him. His family sent him abroad immediately before the newspapers began to attack the family name again.

In Geneva Kerry was preparing to leave for England with her husband. Winter was beginning and it was agreed they would visit England during that time. Celeste and Grant would accompany them on this trip. Celeste and Kerry had grown fond of each other in the months they had together on the ranch.

Kerry was showing a larger girth as the train arrived in Boston and her Auntie Audrey and brother Ayden met her.

"Oh happiness, you are with child!" Audrey declared looking at the small woman buried in a large winter wool coat to shield her from the chilling winds. "We will have another little one soon. Where is my favorite great nephew?"

Celeste came forward holding Bennett's hand. Little Bennett looked all of the sophisticated proper Bostonian in his wool jacket, matching knickers, woolen brown socks, proper hat and shiny leather buttoned ankle shoes. Bennett had been dismayed when he was told he had to wear them and not his comfortable full length jeans, woolen plaid shirt, leather cowboy boots, and fringed leather jacket.

Bennett recognized Audrey and ran to her pulling Celeste with him. "Auntie Audrey!"

Braden escorted Kerry to the waiting carriage and helped her step into it. Ayden took charge of securing the entire luggage that required the hiring of a wagon. It seems Celeste and Grant Wessex had purchased a goodly number of items while in Nevada. Audrey Astor had arranged for a carriage to take



Celeste and Grant Wessex to her estate on Nob Hill, but Bennett she took with her to be with Braden and Kerry.

Bennett was in his glory with all the spoiling of his grandparents and new great Aunties and the fun he had with his uncles in Geneva. He had an uncle and aunt in England but they never had time for him, he barely remembered his mother but his new mother was everything a boy could want. He loved every night when she tucked him in his bed, and how she played with him and taught him things at her ranch in Geneva. Why his uncles had even taught him how to mend fences.

As Bennett was babbling to his Auntie Audrey he cast a glance at Kerry snuggled in his father's arms and watched as his Papa gently kissed her on the forehead and absently was palming her growing abdomen. Bennett suddenly blurted out, "Papa, why is Mamma getting fat?"

Kerry sat up with a start, her face turned beet red, "fat?"

Braden realized they had never told Bennett that he would soon have a sibling or even explained to him that his Mamma was with child. Every day had been full and busy at the ranch they simply forgot. Although this was not the best place to answer that question, Braden always believed in answering his son with an honest and truthful answer. "Mamma is not fat son. Mamma is going to have a baby. Soon you will have a little brother or sister."

Audrey was biting her lip so she would not laugh. This was serious to a soon to be six year old.

"A baby? In Mamma's tummy?"

"Yes, son."

Bennett cocked his head and wrinkled his nose, "When does it come out?"

"We have to wait about four more months." Braden answered and began to gently rub Kerry's growing abdomen again. Braden smiled when he felt a small kick. "Come here Bennett."

Bennett obeyed and Braden took his small hand placing it on Kerry's abdomen. Bennett felt another small kick. Looking up to Kerry he asked, "What was that, Mamma? It moved."

Kerry tousled Bennett's hair, "That's your little brother saying hello to you."

"Your little sister." Braden corrected.

Bennett looked at his father, "Two of them?"

Kerry began to laugh heartily, "I hope not. Just your little brother."

Braden refrained from saying anything. He didn't want to confuse Bennett anymore.

"The baby is kicking already?" Audrey asked absolutely delighted with her niece's condition. Audrey took Bennett's hand and picked him up to sit him on her lap.

"I just started feeling him a few days ago." Kerry laughed. "I guess I'm not fat enough. He's getting crowded already."

"She's." Braden grumbled softly.



Kerry gave Braden an elbow in his ribs.

Grant went to New York to see to the passage on the liner crossing over the Atlantic to London. He managed to procure passage on the luxury Cunard Liner, 'The Russia'. The swift and luxurious new propeller shaft iron ship they had passage on arriving in the Americas.

Celeste stayed with Audrey to shop in Boston and the two of them spoiled Bennett with new clothes, more toys, and lots of food to eat. After all, he was a growing boy. Braden and Kerry went shopping for baby and saw to it that a number of layettes, baby sheets and blankets, including a cradle were sent to Geneva in preparation for the new arrival. Since they still argued as to whether it was a boy or girl they chose neutral colors of soft yellow and green.

"I will not have my son dressed in pink!" Kerry would state when Braden picked up for purchase a soft satin pink quilt.

"I will not have my daughter turned into a tomboy!" Braden would say when Kerry selected little toy pewter cowboys and Indians from a toy shop.

Grant returned and shared some shopping of his own with his wife. At a quiet evening dinner he commented to his son, "Braden I don't recall seeing you or your son this happy in a very long time."

Braden put his arm around Kerry's shoulder his finger gently stroking the nape of Kerry's neck, "Kerry has done that miracle, Papa."

Kerry gazed into her husband's deep blue eyes returning his love and adoration.

"I couldn't agree more, son." Grant smiled to his daughter in law, "The daughter of my dearest friend. Celeste and I owe you a great deal for this joy you have brought to our family."

"Which is why we want you to have this." Celeste said as she handed Kerry a velvet rectangular box. "With all our love to our new daughter."

Kerry opened the box to find a diamond necklace with matching bracelet and earrings. "This is too much." Kerry choked back at her surprise.

"Not nearly enough for the happiness you have brought my dear." Celeste replied quickly, "consider it a belated wedding gift."

"Or for the happiness you will bring with another grandchild." Grant added.

"We have another surprise for you, Kerry." Audrey announced. "I will be accompanying you to England."

"How wonderful Auntie Audrey!" Kerry exclaimed. Kerry wouldn't admit it or say it but she was nervous about going to that strange country alone with her new family. Celeste and Grant were wonderful in laws, but it was away from home and family that were hers. After all, her loving family had always surrounded her.

"Your Uncle Henry wired just before you arrived that he would be delayed in Europe and missed me. He asked me to join him in London." Audrey told Kerry which was a half-truth. Audrey was always sensitive to Kerry's feelings and she felt the need for family to be with her. Especially now



that she was showing her pregnancy. Henry Astor had wired that he would be delayed and he would be in England. Audrey wired him back that she would join him in London as soon as Kerry arrived with the Wessex family because she would accompany them for the Atlantic crossing. Henry had wired her back to tell her he was thrilled she was coming and that he missed her dearly.

Henry had been in Boston just three weeks prior and suggested to Ayden that he should check on his estates in Dunham with Henry's son Robert. Ayden had told his uncle he would think about it after he was satisfied with the court results on the civil suit with Everett Mann.

"I'll be coming along as well, sis." Ayden told her grinning from ear to ear. "I also have a surprise for the new baby, my new nephew."

"What?" Kerry asked excitedly. She was beyond joyful that two of her family would be with her in England.

Ayden unfolded a check in the amount of \$750,000 dollars signed by Everett Mann's father. "For the baby. A trust fund will be set up."

"The civil case?" Braden queried.

"Yes. We won. The evidence against him was too strong. He was exonerated in criminal court, but we hurt his pocket book in civil." Ayden stated smugly. "His family sent him abroad. The scandal was horrendous for them."

"That won't stop him from hurting other women." Kerry said with melancholy.

"Oh, I think it will. His parents sent a bodyguard with him. Big strapping fellow that would hurt him bad if he started trouble. I was told his father laid down the law that if one more case was brought against him, he would disinherit Everett."

"Where did he go abroad?" Grant asked Ayden.

"I heard they sent him to Italy. They sent him to a family friend that had an estate along the Mediterranean." Ayden replied.

"Does Pa know about all of this?" Kerry asked her brother.

"Yes I wired him and sent a letter along with Duffey." Ayden answered. "Duffey went back to Ely last week. He should be home now."

"We rented him his own Parlor car as a thank you." Audrey grinned.

"I heard he really enjoyed the train trip to Boston using yours, Braden."

"We did the same for Kent Ewal and his deputies when they returned." Ayden told his sister.

"That I was told when Kent came to visit, Pa." Kerry smiled. "He told us that never before had he enjoyed traveling and said he would go back East for us anytime."

"I'm glad this nightmare is over." Celeste sighed. "Maybe now you and Braden can really start enjoying yourselves. Especially when we introduce you to the ton in England."

"I already enjoy myself with Kerry, Mamma!" Braden interjected playfully.

"That is quite obvious, son." Grant teased staring at Kerry's abdomen.

GENEVA'S HOPE



Kerry turned crimson in embarrassment.

Ayden noted his sister's color and laughed, "Here I thought family teasing was a McGillinen exclusive."

"Obviously not!" Kerry retorted. "I just hate being the brunt of it all the time."

"Not so my love. I recall being treated in like manner not too long ago." Braden grinned. "Remember the snake filet?"

"Snake filet?" Celeste choked on her wine.

Two weeks later the McGillinen and Wessex family were found on the deck of 'The Russia' crossing over the Atlantic Ocean headed for London. Audrey shared her stateroom with Bennett. No one was more suited for the job of Bennett's nanny than Audrey. She herself had taken her sons across the ocean many times and knew exactly how to keep a child occupied for the ten day trip. Celeste and Grant spent time socializing with the upper elite and as fate would have it. John Astor was aboard this crossing and treated his cousin by marriage, Audrey with due respect as well as the Wessex family.

Kerry and Braden spent a great deal of time in their stateroom. Kerry wasn't handling the crossing very well and Braden doted over her, not leaving her side. Braden spent many of those crossing days applying cool cloths to Kerry's head. The first thing he would do when he got her to his estate at Brenham would be to hire her several personal maids. He would also have to look into hiring a nanny for Bennett and their new baby, one that would could return to Nevada with them. This time he would be more careful and hire a detective to check references. As soon as they arrived in London they would stay in a hotel for a few days and if Kerry was not feeling any better he would have a doctor check her. No, he would obtain a doctor as soon as they arrived in London. In the meantime he had the ship's doctor attend almost every day.

Bennett had become sullen again those past few days on the ship. Audrey noticed immediately and asked the young man at dinner with Ayden, Grant, and Celeste who had also noted and commented on the boy's change. "What is troubling you, child?"

Bennett was toying with his food and hadn't been eating well, "I went to see Mamma again this morning. She looks so pale, so sick."

"It's the baby, Bennett." Audrey answered gently. "Your Mamma's baby isn't taking the ocean crossing very well. It will be better when we get to England."

"No it won't!" Bennett shouted. Tears started streaming from his eyes, "She's going to go away to heaven, just like, just like... I don't want her to go to heaven! I won't let her!" Bennett got up from the table and ran out of the room.

"Catch him Ayden." Audrey called to her nephew as he rose from the table to give chase to Bennett.

"Dear Lord!" Celeste cried. "What are we going to do? He thinks Kerry is going to die like Laura."



"No wonder he has reverted to that sullenness of late." Grant moaned.

"Braden has to handle this." Audrey noted. "He has to reassure Ben that everything is going to be alright."

"I'm not sure he can do it." Grant noted. "He's worried sick about Kerry's illness on the crossing already."

"I think that is half the problem." Audrey observed. "Bennett is responding to the fear his father is feeling."

"I'll talk to Braden." Grant said excusing himself from the table.

Grant knocked on his son's stateroom door and went in on Braden's, "Enter." He found his son playing chess with Kerry who was looking less pale.

"How are you feeling, Kerry?" Grant asked.

"A little better today. The powder the ship's doctor gave me helps for a little while." Kerry answered but noticed the worried brow on her father in law. "What is it?"

"We have a problem with Bennett."

"Dear God, is he ill?" Kerry gasped straining to pull her larger girth erect.

"Yes, but not physically. He has returned to his sullen state and just now shouted out his fear that he is afraid you are going to die." Grant turned to Braden. "You need to handle this, son."

"Where is he?" Braden asked his father.

"He ran away from the dinner table. Ayden went to fetch him back." Grant looked at his son. "Audrey seems to think he is responding to your worry over Kerry."

"I can't stop that, Papa." Braden responded.

"I know, but you must assure Bennett." Grant told him.

"Bring him to me while I am feeling better." Kerry suggested.

"Will you stay with Kerry while I bring Bennett back, Papa?"

"Certainly son." Grant grinned. "It's the right time I showed up, you need my help with this chess game."

Braden returned shortly with Bennett in tow. "See Bennett, Mamma is feeling better. It's just the ocean crossing. Baby doesn't like it and makes Mamma sick. She's going to be just fine when we get to England."

Bennett's little bowed head looked up to Kerry hopefully, "Is that true Mamma?"

"Come here my darling Ben." Kerry called to him and when he ran to her in hope she closed her arms around him and kissed him on his forehead. "It's true my darling. I'll be just fine as soon as we get off this water. I can travel on trains, carriages and horses. I just don't do very well on ships."

"I wanted to be near Mamma and take care of her while she didn't feel well, Bennett." Braden continued as he knelt next to his son and ran his fingers through Bennett's hair, "I didn't mean to frighten you with taking care of Mamma."

GENEVA'S HOPE



"You're really, really, really, I mean really going to be alright, Mamma?"

"Yes, Ben. Really, really, really, better. I promise." Kerry replied.

The rest of the crossing was uneventful. Those last few days when Kerry was feeling better Braden sent for Bennett and they played together in the stateroom to give him reassurance that everything was fine.

When the boat docked several carriages awaited them, including Henry Astor and son Robert with his wife, Eloise. Braden's brother and sister were also waiting in London for them. It was quite a family reunion that day.

CHAPTER 28

Kerry watched Braden embrace his brother, Carlton. Carlton was wearing the newest English fashion of reefer jacket and Hamburg top hat; he was as tall and handsome as Braden. The brothers had the same strong muscular build. Carlton had the thick black hair and blue eyes that reminded one of Lake Tahoe in Nevada.

Grant and Celeste with Bennett in hand, embraced a woman Kerry guessed would be Dyllis, Braden's sister. Dyllis had the dark hair and haunting blue eyes of her brothers. The family resemblance was strong with the Wessex children. Kerry wondered about the child growing within her, would he have the Wessex looks?

Braden had told Kerry the names of his family in Geneva and on the Atlantic crossing with childhood tales and accounts of their courtships and marriages, as well as their offspring.

Standing by Dyllis in her ermine trimmed woolen overcoat was an average height and average looking man that Kerry assumed would be Glyn, Dyllis's husband. Glyn was holding a little girl about three years old, which would be Corliss their daughter noting the Wessex looks, and next to Glyn looking very much like his father, would be Malden their son. Malden looked to be about ten years old and quite unhappy to be at the docks or Kerry assumed. The real reason of unhappiness would be forthcoming.

Braden had told Kerry his brother Carlton's wife was named Edith and they had four children, three girls and a boy, the oldest would be Eartha aged fourteen, Joanne aged twelve, Olivia aged ten, and their only son, Collier aged nine.

Lord, and Braden thought I had a large family! Kerry mused and smiled to herself. Apparently Carlton didn't bring his large family with him, not even his wife for he and Braden walked toward her now, just the two of them.

Braden introduced Kerry, "Carlton, my wife Kerry."

"I am most happy to make your acquaintance." Carlton bowed and took Kerry's hand to apply the gentleman's kiss brushing her gloved knuckles as she extended her hand removing it from the mink muff. Carlton glanced to



Kerry's protruding abdomen and then spoke to Braden, "I see you have been busy, brother. Congratulations are in order. When is your child due?"

"The partition is calculated for early spring, sometime early March." Kerry answered and then unabashedly asked boldly, "Where is Edith and your children?" Like for Like, Kerry thought to herself.

Carlton responded to her question immediately as a smile crossed his face., "Edith is not feeling well and the children are off in private schools. I apologize for the fact I cannot introduce them until Christmas when they have leave from school." Carlton liked the tenacity of his brother's new bride. Carlton's own wife Edith, had seemed to drift away into an emotionless chasm and no longer offered the spark that was once theirs.

"I look forward to it." Kerry replied politely. Kerry adored children and was hoping she would feel more a part of the family through them. Mandel looked as unhappy as Bennett when she first met him under the care of Mildred Hudson.

"We celebrate Christmas Holiday at our parents' home in Morgan Castle." Carlton told Kerry. "It is the only time for a year that our family is all together. I look forward to seeing you there, and it will be a happy change to see my brother smiling this time."

Braden put his arm over Kerry's shoulder. "I have many reasons to smile this holiday."

"Braden, you must introduce me to my new sister in law." A feminine voice came from behind. "Pooh! Never mind I'll introduce myself."

Braden held his breath. He loved Dyllis but if anyone would protest his marriage to a Yank, it would be her. Dyllis was very social status conscious and enjoyed the gossip of the ton more than anyone he knew. Dyllis would be critical until she heard the heritage of his new wife's family. That was a cannon ball he would pleasantly drop upon his snobbish sister.

Kerry turned around to the hand pulling on her shoulder, "I'm Dyllis, Braden's sister, and this is my husband Glyn and our children, Corliss and Malden".

"So pleasant to meet you. Braden has told me about you." Kerry greeted warmly accepting the sister in law's embrace.

"Mamma and Papa tells me that you will not be coming with us directly to Morgan Castle, that you intend to go directly to Brenham, Braden's estate manor." Dyllis said with a tinge of disappointment. Dyllis was hoping to learn more about this Yank her brother had married and if she needed to worry about gossip. "I know I would like you to come to Morgan Castle with us."

"Dyllis!" Braden stated stoically, "I want some time alone with Kerry."

"Some adjustment time is needed." Kerry concurred with her husband. This family was a tad bit overwhelming. Ayden came to Kerry's side at that moment.



"Dyllis, this is my brother Ayden." Kerry said as she pulled her brother forward. He was a bit uncomfortable in his new clothes that were tailor made for him on the ocean voyage. Ayden was wearing a checked tweed suit with double-breasted waistcoat, matching vest, ascot silk tie, and a square crowned bowler hat.

"Will you be joining us in Morgan Castle?" Dyllis asked her new American in law. "Or will you be going with Braden to Brenham?"

"I will be accompanying Braden and Kerry until Dunham." Ayden answered and then pointed to the tall handsome middle-aged man hugging his lovely middle-aged wife, Audrey Astor, "Have you met my uncle Henry Astor and his family? My Auntie Audrey and their son Robert and his wife, Eloise."

"Have you business in Dunham?" Dyllis asked wondering why he would pick Dunham to visit being so far out in the countryside. Most American visitors preferred London. His introduction struck her suddenly, Henry Astor? Robert Astor? The wealthy Astors and Robert Astor was known in England as the Marquis of Wells, "and yes I am acquainted with his grace, Lord Robert Astor. We spoke as the ship was docking and he had told me he was waiting for his wife and family. I didn't dream his family was ours also."

"It appears that is so, and yes, I do have business in Dunham. Uncle Henry has been wanting me to check on my inheritance." Ayden offered bluntly not thinking very much of owning an estate in England.

"You're looking at the Marquis of Dunham, sister dearest." Braden informed his sister and quite enjoyed the shock on her face so much he continued, "and my wife, Kerry is the Duchess of Lincolnshire."

"What?" Dyllis gasped.

"There are even more lands and titles," Braden chortled. "It seems my wife is a descendant of the Royal Stuart family as are the Astors."

"What?" Dyllis choked again.

"These properties in England don't even begin to measure to their ranch in Geneva. My guess at the ranch size would be from London to Wales." A slight exaggeration in expanse, but Braden couldn't help but needle his sister a bit.

"I guess Viscountess would be replaced by Duchess, then." Carlton butted in. "Your Grace." Carlton bowed to Kerry. "Do you intend to reclaim your Duchy?"

"That's what Ayden is here for. I am here for Braden only." Kerry answered demurely holding tight to her husband's arm.

"You can't possibly mean that, your Grace." Dyllis stuttered. "Brenham is a tiny estate compared to your Duchy in Lincolnshire. It is a huge estate currently run by the Monfort family."

"I am aware the Monforts are currently running my niece's property. " Henry Astor now added at his approach to the Wessex family. "We have retained them and their heirs as was the request of Harold Stuart, my father in law. Rest his soul."



"My sons and husband have taken the duty of handling all the Stuart estates in England." Audrey Astor told Dyllis.

"Yes, but it is time that Ayden takes some of this responsibility." Henry Astor said and placed his hand on Ayden's shoulder.

"Surprised, sister dearest?" Braden chuckled.

"Overwhelmed. Do Mamma and Papa know?" Dyllis asked as she breathed a little deeper and placed her hand over her throat.

"Papa knew, but Mamma had the same response you did, and I as well when I learned of my wife's royal heritage." Braden said laughing openly. "I have married quite well, don't you agree?"

"Indeed you have brother, indeed you have. This shall be the talk of the ton." Dyllis quipped gleefully.

"I am sure you will be in the center of the ton's talk, sister dearest." Carlton chided.

"Of course I will, silly." Dyllis crowed. "Do you realize brother that our family although wealthy and noble now has **Royal** blood!"

"The House of Stuart would bring that, yes. Of course you would realize that, Dyllis." Carlton scoffed. "However, the current monarchy is the House of Hanoverian, not the Stuarts."

"Do not think that your own wife Edith will not be so impressed, Carlton." Dyllis retorted.

"Let Dyllis enjoy herself Carlton." Braden interceded enjoying the unfamiliar teasing between his brother and sister. "Kerry and I won't be here very long."

"You're not staying?" Dyllis gasped.

"No sister dearest, Kerry and I will return to the Geneva ranch. I did tell you did I not that the ranch is quite large and is Kerry's inheritance. We will only visit England, our home will be in America." Braden told his sister, Dyllis. There it was finally out.

"Live in the Colonies? I don't understand when you have your estate here." Dyllis protested not believing anyone would walk away from such a large estate as Lincolnshire. An estate she would enjoy bragging about visiting to her friends in London and Wiltshire.

"You haven't seen my home, my Geneva." Kerry finally spoke up. "Geneva ranch is beautiful, open and free." Then with emphasis, "We are *not* your Colonies!"

"I forgot to warn you about that, Kerry takes offense to America being called the Colonies." Braden smiled. Who dare would gainsay the Duchess of Lincolnshire or the Marquis of Dunham? Not anyone in his family. Holding back the chuckles from the looks on his brother and sister's faces was getting harder to do. His family was also well aware of the name of Astor; it was so funny a chuckle did break through.

"What is so humorous brother?" Carlton asked sternly.

"Just happy, that's all. Just happy." Braden responded, but in his mind he was thinking about the first time he saw Kerry all rumped playing on the



floor with his son. She was hardly the image of a duchess. He had fallen in love with her immediately and all her wealth and titles didn't matter. He had fallen in love with her, Kerry, Bennett's governess.

The walk to the carriages was brief and the family split into sections, it was then Celeste and Grant told Kerry and Braden they would be keeping Bennett. Kerry protested wanting Ben with her, but since Audrey, Henry, Robert and Eloise would be staying at Morgan Castle in Wiltshire they all wanted Bennett with them. Reluctantly Kerry agreed.

Braden had procured by wire before they left Boston Harbor a suite in a London Hotel. Kerry was grateful for the respite, as she was very tired from the trip. Although she was only in her second trimester she found herself tiring easily and the ocean trip doubled with seasickness did not help matters. It was also a chance for her family to be together for a few days before everyone left for their destinations.

After a nap Kerry woke refreshed and feeling much better. She took a seat on the parlor chair in the sitting room of the suites.

"I am so glad to be off the ocean." Kerry told Braden. "I am already feeling much better."

"That is an incredible relief, my love as I was going to call a doctor to check on you before we begin our journey to Brenham."

"You really worry too much, Braden."

"You are a lot to worry about!" Braden insisted and bent over to kiss her lips gently. "I also would like to spend a few days in London with you shopping."

"Just what are we going to shop for?"

"Mayhap a few baby things and a new wardrobe for you."

"What on earth do I need a new wardrobe for? I'm growing fatter every day. Whatever we buy won't fit in a month or two."

"Our seamstresses in London make certain adjustments for growing waistlines." Braden smiled to her, "which is precisely why we need to take you to one of them. The House of Antoinette is highly recommended by the women in London."

"Just how would you know that?" Kerry cocked a brow at her husband. "Personal experience?"

"I don't wear dresses if you haven't noticed." Braden shot back. God he loved it when Kerry showed jealousy. "Dyllis shops there, and if anyone would know the best, it's Dyllis."

"Oh." Kerry said feeling somewhat ashamed. It's just that Braden is so handsome that in England he must have had women falling all over him and as lusty as he was with her, well he must have given in sometimes.

"And my love, since we are in England there will be certain balls we are required to attend for protocol. You will need some new very fancy ball gowns."



"You wouldn't make me go to balls?" Kerry shrieked. "I can't! I can't go looking like this!" Kerry pointed to her growing abdomen.

"Oh yes you can! And I think you are very beautiful! Especially right now." Braden bent over to kiss her abdomen.

Kerry lost that battle to Braden. The very next day she was in The House of Antoinette selecting ball gowns, house dresses, robes, lingerie, coats, jackets, skirts, blouses and hats. Most of Kerry's choices were the Langtry including the bustle. Her fabric choices were satin, velvet, and faille for overskirt and jacket. Kerry's favorite gown was French influenced that combined white spotted gauze with pale and dark green satin. A cascade of roses and foliage fell from the shoulder to back and down the sides. It was matched with long pale cream gloves.

"You are a vision." Braden told her when he saw her in the gown as adjustments were made.

"Thank you. I'm glad you didn't say nightmare." Kerry said softly and then asked her husband, "will you still want me when I'm really big and waddle instead of walk?"

"I will always be next to you, loving you and lusting for you."

That response made Kerry feel a little more secure, but not much. Kerry was feeling very self-conscious. Yes, she wanted Braden's baby, loved it already, but would Braden wander when those beautiful slim English women would entice him. Just in this shop there were three beautiful women looking at him. Kerry did learn at the couturiers just how adjustments were made for a lady in waiting. Kerry bristled at their continual staring at her husband. Kerry was tempted to strap on her colt and if any one of those she cats tempted or pawed her man why she would just shoot them. Kerry's angry glares eventually were warning enough for the woman that dared glance her husband's way.

Kerry did learn at the couturiers just how adjustments were made for a lady in waiting. Kerry was grateful; she didn't feel quite as fat.

When she returned to her London hotel with Braden she noticed a woman in the lobby talking to Glyn Perkins, Dyllis' husband. That shouldn't have been so strange but the back of her looked like Mildred Hudson. The woman walked to the alcove and out to the garden without turning around. *Don't let your imagination run away with you, Kerry.*

"Braden, where would Mildred Hudson go after you sent her back to England?"

"I would assume she would go back to her sister in Oxford. Why? What brought that up out of the clear blue?"

"I thought I just saw her talking to Dyllis's husband, Glyn."

"Are you sure?" Braden asked intensely concerned.

"No, I'm not sure. It was the back of a woman. It looked like her, but I'm not sure."

PAYTON LEE



"I hope not. I couldn't even begin to comprehend that woman as governess for Corliss and Malden."

"I must have been mistaken." Kerry uttered but in her mind, I have to be mistaken.

"Are you tired yet?" Braden asked.

"Why, are you hopeful?" Kerry teased batting her eyelashes.

Braden knew that look and groaned. "Actually I wanted to eat at the hotel restaurant, but instead lets go to our room. I am suddenly hungrier for you."

"I'm famished for you."

"Oh God!" Braden moaned as his loins swelled. He had to get her to bed quickly.

CHAPTER 29

The rest of the time in London was spent Christmas shopping for the Wessex and McGillinen family. Celeste and Dyllis stayed behind in London to do some Christmas shopping with Kerry before they joined the rest of the family, and the Astors in Morgan Castle. Kerry bought clothes and toys for Bennett. Kerry did buy some silken layettes for her expected son. She also bought some presents for her Sosoni' family in Geneva, her brothers, the staff, and hands of Geneva Ranch that she shipped to Grady and Morning Song for Christmas in Geneva.

Braden was difficult to buy for, since he had just about everything, or so Kerry thought. Dyllis had spent some time shopping with Kerry before she and her family left for Morgan Castle and told her how Grant and Celeste kept buying Braden everything they could think of after Laura died to ease his depression even though nothing had worked.

Kerry didn't know what to do until she and Celeste had met Braden returning from his ride on a London street. Braden was pulling a tethered pony named Danny that he bought for Bennett on a farm just outside London.

"Braden just adored his horse Socks. It must have really hurt him to leave Socks at Geneva." Celeste mentioned as she watched Braden ride on the Hyde Park rented horse.

"He knew Socks would be well taken care of at Geneva, and he wanted Socks to stud with a mare, Pa had bought in Virginia City." Kerry smiled when she told Celeste. Braden had told Kerry that if Socks would stud that beautiful thoroughbred mare a father should be there when his colt would be born. Those sentiments really endeared Kerry to her husband.

"Still, I am certain he misses Socks." Celeste said wistfully just before Braden rode up to speak to them in the carriage.

That comment did give Kerry an idea for a present. Celeste and Kerry went to a livery after the meeting. Kerry had new tack made for Braden with not only the best leather but also it would be decorated with Braden Morgan Wessex gold initials of BMW. Celeste agreed it was a perfect Christmas

present. Celeste promised to pick the new tack up when it was finished and wrap it for under the tree.

Kerry and Braden journeyed and spent a week at Dunham with Ayden. The staff had been introduced to their Lord McGillinen on their arrival. Kerry almost burst out laughing when she saw the servants choke on the Irish name their Marquis of Dunham bore. No wonder Kerry and Ayden's grandfather was so against the marriage of his youngest daughter Ashley with the Irish upstart Grady McGillinen. Grandfather Stuart had used every ploy possible to prevent his daughter from marrying that Irishman from Nevada. It didn't matter that he had struck both gold and silver in his mine and had bought a large area of land in that wild area. Grandfather Stuart's last resort was to disinherit his daughter but bequeath her children with portions of the Stuart estate. All three of his daughter's did marry into money and near the end; Grandfather Stuart willed all the estates to his grandchildren and future grandchildren. At Grandfather Stuart's death there had only been grandsons. Kerry was born after his death and then her mother had died. Kerry was the only granddaughter and she had been well spoiled.

"I could barely hold my laughter when I saw their faces, Ayden." Kerry giggled. "Having Robert Astor care for these lands did not prepare them for their Marquis."

"No, it did not." Ayden snorted. "I am sure they will get used to it however."

"You are intelligent and kind. They will not be able to help but love and respect you." Kerry told her brother fondly and stroked the back of her hand across his cheek.

Ayden and Braden spent the next few days reviewing the household books, questioning the steward, and riding the properties. Kerry used the time to rest and relax. As Mrs. Braden Wessex the Dunham staff more readily accepted her. Accepted may have not been the word; it was more welcomed or comfortable. In the week they spent at Dunham with Ayden, Kerry had won over many hearts and showed Braden what a good lady of the manor she would be.

"I'm so proud of you." Braden would tell her every evening.

Their trip to Brenham was just a few days past Dunham and they were enjoying the pleasant solitude of Braden's Estate after their arrival. The Brenham staff was prepared for their Lord's arrival with his new wife and everything was ready and welcoming.

"Do you really think Ayden will be alright at Dunham?" Kerry asked Braden with a great deal of concern for her brother. "He is the smartest and most affable, but running that estate? I am really worried."

"Don't fret my love. Tom Andrews, the steward, is a very capable man and he has taken a like to Ayden." Braden smiled. "Ayden will do just fine."

GENEVA'S HOPE



"I hope so." Kerry sighed. She had not been feeling well and it seemed to be getting worse every day.

"Kerry, are you feeling well?" Braden asked noticing her more labored breathing and pallid color.

"Certainly. Why would you think otherwise?" That was a lie. Kerry was feeling worse than the trip on the ocean except there was no retching.

"I would think otherwise because you are looking pale, my love." Braden told her, "and your eyes look sort of glassy."

"Don't be silly, glassy?" Those were the last words she remembered when everything began to whirl. The room started spinning and Kerry grabbed for the arm on the chair when she felt herself falling.

Braden was up and cradling Kerry in his arms before she had a chance to fall.

"Jason! Jason!" Braden screamed to get the attention of his Brenham butler.

"Yes my lord?" Jason answered as he walked into the room. Then he saw the limp body of his lord's wife being cradled in Braden's arms.

"Get a doctor right away!" Braden ordered as his arm slipped beneath Kerry's knees and firmly around her waist. Braden picked her up, bounded up the stairs and carried her to their bedroom in a blink. "Send Mrs. Graham up to our room," he shouted to Jason over his shoulder.

Braden laid Kerry gently on the bed and began to unfasten her dress. Never before had Braden undressed Kerry that quickly. Braden had Kerry undressed to her broderie when Mrs. Graham walked into the room.

"Dear God Master Braden!" Mrs. Graham cried seeing Kerry unresponsive.

"Help me!" Braden choked.

Mrs. Graham pulled a cotton nightgown from the armoire and helped Braden remove the broderie and slip on the nightgown.

"What am I to do?" Braden cried openly. "I don't know what's wrong!"

Mrs. Graham put her hand to Kerry's abdomen. "The baby is moving. That is good."

"What is it? Why did Kerry faint?"

Mrs. Graham felt Kerry's forehead, "Sweet Jesus, she's burning!"

"A fever?"

"Did you send for the doctor?"

"Of course, tell me what's wrong Mrs. Graham." Braden pleaded for an answer.

"I believe she has the influenza."

Braden sagged. Influenza had been known to kill. "Where the hell is that doctor?" He wished Morning Song or Small Bird were here. They knew remedies, they could take care of her, make her better. Why did he let Edward and Small Bird stay behind? Why did he listen to Edward and let them stay

because Edward wanted more time with his new wife before he brought her to England?

It was as if Mrs. Graham read his mind. "I don't know my lord, but if it is influenza there is a woman in the village that knows plant medicines. Mrs. McGregor can help. I know she can."

"Get her, please. Send someone." Braden said pathetically as he gently laid Kerry's head on the bed pillows and slowly covered her body with a quilt.

Mrs. Graham flew down the stairs and ran into the kitchen side breakfast room where she knew her husband would be eating lunch. "Go find Mrs. McGregor, Mark. And hurry!"

"Good God, Madeline what has you in such a tether?" Mark asked his wife as he looked up from his breakfast.

"It's the master's new wife, she is ill. Very ill!" Madeline squeezed out with agitation. "Now go, hurry!"

"It's probably just morning sickness from the pregnancy, but I'll find Mrs. McGregor. Calm down, Madeline." Mark told his wife of thirty years with affection.

"Mark, I will not calm down. The lady is burning with fever. What if she?" Madeline Graham didn't have to finish. Mark Graham was grabbing his topcoat, slicker and hat. Mark made his way in the gloomy rainy English day to the village and house of Mrs. McGregor.

The Wessex household in Brenham was buzzing with the news before the doctor arrived. Panic and fear were rampant that morning in the manor. Soon all the servants were talking. Most of the staff had known Braden since a child and they had mourned with him when Laura died. They had taken careful pains not to mention Laura's name and silently remove all personal effects that would remind him of his loss.

When Braden had returned to Brenham with his new bride he was happy once more. To think he might suffer again the loss of a beloved and pregnant wife would be too unthinkable, too horrendous.

The doctor arrived sooner than Mrs. McGregor and he was ushered upstairs immediately. The doctor barely had time to remove his rain slicker.

Kerry was in delirium at that time, fading in and out of consciousness. The raging fever had taken over her body. The doctor looked at her eyes, her throat and listened to her heart. He noticed the pregnancy and tsked.

"I'm sorry Mr. Wessex, there is nothing I can do. This will have to run its course. Your wife and child may not make it. I'm sorry."

"Nothing you can do? You're a doctor! Trained in medicine! Damn you, do something!" Braden roared his rage uncontrollable. He wanted to thrash the incompetent man. Braden grabbed the doctor's collar and shook him violently. "Do something! Damn you!"

"Mr. Wessex," the doctor said calmly, "any and all threats are useless. There is nothing anyone can do to prevent or stop the influenza from running its course."



"There is something I can do, Doctor Reinhold." Mrs. McGregor said gruffly as she entered the room. Looking at Lady Wessex on the bed writhing in delirium, Mrs. McGregor cried out, "Oh my poor child."

Mrs. McGregor placed her bag on the floor and went to Kerry's side. Gently placing her hand on Kerry's head she began to issue orders to the staff that had followed her and were standing outside the door in the hall. "Bring me cool water, lots of it and enough cloths to cover her entire body."

"What do you think you're doing madam?" Doctor Reinhold scolded Mrs. McGregor.

"I'm going to take care of Lord Wessex's wife, sir." She growled. "Something obviously you cannot do."

"Sir," Dr Reinhold addressed Braden Wessex, "are you going to allow this woman to practice her witchery on your wife?"

"Hardly witchery sire," Mrs. McGregor said sarcastically. "These herbal medicines have been curing illness for centuries. Someday in the future your medical world will admit that these herbs are the foundations of all your scientific medicines. Just where do you think morphine came from?"

"Lord Wessex, are you going to allow this?" Doctor Reinhold demanded with indignation.

"Absolutely. I myself have seen the plant medicines work. And besides that, Mrs. McGregor says she can help, you do not." Braden squared his shoulders in defiance of the Doctor. "What do you want me to do Mrs. McGregor?"

Doctor Reinhold stormed out of the room, down the stairs and grabbing his coat and slicker left in a huff.

"Call me Gayle, and go help them bring up the cold water. We need to bring down her body temperature before we do anything else."

"But won't the chill give her lung fever?"

"In some cases that is true, but when a body is this hot and there is no perspiration we must cool the body for her."

Before Braden could turn and run his staff already had retrieved basins for the cold water, many cloths and buckets of ice-cold well water.

"Help me take off her clothes." Gayle McGregor ordered. "Madeline, you stay and help."

The three removed Kerry's nightgown and covered her entire body with the cold cloths. As soon as her body had heated the cloth, they exchanged it for a different cold one. To cool Kerry's body, it took all three of them continually changing the cloths that covered her.

The household staff continued to exchange the warming buckets with fresh ice cold ones.

Kerry in delirium was unaware of the people surrounding her. She was dreaming now, Everett Mann was there and he was pouring cold water over her. She started screaming, "To hell fire with you, Everett Mann. I'll kill you! I swear I'll kill you."



Braden's heart went to his throat listening to her dream state murmurs, was she remembering the nightmare Mann had put her through. Would there ever be an end to that suffering?

Mrs. McGregor was ignoring Kerry's delirium, but noticed Braden. "Don't listen to the delirium boy, she won't remember it. Keep your mind on changing those cloths."

This went on for hours and well into the night. No one admitted they were exhausted.

Finally in the early hours of the morning Kerry's fever had come down and she began to perspire. Soon she was shaking violently with chills.

"Quickly, we must change the sheets to dry bedding and dress her." Mrs. McGregor now ordered.

Braden wrapped Kerry up in a warm down quilt and held her shaking body in his arms while Mrs. McGregor and Mrs. Graham removed the wet sheets from the bed and replaced them with clean dry linens.

Placing Kerry back on the bed, Mrs. Graham quickly dressed her in a warm woolen nightgown and she was suddenly layered with blankets and quilts.

"Now what?" Braden asked as he choked back his fear. He watched helplessly as Kerry was shivering even under the mass of quilts and blankets piled on top of her.

"Now I give her some medicine." Gayle McGregor informed him. She went into her bag and pulled out a vial. "Madeline, fetch me a spoon please."

"What is that?" Braden asked pointing at the vial.

"Fortunately for you, this fall I made a syrup of garden violets and haven't had to use any of it yet. This will clear the influenza from the lungs and help bring down her fever. I have powdered garden sage and thyme that will be mixed with the garden violet syrup. I then add honey for taste and you will help pick Mrs. Wessex up to get it down her throat." Gayle McGregor explained. "We will do this every three hours. When Mrs. Wessex is awake we will help her drink Angelica tea."

"Anything you say." Braden would agree to almost anything at this point.

"Anything?"

"Yes, yes, anything."

"Good let Mrs. Graham and I take care of her for the next nine hours and you sleep. Then you and I will take nine hours and let Mrs. Graham sleep."

"Then your turn?"

"Yes, you and Mrs. Graham will care for her when I rest. I'm afraid I will need to stay several days. This isn't broken easily, and since your missus is carrying a child I intend to be careful and watchful."

"There is no way I can thank you enough Mrs. McGregor, Gayle."

"It would be nice if you would ask Mr. McGregor to bring me fresh clothes, let him stay here with me, feed him, and offer me a bath."

GENEVA'S HOPE



"Done and done. Gayle, if you make Kerry better I will give you a complete new wardrobe if you like."

"Well now, a new dress or two would be nice." Gayle smiled teasing the Lord of Brenham. "Off to bed with you, the sooner you get rest the sooner Madeline and I can."

"Anything you say. First I'll send for your husband and clean clothes." Braden left and then turned to say something but Gayle cut him off.

"Don't worry, if there is any change, I will send someone to wake you."

"Thank you." Somehow Braden felt confident of Kerry's care under the capability of Gayle McGregor.

CHAPTER 30

Braden slept through his allotted eight hours. He then bathed, donned fresh clothing and ate. It was dinner. Braden himself brought a dinner tray to Gayle McGregor and sent Madeline to have dinner with her husband and then sleep her eight hours.

"Kerry looks better!" Braden whispered after he gave Mrs. McGregor her tray and took his place by Kerry's side. "She's stopped shaking."

"Aye, her fever is down, but not broken. We must be vigilant, but there is improvement. Her breathing less labored and she is perspiring."

Braden took a chair next to the bed and held Kerry's hand, "I love you Kerry!" Braden thought of Bennett and was grateful he was still with his parents and Kerry's Auntie Audrey. If Bennett had been frightened on the ship he would have been terrified seeing his Mamma like this. Braden sighed heavily and rubbed Kerry's hand absentmindedly.

Gayle McGregor noted Braden's distress and began a conversation. "My husband brought us some black elderberry wine. When Mrs. Wessex is better we will give some to her." Then Gayle walked to Braden and gave him a packet, "this is Echinacea. Share my tea and take this. We must protect ourselves from the illness."

Braden took it obediently and enjoyed having tea with Mrs. McGregor. While Kerry slept on they talked of many things. Braden bared his very soul to Mrs. McGregor including the terror of losing his wife, again.

Mrs. McGregor was very supportive and promised Braden that would not happen this time. She also volunteered to be Kerry's midwife when her term came.

"My wife wants to have our baby in the Colonies. In her Nevada and at her Geneva ranch." Braden explained.

"That's all well and good, but you cannot allow her to do any traveling, not anymore. This illness has weakened her and by the time she will have regained complete health she will be too far along to risk traveling."



Gayle McGregor warned. "It's best I tell her that she will have to birth your bairn in England."

"You are telling me that she shouldn't travel at all?"

"Aye that I am. It would be best if Mrs. Wessex go no farther than the Brenham gardens for sometime."

"You tell her and I'll make sure your orders are followed." Braden grinned, "even if I have to lock her in this room."

Mrs. McGregor then told Braden of her life and of Mr. McGregor who appeared in the room with Madeline Graham.

"Mrs. McGregor, it's time for our breakfast and time for you to sleep."

Mr. McGregor ordered his wife with affection. He walked to her and took her hand. "Wait until you see the room they have prepared for us. 'Tis a lord's chamber it is."

The two left the room and an hour later, Braden and Madeline spooned the syrup into Kerry's mouth. Braden was pleased, Kerry's breathing was improving and her color was better.

These shifts continued for the next three days until in the morning of the fourth day, Kerry opened her eyes and started coughing. "I feel terrible!"

Braden jumped from his chair and embraced Kerry with such force she cried out, "Braden, it's hard enough to breathe!" Kerry began coughing again.

Madeline Graham handed Kerry a napkin to release the sputum.

"Welcome back, my love." Braden said as he released his death hold on Kerry.

"Back? Where have I been?"

"You've decided to take a nap with a high fever for the last four days."

"Four days?" Kerry squeaked.

"Madeline, will you please wake Mrs. McGregor?"

"Of course my Lord and I will prepare the Angelica tea for Lady Wessex."

The little talking Kerry had done weakened her and she sank back into her pillows. Just barely above a whisper she said, "I feel filthy. I want a bath."

"We'll see what Mrs. McGregor says, my love." Braden replied.

Kerry could barely keep her eyes open, "who is Mrs. McGregor?"

"The woman that saved your life, and mine." Braden said softly.

"Oh." And Kerry was fast asleep again.

Mrs. McGregor went directly to Kerry and felt her cheeks, her throat, and checked her heart rate. "The fever has broken."

"She was cognizant, Gayle. It was just a few minutes but she spoke to me and knew who and where she was." Braden said joyfully. "She said she wanted a bath."

"And she will have one when she wakes. We must of course make sure she does not get a chill." Gayle McGregor grinned with pride in her accomplishment. "I see Madeline has the Angelica tea ready. Can you get



your wife some biscuits? She will be hungry when she wakes and we need to have food ready."

"I'll keep the kitchen open 24 hours for her needs. I'll hire two more cooks to keep food ready at anytime." Braden promised more for himself than for anyone else.

"From what I have learned, your staff loves your wife and most definitely you. I imagine they would put in all hours for you without complaint or additional staff." Gayle told Braden.

The quiet conversation between Gayle and Braden was interrupted when Audrey Astor came into the room. Stopping to stare at Kerry under the massive covers and quilts she cried, "It is all true. Kerry is deathly ill!"

"Was, Mrs. Astor. Mrs. McGregor here has helped Kerry." Braden told Audrey as he stood by her side when she sat next to Kerry on the bed.

Henry Astor, Celeste and Grant Wessex stood by the door.

"Please, I must ask all of you to leave." Mrs. McGregor said firmly. "Kerry is better, but not completely well and I don't want any of you to contract her illness."

Audrey looked up at Braden with question in her eyes.

"Mrs. Astor, I do not have the illness but I have been taking herbs every day to prevent contracting it. All of you have not, so please follow Mrs. McGregor's request."

"Then I want some of those herbs. I want to help take care of my beloved niece." Audrey almost begged.

"I want to take them also." Celeste Wessex asked. "I will help take care of my son's wife."

"Very well, here are the powders. You will add a half spoon to a tea daily." Gayle McGregor said after she pulled out folder papers of the Echinacea.

"Where is Bennett?" Braden asked his mother after he left Kerry's side and walked to her. He did not want Bennett frightened or catch the influenza.

"He's downstairs with a Mr. McGregor. Apparently Bennett took a liking to the man and Mr. McGregor is taking him to the stables to show him Danny, his new pony." Celeste answered.

"Good, I'll meet them there and tell him his Mamma is alright but has a sickness he could catch." Braden offered as he embraced his mother.

"That's a very good idea son. If you explain things to him right off, he won't get as frightened again." Celeste agreed and pushing her son from the room smiled as her son and husband left to care for Bennett.

While Braden was taking his rest, Kerry woke up again and this time Mrs. McGregor, Mrs. Graham, Audrey Astor and Celeste Wessex helped a weakened Kerry to a warm bath with fragrant salts. They washed Kerry, washed her hair and dried her quickly. A fresh cotton nightgown was put on her and then she was assisted right back to bed.



When Braden returned for his vigil Kerry was awake. Audrey was spooning broth for her to sip to give her strength. An empty cup that held tea was on the table near Kerry's bedside and only a few of the biscuits Braden had brought up for her were left.

"I'm glad to see you eating." Braden said as he leaned over to kiss her. "You look beautiful and smell wonderful."

"Actually I seem to be famished." Kerry smiled weakly, "and I finally had a bath."

"Yes, eat." Audrey ordered as she brought up another spoon for Kerry to swallow.

Celeste walked in with vanilla pudding. "I brought you this for dessert."

Kerry looked at the treat in her mother in law's hand. "Yum." Kerry finished the broth and Celeste fed Kerry the pudding.

Braden was ecstatic that Kerry was eating so much and not complaining that it was all light food.

"When you're stronger, Bennett has been pleading to see you." Celeste told Kerry as she held the spoon to her mouth. "We have assured him you are getting better, but of course he is worried."

"You need to spend a lot of time with Bennett." Audrey chided Braden. "This is the second scare he's had and he really won't be assured until you show him you are not worried."

Kerry didn't take the next bite, "Go to him Braden, I have all these nurses. I don't need another. Why soon all of you will trip over each other."

"We're here to take care of Kerry, now run along to your son." Celeste ordered. "Bennett is currently in the kitchen with Mrs. Graham."

As Braden walked into the kitchen Bennett spotted him and ran into his father's arms, "Papa!"

"My son!" Braden said picking Bennett up and showering him with kisses.

"I've missed Mamma. When can I see her?" The little boy asked innocently.

"Mamma is getting much better but I told you what she has my special little son could catch and I don't want that, so you can't visit Mamma." Braden told Bennett and then added, "at least for a while."

"But then I can see Mamma?" Bennett asked with a slight tremor of trepidation.

"Yes, then you can see her," Braden promised with reassurance and took Bennett's hand. "Why don't we go for a ride? Your pony, Danny is in the stable and waiting for you."

"Oh yea! Let's go." Bennett bubbled enthusiastically.

They spent several hours riding around the estate and it was just what Bennett needed to feel reassured about his new mother. She would be all right if his Papa would take the time to go riding with him.



When they finished riding, Bennett was tired and Braden tucked him in his bed for a nap.

Braden went to his study and went to get a brandy to warm himself from the chill of the ride. Henry and Grant Astor were sitting in chairs.

"Why didn't you send for us right away, son?" Grant asked.

"Her illness came on too suddenly and she needed care immediately." Braden answered. "There was no time to even think. I'm sorry, I just didn't think of anything but Kerry."

"Is it true the doctor you sent for said nothing could be done to help?" Henry Astor asked.

"It's true. He left in a bit of a tetter when Mrs. McGregor said she could help and I let her."

"You made the right decision." Henry Astor told Braden. "Just how is my niece doing now?"

"On the road to recovery, thank God." Braden poured his brandy then added, "It will take some time. The influenza weakened her."

"We'll stay as long as we are needed." Grant said to his son as he sipped his brandy.

"We won't be able to come to Morgan Castle for Christmas." Braden told his father and took a sip of his brandy. This would be the first Christmas he would not be in attendance. "Mrs. McGregor told me that Kerry is not to travel anywhere for a long time."

"If that is true, you will not be able to return to Geneva the end of January as you had planned." Grant realized with delight. It meant his son would stay in England longer and he hoped his new grandchild would be born here.

"Mrs. McGregor also told me it would not be wise to embark on a sea voyage so close to term." Braden looked at his father when he said, "That means Kerry will give birth in England and we must wait until our child is a little older before we return to Geneva."

Grant Wessex did not even try to hide the broad smile that ran across his lips. "You know full well that pleases me, and will certainly delight your Mamma."

"It makes me happy. I am sure Audrey will insist on staying for it and I can conclude my business here with my wife by my side." Henry snorted. "I do miss that lovely body in my bed to warm me when I am abroad."

"I have just learned that same feeling." Grant chuckled thinking about the trip he and Celeste enjoyed in Geneva. It was the first time she had accompanied him outside of England. The trip had been wonderful, almost a second honeymoon.

"I hope I never experience a cold lonely bed." Braden countered. "I will demand that Kerry be with me wherever I go."

"And what if she doesn't go with you?" Grant teased his son.

"Then I won't go. Very simple isn't it, Papa?"

The three men laughed. For Braden it felt good to laugh.



Christmas was upon the Wessex family and arrangements were made to have their Christmas together in Brenham. This one year Christmas would not be in Wiltshire's Morgan Castle.

Kerry was stronger but Mrs. McGregor would not allow her downstairs until Christmas Day. Even on Christmas Day Kerry did not walk downstairs, Braden carried her and she was dressed only in a red satin nightgown, red velvet robe with gold braid trim and red velvet slippers.

"Mamma!" Bennett shrieked after his father had sat Kerry in an overstuffed chair near the fireplace.

"Ben, oh my darling Ben. Merry Christmas my darling." Kerry cooed while she squeezed Bennett as tightly as she could.

"Well the family is all together now." Grant announced, "Let the presents begin!"

"Who is to pass out the presents this year?" Celeste asked, "Will it be Braden? Perhaps Carlton, or maybe Dyllis?"

"I do believe it is Dyllis that has the honor this year." Carlton answered. "If you please sister, I do believe our children are at the end of their tether in anticipation."

"Joanne and Malden were down here last night peeking." Olivia tattled.

"Really? Just how would you know that unless you were downstairs also?" Grant asked his grandchildren sternly while his eyes were twinkling in good humor.

The presents for the children were passed out first and when that was completed six grandchildren sat around the decorated pine tree playing with their new toys, or books, and looking at their new clothes. Bennett sat next to Kerry by the fire sharing his new toys with her and she of course played with him.

"You're the best Christmas present, Mamma." Bennett told her and stood on his tiptoes to give her a loving kiss on her cheek.

"You're my best present this year." Kerry repeated to Bennett and stroked his pink cheeked smiling face.

A huge gift-wrapped present was placed at Kerry's feet. "For you, from us." Grant told Kerry as he put it down.

Kerry unwrapped it with excitement and then looked at Braden, "A cradle. It's beautiful, but when we bring Garrett back he'll be too big for it."

It was time to tell Kerry about not returning to Geneva in January. Braden really did not know how she would take it but she had to be told. "Kerry, our baby will be born here at Brenham."

"What? But we agreed to return to Geneva for our baby to be born." Kerry blurted out.

"Look at you my dear," Grant reprimanded. "You're still as weak as a newborn kitten. It will take all the strength you have to give birth."



"Don't forget the sea voyage and how ill it made you. You simply would not be able to regain your strength for partition if you had to endure more illness." Braden reasoned with her.

Tears swelled in Kerry's eyes and she bit her lower lip to avoid ruining everyone's Christmas. She especially did not want to seem ungrateful for the thoughtful gift, but deep disappointment welled in her heart. "I know you are all correct. Mrs. McGregor has been trying to tell me about risks in traveling. I won't risk our child." Kerry sighed heavily stemming the torrent of tears that wished to flood her eyes, but she would not make a spectacle to ruin Christmas.



CHAPTER 31

Braden's concern for Kerry and the well being of their child did not compensate for the sadness he knew that news brought to his dear wife. He worked harder to be happy and playful in the spirit of Christmas hoping the cheer would rub off on her.

Kerry did try to get into the holiday spirit but she really wanted to cry, just cry and get out her disappointment that her first son would not be born in her beloved Geneva, but then again at least he would be born and everyone here she loved as much as her Sosoni' family and her brothers. At least Kerry convinced herself of that as she watched all the children open their presents and beam with joy and the Christmas spirit. *My son will be a part of this next year.*

It was watching Kerry put on a good show that Braden got the idea to write to the McGillinen's and ask them to come to England to be with Kerry when it was time for the birth. What was that old saying, "*bring the mountain to Mohammad?*" He would do it tomorrow. On his mind right now was the special gift he and Bennett would give Kerry after all the other presents were passed out.

"This is for you my love." Braden said to Kerry as he nudged Bennett to give her the brightly wrapped package. "From us."

This present Kerry opened slowly and carefully. She had held back her disappointment well and was showing genuine excitement in the present from Braden and Bennett. After the wrapping there was a black velvet box and when she opened it, "Oh my God. Oh thank you my loves." Kerry exclaimed and then the dam broke and the river of tears that had been held back suddenly flooded out down her cheeks. Sobbing she cried, "This is so precious, I thought it was lost forever. It's my precious comb, the first gift Ben bought for me. I love you!" Kerry hugged Bennett with all the strength she had and Bennett hugged her back.



Braden bent down and took it from her hand and put it in her hair, "There it is, back where it belongs."

The gift was exactly what Kerry needed; an opportunity to be extremely emotional and let those tears of disappointment flood out and that is precisely what she did.

Braden opened his present from Kerry and felt even worse about keeping Kerry in England even though it was for her health. He knew she bought the tack for him to enjoy on Socks when they returned to Geneva.

"It's absolutely incredible, thank you my love." Braden told Kerry. "As soon as we return to Geneva I will make good use of it with Socks. Until then I will use it everyday when Bennett and I ride together in the morning."

"I wish I could ride with you and Ben." The sigh was strong with regret.

"You will again, soon." Braden reassured her and bent to give her a lingering kiss.

The rest of the day was quiet and uneventful. Kerry had been showered with gifts from all her family. They knew it would be difficult for her to accept her baby being born in England. They had all been in the conspiracy and hoped their loving Christmas gifts would help. As was tradition the family ate a large Christmas dinner and afterwards the entire family, which on this Christmas included Audrey and Henry Astor, Robert and Eloise Astor, as well as Ayden McGillinen rejoined in the parlor and sang Christmas Carols. The staff was called into the parlor for the purpose of Braden and Kerry bestowing upon them their Christmas presents which with Kerry was personal and Braden's generous.

It was after the staff retreated before the carols that Kerry had a few quiet moments with Ayden.

"How is Dunham coming along?" Kerry queried.

"Interesting would be a good word." Ayden told his sister. "Although it has been well maintained it lacks in modern conveniences that the other manors surrounding have."

"And?"

"I'm rectifying that sis."

"I thought you would."

"The husbandry is rather backward compared to the new scientific methods we have been using in Geneva."

"I would assume you are rectifying that as well?" Kerry stated with pride knowing her brothers capability.

"Indeed I am, sis."

"You are handling everything, no problems?"

"Well two small ones." Ayden blushed slightly.

"I don't believe it, what can't you handle?"

"The endless introduction balls, with women begging to bed me, and my neighbor."



Kerry flamed red with his statement. Her brothers had never talked so openly about their sexual escapades with her. Kerry always kept hidden to hear those promiscuous discussions. "Women are falling all over you? That would make Dwayne jealous."

"I don't think it's me. I think it's the title."

"My, my brother, that is a problem." Kerry giggled

"These matron women keep trying to push their little girls on me."

"Little girls? As in three or five year olds?" Kerry asked somewhat sarcastically but in good fun.

"Little girls like sixteen to eighteen." Ayden veritably snarled. "I prefer women! I have no intention of being a father figure to a wife."

Kerry grinned at that remark. Ayden was always quiet but he was also lusty. "Poor baby, what neighbor problems do you have?"

"It seems the Lord of Amherst thinks I tried to drown his daughter."

"You didn't!"

"Of course I didn't. I was visiting his manor and while talking to him backed into his daughter that was too close to the edge of a pond." Ayden continued, "I didn't even laugh but offered my hand to pull her out. To which I received an flood of invocations and a look that would kill."

"Oh dear Lord. They haven't forgiven you? They didn't believe it was an accident?"

"No they haven't"

"Who is Lord Amherst's daughter, perhaps Grant and Celeste could help?" Kerry suggested knowing how well known the Wessex family was in society.

"Her name is Lady Paige Amherst. Do you think they might help?" Ayden asked encouraged by his sister's suggestion.

"I do believe they would. This Paige must be something for you to care how she feels about you." Kerry hit the emotions right on the mark. Ayden flushed red this time. "I take it Lady Paige is a woman, not a girl."

"Oh yes, very much a woman. Her hair is as gold as the setting sun with eyes that are the same color as a blue topaz, and her.. well, she is every bit a woman."

"Ayden, I do believe you are finally taken with someone." A bright smile danced across Kerry's lips. "This is famous. I'm so happy for you."

"She hates me, sis."

"You can change that. I know you can."

"I will work on it. I will ask Grant and Celeste for help."

Kerry smiled fondly at her brother. It was the first time any woman had caught his interest. This could be the future Marchioness McGillinen of Dunham Kerry mused and actually found herself smiling..

Braden walked to his wife then and told her firmly, "You have been up far too long without a nap, so I am taking you up to bed."

Kerry was indeed tired and had no intention of insisting upon staying with the family. Kerry stood to walk to her suites when Braden quickly



grabbed her at the waist putting his arm under her knees and carried her up the stairs to their bed. Braden removed her velvet robe and placed it over the chair. As Kerry lay back on the bed he removed her slippers. When Kerry was completely under the quilt, Braden tucked her in tenderly and placed a gentle kiss on her forehead. "Good night my love, and sweet dreams."

It had been almost two months since they had shared a bed and Kerry thought about how much longer Braden would have to endure sleeping separately. She knew she missed his warm arms embracing her. Those were her thoughts as she quickly fell into a sound sleep totally unaware of Braden watching her.

Shortly after Christmas the families again returned to their homes and the New Year came and went. By the month of February Kerry was much better and stronger but now quite heavy in her pregnancy. Mrs. McGregor had been right, in the current condition her body was in; traveling would have been uncomfortable and difficult. Kerry did prefer to stay in the manor and did not go farther than the gardens of Brenham. Occasionally Kerry would get a visit from her Auntie Audrey, her mother in law Celeste, Dyllis, Carlton and Edith, and her brother Ayden.

It was a cold dreary and rainy day the middle of February that Braden told her he had to travel to London and would be gone several days.

"Braden, don't leave. It's so close to my time." Kerry begged her husband.

"I'll be back soon, my love."

"You don't understand." Kerry moaned stubbornly.

"I guess I don't understand, but I must go to London."

"Braden, don't go!"

"Why?"

"Because I'm afraid. I don't want to be alone here when the baby comes."

"Your Auntie Audrey is coming today. She is going to stay with you while I am in London." Braden answered trying to calm Kerry.

"It's your baby, not hers!" Kerry retorted sarcastically.

"I'll be back in plenty of time. You don't think I wouldn't be here when our baby comes do you?"

"What if something happens? What if the baby comes before time?"

"What if I get going now, so I get back sooner?" Braden kissed Kerry on the cheek as he held her face in his hands. "Don't believe for one moment that I enjoy being away from you for even a day. This is something I must do."

"What is so damn important?" Kerry demanded. "What is more important in London than our baby?"

"I'm going to London for our baby."

"Oh that makes sense, yes it does." Kerry snapped and crossed her arms over her large abdomen. Kerry was getting more irritable every day and she knew it, she knew she was being unreasonable but she couldn't help it. Fear



and anxiety were plaguing her. She was afraid of childbirth and she was afraid that Braden was leaving to find relief with another woman. It had been too long for that lusty handsome man to be without a woman. Mistresses were half the population of London, or so she had heard.

Before Kerry was going to shout at Braden and accuse him of obtaining a mistress her Auntie Audrey came in, "Hello my precious. How is my great niece behaving today?"

Kerry snarled, "Your great *nephew* is giving me bruises in my ribs with his kicking."

"My, my, aren't we in a snit this gray rainy day." Audrey chuckled. Audrey knew by personal experience how uncomfortable the last month of pregnancy could be, and how irritable the mother became. "Well I came by to tell you wonderful news my dear."

"What could possibly be so wonderful?" Kerry snarled irritably.

"Your cousin Eloise is with child. Robert and Eloise are ecstatic, and of course your Uncle Henry and I are also." Audrey continued ignoring Kerry's waspish tone.

Kerry brightened a little, "I'm happy for them. They waited a long time for this to happen."

"We are all so happy. Apparently it happened while they were here during Christmas." Audrey beamed. "You and Braden brought them good luck."

"Or pregnancy is truly contagious." Kerry joked.

"Well whatever the reason, they are going to visit you soon. Eloise wants to discuss baby with you."

"She's not going to like the last month. I'm miserable. I waddle, I can't bend, my legs are stiff and Garrett keeps punching and kicking."

"That's because he's too crowded in there, but Braden tells me it's a girl." Audrey winked to Braden who was standing by the fireplace just listening.

"Fat lot he knows!" Kerry shrugged and threw a wad of paper at him. "He isn't carrying this weight around and getting kicked."

"It's time for me to ride to London. I could get hurt here." Braden laughed ducking the paper wad.

"Give my regards to your mistress." Kerry cooed.

Braden turned on his heels with that remark, "my what? Good God love, that's not what you're thinking is it?"

"What else can I think? I am in no condition to be your wife, and I haven't been for some time." Kerry cried. It was another pregnant hormone emotion.

Braden was on his knees before her, "Don't you ever think that. I love you and only you!"

"But I can't be your wife."

"You are my wife in every way. I can't be your proper husband because you and our child come first. Do you understand me? Our child

comes first!" Braden was angry. "And your health is top most above our child!"

Kerry sagged into Braden and he immediately cradled her in his arms. "I love you Kerry, I'll be back soon, very soon."

Bennett walked into the room and asked, "What is it Mamma? Why are you crying?"

"I'm just being silly, come here to Mamma." Kerry called to Ben. "What brings you to Mamma?"

"Annie had kittens, I brought one for you." Bennett showed her the little fluff in his hands. Annie had been a stray half starved cat hanging around the kitchen that Bennett had adopted and fed every day. Annie became attached to Bennett and shortly after that delivered kittens to the delight of Bennett who had watched in awe as they were born with Mrs. McGregor's assistance. "Mrs. McGregor said they were old enough for me to bring one to you."

"Oh it's adorable." Kerry said quietly holding the kitten to her cheek.

"Mrs. McGregor said that Annie had her kittens to show me how you will have a baby and how mommies take care of babies." Bennett told Kerry with a sense of pride in understanding what was explained to him.

Mrs. McGregor had been hired as Bennett's and the new baby's governess when Braden and Kerry would be in residence. Braden had also hired Mr. McGregor to be the full time landscaper of Brenham Manor. They were given a small cottage on the grounds for their own, and Gayle would be excused from duty when someone in the village needed her medicinal knowledge. It was Braden's reward along with a complete new wardrobe for Mrs. McGregor as promised, for saving Kerry but it was one of the best decisions he had ever made. Bennett adored Mrs. McGregor and his lawns and gardens never looked so beautiful especially in the winter.

While Kerry was occupied with Bennett and the new kitten, Braden made his escape. He chuckled to himself when he thought about Kerry thinking he was going to London for a mistress. Had he wanted, there were plenty of women available that would have loved to jump into bed with him, but there would be no love and he only wanted love in his passions. He enjoyed it when Kerry was jealous; it made him feel more secure in his marriage.

The two weeks Braden was gone became difficult for Kerry. Her mind raced to and fro imagining Braden in the arms of a beautiful raven haired, brown eyed, pink cheeked and voluptuous red-lipped jezebel. Then she would chide herself for even thinking her loving husband would consider that. It must be business, but why didn't he say it was? Why did he say it was for the baby? This was driving her mad and her son began kicking even harder, sometimes, she couldn't even breathe. Where was Braden and when would he be home?

"He'll be back any day." Audrey told her niece as she tucked a warm blanket around Kerry's legs as she sat in the parlor by the fireplace.

GENEVA'S HOPE



"You can still read my mind!" Kerry sighed in exasperation. "Auntie Audrey, I miss him. I want him here. I just know the baby is going to come early."

CHAPTER 32

It was two o'clock in the morning; Kerry had turned up the oil light in her room and looked at the clock on the mantel over the fireplace. Something had woken her up and she felt she could not go back to sleep.

"Oh God!" Kerry exclaimed as a band wound around her mid section. She felt a tightening for almost a minute. Kerry sat down in the chair by the fireplace. Twenty minutes later it happened again. "Mrs. McGregor described this to me. My baby is coming."

Kerry kept watching the clock and finally at six o'clock the cramping was ten minutes apart and becoming stronger, but Kerry suddenly felt full of energy; more energy than she had in several months. Kerry put on her robe and slippers and quietly walked down the steps. She went into the kitchen and pulled out rags from the kitchen box that held them. Kerry walked to retrieve the lemon oil used for polishing. She walked into the parlor and started humming as she polished the cherrywood furniture.

"What are you doing up so early?" Audrey demanded as she tied her robe tighter around her waist.

"I felt like cleaning," Kerry responded dryly but then sucked in a gasp of air as another wave accosted her abdomen. Kerry bent over with it and held her breath.

"My God, it's the baby!" Audrey cried out and ran to her niece. "It's time isn't it?"

"Time?" Kerry asked. "Time for what?"

"You're in partition aren't you?"

"Auntie Audrey how would I know? I never had a baby before." Kerry answered and began to move the large parlor settee. Kerry was denying her condition. Braden wasn't with her, therefore partition couldn't be happening. Kerry wouldn't allow it.

"What on earth are you doing child?" Audrey reprimanded stopping Kerry from attempting to move the piece of furniture.

"I want to rearrange the parlor, the settee would look better over there and I think the piano should be on the east wall."

"Kerry McGillinen Wessex sit down right now!" Audrey ordered.

"I want to move the piano!" Kerry protested.



Audrey pulled her niece forcibly and pushed her by her shoulders on to the settee. "Sit!"

"What is this all about Auntie Audrey?" Kerry pouted as she was held down about the shoulders on the settee.

"You have begun partition and we shall call for Mrs. McGregor."

Mrs. Graham entered the room curious about the noise so early in the morning. She had been on her way to the kitchen to begin breakfast. "Lady Astor? Lady Wessex?"

"Mrs. Graham, thank heavens!" Audrey sighed, "please fetch Mrs. McGregor while I hold my niece down. Partition has begun."

Kerry gasped as another wave wound around her middle.

"Mrs. McGregor hasn't returned from the village yet. She was called last night to tend Mrs. Arrins little girl. The child had a high fever." Mrs. Graham frowned as she watched Kerry panting with the childbirth contraction.

"Get Mr. McGregor or Jason to fetch her right away. Our baby is coming." Audrey sat next to Kerry and put her arm around her while the cramping continued to almost a full minute.

"I want Braden here, I can't be having the baby yet." Breathed raggedly.

"Babies come when they choose, not when you want them to." Audrey cuddled her. "Come let's get you to bed."

"I don't want to go to bed! I want Braden!" Kerry became very stubborn and insistent.

It was three hours before Mrs. McGregor came into the parlor. Eloise, who was visiting, had now joined the others in the parlor and to placate Kerry sat with her to drink Kerry's favorite morning beverage of hot black coffee. Kerry was drinking coffee and another wave caused her to stop drinking in mid sip. Mrs. McGregor watched her carefully and glanced at the large Grandfather Clock in the parlor. Mrs. McGregor counted the pendulum swings while Kerry held her breath.

"Mrs. McGregor, thank heavens! I cannot get this stubborn child to bed!" Audrey complained.

"Lady Kerry, how long have you had these waves?" Mrs. McGregor asked. "When did they start?"

"About two o'clock this morning I think." Kerry gasped as the pain continued and stronger with each wave.

"The bairn is ready, we must get you ready." Mrs. McGregor said as she walked to Kerry. "When the pain stops, we must get you to bed."

"I don't want to go to bed, I want Braden." Tears were streaming from Kerry's eyes.

"He isn't back yet and your bairn doesn't care if its Papa is here or not!" Mrs. McGregor told Kerry gruffly, "come child we don't have much time. The bairn is ready to be born."



"I won't go, it can't be time. I want Braden." Kerry pouted and wouldn't move. Again another band ran across her. The clock struck ten o'clock

Audrey thought she heard a coach and horses approaching. She glanced out the window and saw Braden dismounting from a chestnut. "Thank God! He's back Kerry, Braden is back."

Kerry couldn't speak at the moment. This pain was long and deep.

Audrey ran to the front door and yelled, "Braden, get in here and hurry! Kerry is having the baby."

Braden ran into the house and headed for the stairs.

Audrey called out to him, "She's in the parlor. We need your help."

Braden was next to Audrey in a second, "What is it? Is Kerry alright?"

"She won't leave the parlor, you need to get her upstairs. There isn't much time."

"Braden!" Kerry said as she looked up and then bit her lip to prevent from feeling the intense banding that was now beginning.

"What are you doing here?" Braden choked out. He was pale watching her bear the contraction.

"I live here!" Kerry growled back in the middle of her contraction.

"You know that's not what I mean!" Braden snapped back. He was worried for Kerry and knew this was the time she was supposed to be in bed. He had gone through this once before. Braden waited until the pain stopped and then took her in his arms and carried her out of the room and toward the stairs.

"Pa!" Kerry squealed when she saw her father enter the manor and stand in the hall as he observed his daughter being carried to the stairs.

Morning Song was behind him and saw Kerry being carried up the stairs by Braden. She watched as another contraction struck her stepdaughter. "It is time husband. I must be with her."

Grady kissed his wife gently and told her, "Go! It looks like we arrived here just in time."

Mrs. McGregor, Audrey Astor and Eloise Astor were already on Braden's heels as he carried his Kerry up the stairs.

Braden gently put Kerry on their bed and kissed her gently.

"I'm frightened Braden." Kerry whispered. "Is this going to get worse?"

"You're doin fine Lassie, just continue to relax." Mrs. McGregor smiled at her and looked to Braden Wessex pointing her finger, "You get out of here, and we don't have much time."

Mrs. McGregor started issuing orders immediately. Kerry was undressed and a fresh cotton nightgown was placed on her. Several thick pads of sheets were placed under her just in time.

As Kerry sat up to get comfortable she felt something wet and warm run down her legs. "What is that?" She cried.

"Tis only your waters, Lassie." Mrs. McGregor soothed.



"It is exactly as it should be." Morning Song comforted as she held Kerry's hand.

Another band enveloped Kerry this time much stronger and longer.

"It is not weak to cry or scream my daughter." Morning Song told Kerry softly. "If it hurts badly you may cry out. I am sorry my medicine for the pain is in my bags."

"I have the medicine for her pains ready." Mrs. McGregor told Morning Song as she walked to the mantel of the fireplace. "I have kept it here in readiness."

Two hours later Kerry was having no rest between contractions. Mrs. McGregor and Morning Song had become fast friends quickly exchanging the midwifery information between two cultures. Audrey Astor introduced Eloise to Morning Song.

Kerry's breathing was heavy and ragged but she had not screamed until a minute ago. Mrs. McGregor called for the hot water to be brought up. A little patch of dark hair had showed itself with that scream.

In the parlor Braden was pacing frantically. "I should have been here sooner."

Grady was about to talk to Braden to calm him down when they heard Kerry scream.

"God, she's dying." Braden gulped, and he turned white.

"You know better than that." Grady chided.

"Do I? How would I know better?" Braden glowered.

"You've been through this before, boy. Remember when Bennett was born?" Grady thought that would remind him.

"Laura was screaming the entire time, but not like that! And a doctor was present, not a midwife. He told me he gave her morphine for the pain and it was not bad for her at all."

"Morphine?" Grady exclaimed. "Isn't that a bit too strong for childbirth?"

"It's what the doctor gave her." Braden heard another blood curdling scream. "Sweet Jesus I should have fetched a doctor."

Another scream echoed through the rooms of Brenham Manor. Braden swayed uneasily and Grady supported him. "It's going to be alright, Braden."

"Kerry has been through so much. What if something happens?" Braden strangled on his emotions.

The next thing they heard was the wailing of a baby.

Grady grinned broadly, "You mean something happening like a baby being born?"

Braden was not reassured with Grady's remark, but listened intently as the newly born wails continued for a time.



It was an eternity for Braden as he waited at the foot of the stairs for someone to come out of the room. Mrs. Graham had hurried past him with a fresh kettle of hot water.

Finally Eloise emerged from the room and carried a bright smile as she looked at Braden and Grady by the stairs. "It's a boy! I healthy beautiful wonderful boy!"

Braden leaped up the stairs three at a time. "Let me see Kerry." He grabbed Eloise's arms. "Is Kerry alright?"

"Kerry is fine, wonderfully fine." Eloise twinkled with delight. "Braden, he's so beautiful. I hope Robert and I have such a beautiful baby."

"I want to see Kerry." Braden demanded and walked to the bedroom door.

Eloise grabbed Braden, "Not yet, go downstairs. We'll call you when you can see her."

Braden slumped as he walked down the stairs. Braden was met by Grady with a brandy snifter in his hand and gave it to Braden.

"A boy! Congratulations! A grandson, how great! I have my first grandson." Grady crowed. "Drink up boy, this is a time for celebration."

Grady guided the bemused new father to the parlor and sat him down.

"I want to see Kerry!"

"Good God Braden, you know very well that these things take time. They have to clean the mother and baby." Grady offered reassuringly. "I know my daughter is fine, just fine. Morning Song is with her."

It was another hour and two brandy snifter's later that Audrey Astor walked into the parlor. "Braden, you may go upstairs and visit your wife and new son."

Braden was gone so fast Audrey and Grady saw only a streak as Braden bounded for the door.

"We'll give him a few minutes and then you can see your new grandson." Audrey told Grady as she poured a snifter of brandy for herself.

"How is Kerry?" Grady asked sipping his brandy.

"Beautiful and exhausted." Audrey chortled. "Garrett is an angel, a veritable angel. Wait until you see him. Thick black hair and Bennett's adorable face."

"So he is going to look like his father?"

"He and Bennett definitely look like brothers."

"Where is Ben?" Grady asked his sister in law.

"Bennett is so sensitive to Kerry we didn't want him frightened so Mr. McGregor took him to town early this morning to pickup supplies."

Kerry was sitting propped up by many pillows holding her son, Garrett Stuart Wessex. She was admiring her labors when Braden walked in.

"Hello my love." Braden said quietly.

"I told you it was a boy, didn't I? Kerry boasted.



"Yes you did. He's beautiful my darling." Braden offered and sat next to Kerry putting his finger out to his new son's grasping little hands. "He's as beautiful as you are."

"He looks just like Ben." Kerry corrected her husband. "Do you want to hold him?"

"I would rather hold you, but yes. I want to hold my son."

Kerry lifted the newborn in her arms and placed them in Braden's. Morning Song, Mrs. McGregor and Eloise had left the couple alone when Braden came in.

"He does look like Bennett." Braden commented in wonder holding the precious bundle of love created by his Kerry and himself.

"Where is Ben?"

"I don't know I haven't seen him. We just arrived and then got pretty involved with you wife!"

"Go find him, he should see his new brother!"

"I will, but shouldn't you get some rest now." Braden whispered as he bent over his cradled son to give Kerry a gentle kiss followed by a soft whisper in her ear, "thank you my love."

"You're welcome my love and I am tired." Kerry admitted and closed her eyes. In a few moments her breathing was soft and regular. Kerry had fallen asleep.

Braden carried his new son downstairs to show his grandfather, Grady McGillinen.

Grady took the baby from Braden's arms right away. Grady's eyes were filled with pride and misted in happiness. "Strong looking boy! Have you thought of a name?"

"Kerry had him named eight months ago, his name is Garrett Stuart Wessex." Braden grinned and took his son's hands with his long large fingers.

"I like the name." Grady laughed. "I do really like that name. It's a strong name."

"Well Garrett needs to get some rest like his Mamma." Mrs. McGregor stated and took the newborn from Grady.

"See here!" Grady grumbled unwilling to part with the precious bundle he called grandson.

"Shush husband!" Morning Song reprimanded and led Grady up the stairs. "You and I need to freshen."

"Right! And maybe take a little nap?" Grady agreed teasing her.

"A little nap would be good, Grady McGillinen." Morning Song answered mischievously.

Braden turned to Audrey Astor who was sitting on the divan with a brandy snifter. "Where is Bennett?"

"He's with Mr. McGregor in the village shopping. They should return this afternoon."

"Don't you want to refresh, Braden?" Eloise suggested, noting his haggard worn look.



"Yes I should. Excuse me ladies." Braden bowed politely and went to the room next to their room. Jason assisted Braden in providing a hot bath and clean clothes that felt wonderful. Braden lay on the bed thinking of his Kerry. All his dreams had come true. He had Kerry and now the baby he wanted with her. A little boy that looked just like Bennett, who looked just like him. Could a man be happier he wondered? Braden jumped from the bed and quietly opened the door adjoining to his master suite. Peering in he saw Kerry sleeping and his son lying in the cradle. No one else was about so he stealthily tiptoed into the room and picked up his newly born son.

No sooner had he picked Garrett up than the little babe opened his eyes and started moving and stretching his little body in his father's arms. Garrett balled a fist and wildly moved it around.

"Is that what you have been doing to your Mamma while she protected you in her womb little one?" Braden softly asked the baby in his arms. "No wonder Mamma was quite irritable these last few weeks."

Garrett's eyes followed the familiar voice and a Braden heard a little gurgle.

"Well little tiger, I think we will have to enroll you in a pugilist class very soon." Braden chuckled as the little balled fists still swung wildly about. Braden jumped and almost dropped Garrett when he heard the stern voice.

"Braden Morgan Wessex!"

Turning to the voice he sheepishly answered. "Yes my love."

"What do you mean enrolling our sweet little cherub in a pugilist class?"

"My sweet, look at him!" Braden replied as he brought Garrett close to his mother. "Here is a born pugilist champion if I ever saw one. Go show Mamma, tiger."

"I take it you're well pleased?" Kerry smiled.

As Braden was about to reply except Garrett had responded to his mother's voice with a shrieking high-pitched cry that could split eardrums.

"What did I do?" Braden looked at Kerry helplessly.

"You did nothing." A voice came from the doorway. "Your son is just letting you know he is hungry. That is the baby's cry for food."

"Morning Song!" Kerry laughed. "I was so busy before giving birth I didn't welcome you properly and let you know how happy I was to see you and Pa!"

"Braden sent for us, didn't he tell you?"

"No he did not!" Kerry crooked a brow at her husband.

"Wasn't it a nice surprise my love?" Braden answered praying Kerry would be happy with the surprise, now. Braden was holding Garrett rocking him gently trying to soothe the hungry child. "I'll send for a wet nurse."

"Why would you do that?" Morning Song demanded. "My Shining Star will have bounties of milk for her man child." Morning Star crossed the room and took Garrett from his father's arms.



"It isn't done madam, not in society. A wet nurse fulfills those duties." Braden tried to explain.

"Humph!" Morning Song responded. "A strange woman never feeds a new child unless the mother is ill or ..." Morning Song did not complete the sentence, instead she said. "Shining Star is strong and healthy. She has milk to give and bond the spirits of mother and child."

Morning Star marched over to Kerry holding Garrett and boldly untied the laces of Kerry's cotton nightgown. She pulled the gown apart to reveal Kerry's breasts and placed Garrett in Kerry's arm. Two of Morning Song's fingers manipulated the teat and another finger teased the tongue and mouth of the infant. Soon the two were latched together and Garrett fed hungrily on the sweet syrup oozing from Kerry's breast. "Good Medicine!" Morning Song proclaimed. "He is a tiger. We will call him Tiger cub. I will get Grady, he wishes to see his daughter."

After Morning Star left the room, Braden offered. "I will get a wet nurse if you wish."

Kerry looked down on Garrett greedily sucking, "Not on your life, Braden. Not on your life. Garrett is mine, only mine."

CHAPTER 33

Grady walked in on Kerry while she was nursing Garrett. "A fine job you did, baby." He was smiling broadly. "I'm mighty proud of my new grandson, yep a fine job."

"Did you expect any less from me?" Kerry teased.

"You always did things well daughter, always. No, I never doubted you would do a fine job." Grady beamed proudly toward his daughter.

All heads turned and focused at the door when a young voice and footsteps were heard approaching the bedroom door. "Mamma, Mamma! Mrs. McGregor says I have a brother!"

Bennett was breathless. He had run all the way from the garden supply shack where Mrs. McGregor had found him. "Where is my brother?" Bennett questioned as he ran through the door.

Braden scooped him up in his arms before he jumped and bounced the bed. "Hold your horses, Bennett. Calm down a little." Braden ordered affectionately.

Garrett had finished nursing and was sound asleep. Kerry was readjusting her nightgown as Bennett ran in. "Your brother is right here." Kerry told Bennett as she held out the infant cuddled in a soft woolen blanket.

Braden put Bennett gently on the bed near Kerry and the baby.

"He's so small!" Bennett noted cocking his head as he perused the small bundle in his mother's arms.

"He'll grow really fast." Kerry answered quickly. "Remember little ashes, your kitten? Look how much bigger he is now."

"He's red and crinkly." Bennett observed further as he viewed Garrett.

"In a day or two he'll look normal." Braden reassured his son.

"When can we play?" Bennett looked at Kerry asking innocently.

"Soon enough." Kerry replied.

"What's his name?" Bennett asked.

"Garrett." Kerry answered. "Garrett Stuart Wessex."

"Garrett." Bennett carefully repeated staring at the little bundle he touched the little face peeking from the blanket in his Mamma's arms. "I'm your big brother. I'll protect you when you grow up."



The next month was heaven for Kerry. Bennett came in every morning after his ride with his father and stayed until noon to play with his new brother. Braden spent most of his day with Kerry and his new son. Grady, Morning Song, Audrey Astor visited in and out throughout those days of contentment and joy. Celeste and Grant came immediately upon receiving the telegram that their grandson decided to arrive early and stayed with Kerry and Braden. Carlton, Edith and their four children visited, Robert came to pickup Eloise, and Ayden came as well. The only people she didn't see were Dyllis and Glyn or their children.

Garrett was held and rocked by so many people he barely spent time in the cradle. Kerry was fortunate enough to get her son back when it was time for feeding. When Garrett woke up in the middle of the night Braden would pick him up from the cradle and bring him to the bed for Kerry. A week after Kerry had given birth Braden once again started sharing their bed. He would embrace her warmly in his arms and they would sleep peacefully interlocked in their closeness.

"Shush Garrett, Mamma is right here." Braden would say as he gave Kerry their crying hungry son every night and early morning. Braden would even change Garrett's nappies so Kerry wouldn't have to get out of bed on those chilled mornings.

Braden and Bennett enjoyed a brisk ride one early April morning. Braden and Bennett's cheeks were rosy pink from the nipping morning chill. Mrs. Graham had prepared hot chocolate for the riders when they came in.

"Mmmm... Do you smell that Bennett?" Braden asked as he enjoyed the aroma of the hot chocolate.

"It smells real good." Bennett chirped following the fragrance to the kitchen of Mrs. Graham.

Sitting at the table was Grant Wessex sipping some of the delicious hot chocolate. He watched the two thoughtfully as they savored the cups of chocolate Mrs. Graham had poured for Bennett and Braden.

Braden sitting at the table looked up to Mrs. Graham now adding more hot chocolate to his father's cup. "Is Lady Wessex awake yet?"

"Lord no, the poor thing doesn't nearly get enough rest. As you well know your son, Garrett still gets her up in the middle of the night to eat." Mrs. Graham chuckled, "The babe has a bottomless pit for a stomach."

"He's a growing boy." Braden defended his new son.

"Lord how he has grown this past month." Mrs. Graham thought verbally. "Come Master Bennett, let's take some hot chocolate upstairs to your Mamma. Mayhap she is awake now and would like some."

Braden watched as his son, Bennett eagerly followed Mrs. Graham.

"Bennett is certainly enamored of his new brother." Grant mentioned casually as he sipped some more chocolate.



"He adores Garrett. Just yesterday he was telling his Mamma that he would teach Garrett how to string a bow and shoot an arrow." Braden related with a proud grin.

That statement changed Grant's disposition, his tone was now serious. "That brings up the matter of returning to the Colonies."

"Good God, don't let Kerry hear you refer to her country as the Colonies." Braden said feigning fear.

Grant was still serious, "You know son, your Mamma and I could not be happier seeing you so well settled, content, and deliriously happy."

"That I am, Papa, that I am."

"Your Mamma and I are extremely happy that Garrett was born here, in Brenham."

"I guess it was destiny."

"Destiny, fate, it matters naught. What matters is now we, your Mamma and I simply cannot face giving your new family up."

"What do you mean, Papa?"

"Your Mamma and I are asking, no, begging you not to leave England. Stay here with us. You and Kerry bring us so much joy, and I think it would tear us apart to lose you and our grandsons."

"Papa, you know Kerry has her heart set on returning to Geneva. We were just waiting for Garrett to grow and become stronger." Braden squirmed uneasily on the chair and addressed his father, "Morning Song and Grady are already discussing they must return to Geneva for spring round up."

"And Kerry wants to return home with her parents." Grant sighed heavily. "Couldn't Kerry find happiness here with us? We adore her you know."

"Papa, I find even I long to return to Geneva. It is a wonderful place to raise our sons." Braden touched his father's hand and said, "We promised we would visit once every year or two, and you and Mamma can visit the ranch anytime you want."

"Your minds are made up then?"

"You know they are, Papa. Kerry and I will return with the McGillinen's the end of this month."

"You are going to break your Mamma's heart and mine." Grant sighed, "Bennett isn't the only one that adores Garrett."

"Papa, you have six other grandchildren." Braden reminded his father rather unnecessarily. "This is Grady's first blood grandchild."

"Braden, you know very well that your Mamma cannot abide your sister's husband and can barely tolerate Edith and her daughters that are growing up just like her." Grant grinned, "Your Mamma loves Kerry. And Kerry's influence of happiness on you and Bennett wants us to hang on with all our might."

"Is it Mamma that has problems with the in laws, or you?"

"Touché son. You know I have always thought your siblings did poorly in mate selection, but you and Kerry I love deeply and approve."

GENEVA'S HOPE



"You will always have our love, Papa."

"But not your countenance." Grant countered.

"Not all the time."

Their attention was drawn to Kerry as she walked into the kitchen carrying Garrett in one arm and Bennett hanging on looping his fingers through Kerry's free hand.

Braden promptly declared, "there are my boys! Come to Papa."

Bennett ran to his father's knee and Kerry carefully handed Garrett to Braden's open arms.

Garrett gurgled playfully and a milk bubble began to form over his mouth. As Braden held him high and gently shook Garrett over his head, little Garrett squealed in delight and kicked his arms and legs.

Kerry sat on a chair by the white linen covered oak table in the morning breakfast room. Bennett went immediately to her lap and sat upon it, "Mamma, when are we going back to Eye of Hawk and Little Bear?"

Kerry kissed the little boy's dark wavy hair, "We leave for Geneva the end of this month."

A strong sigh was heard from Grant Wessex. "Are you quite sure Garrett is old enough to travel?" Grant petitioned hopefully. "The North Atlantic is really cold this time of year. It would be a very rough crossing."

"I promise to keep him warmly bundled, father Wessex." Kerry chuckled. "He's already two months old and a healthy two months old."

Grant stood up and pushed in the kitchen chair, he slowly bent over the back of the chair resting straight arms upon it and spoke gently, his voice quivering with a pleading, "Kerry, don't leave us. Stay with us. Keep Garrett and Bennett here. I'll offer you anything you want. Name it, it's yours."

Braden watched his wife carefully unsure of her response to his father's plea. Braden knew Kerry would return to Geneva with her family, nothing would stop that but how would she react?

Kerry's hand brushed the whitened knuckles of her father in law pressing on the back of the chair and her hand lingered to gently squeeze one of them, "Father Wessex, I love my home, Geneva. I want my son to be raised as I was, open and free. I want him to love nature and treasure its simplicity and humility. Don't you see?"

Grant sighed, "Unfortunately I do see and understand. I am even aware that Bennett did not come to life until you showed him the world through your eyes. It's just that.."

"I know, you needn't say it. We love you just as much and leaving you will cause us to miss a piece of ourselves, but the whole of what we are about must return to Geneva."

"There is only one thing for Celeste and I then." Grant remarked determinedly.

"What?" Braden questioned.

"We will go back with you. Celeste and I will live half a year there and half a year here. Carlton manages the family business quite well. I think

that the family business has become his entire life." Grant rose straight from the chair. "If there is any emergency we can be contacted by wire."

"Do you think Mamma would agree to this half a year household?" Braden asked curiously.

"I know she would. Your Mamma had become very attached to those breeches she wore in Geneva." Grant chuckled. "I would also buy land there and build her a castle equal to the castle of Geneva. It is something that I have wished to do for sometime."

Kerry smiled, "castle?"

"It may be logs, but Geneva's ranch house is indeed a castle." Grant laughed heartily, "and you my little one will be a prince of the manor." Grant picked up his new grandson with pride and joy as he spoke to him.

Garrett gurgled and milk bubbles again surrounded the deep pink outlines of his lips.

Bennett tugged at his grandfather's trousers, "and am I a prince?"

"Indeed you are my prince, my lord." Grant smiled at his grandson Bennett. "Come, let us find your Grandmamma and tell her of our future voyage."

Kerry and Braden watched as the Wessex men left the kitchen. It was with an 'Oomph that Kerry squealed when Braden's arm snaked around her waist and pulled her down to sit on his lap. Braden picked up Kerry's hair with one hand and his lips found the nape of her neck and began nibbling with his teeth and his hot tongue slashed across Kerry's neck occasionally causing gooseflesh.

"You know what this leads to, husband." Kerry reprimanded sensually as she responded to the fires Braden was kindling in her body.

"I know exactly where this leads, wife." Braden responded huskily. "This man has been kept starving far too long. The healing time is over and we have privacy offered to us for several hours."

A hand invaded Kerry's gown and playfully kneaded a soft milky breast. "Husband, let us retire to our chamber." Kerry replied breathlessly. "I am in want of ravishing."

"Oh my love, I am in need of your nourishment." Braden's voice was heated and demanding. Braden's lips found Kerry's and they succored their needs momentarily with deep lathing tongue duels. "God, I've missed you. Your warmth, your wetness, your wantonness."

"Your strength, your hardened projectile, your warm sticky seed."

Braden groaned and the two of them quickly slipped up the back stairs to their room before they were missed and Garrett would need attention.

Several hours later Braden and Kerry returned to the parlor of the Brenham manor. Walking hand in hand into the empty room they walked to the large French doors that were opened. There they watched the two sets of grandparents doting on the two grandsons in the warm sunlight. Grady and Grant were both on the grass playing and rolling with Bennett. Celeste was



holding Garrett and Morning Song clucking and humming an Indian Sosoni' lullaby.

Framed in the hard frame of her husband's body and with his arms firmly wrapped around her like a belted velvet wrapper, Kerry mused, "Braden, we are so fortunate and we have so much happiness I can barely believe it is ours."

"Ours forever my love." Hugging Kerry even more tightly Braden whispered in her ear, "I shall fill your belly with my children at every opportunity and our happiness will continually be multiplied."

"You are so lustful!" Kerry teased.

"You are too tasty." Braden countered.

"How many sons do you want?"

"As many as you will give me, and an equal amount of daughters as well."

Kerry turned and looked up into her husband's eyes, they were twinkling mischievously. "I think sire, that you shall tire out this maiden."

"I hope too, every night!" Braden chuckled. "You will keep me young and virile, temptress."

Celeste noticed the two and beckoned them out to the carved stone patio.

Garrett had been sleeping as he was rocked in his grandmother's arms but responded immediately to the voice of his mother and a loud and demanding wail was heard.

Kerry scooped Garrett up in her arms and retreated to her chambers to feed her hungry son.

Braden joined in the melee on the grass with Bennett and his two grandfathers. They were all pretending to be generals in a battle of royal houses.

Everyone was aware of the life that surrounded Brenham Manor and the expanding Wessex family. All the family, guests, and servants thrived on the energy this new happiness brought.

Countering the noise and vigor of happiness enjoyed by the occupation of Brenham Manor by the Wessex family was a heavy sadness that hung over the manor when the wagons and carriages were packed and readied for the trip to London and the return home of the Wessex and McGillinen family to Geneva.

CHAPTER 34

Braden waited in the their hotel room bed while Kerry tucked Bennett in his room and bed for the night. The London hotel suites were lavish and after Kerry had tucked Bennett in and heard his prayers went to the luxurious privy of the hotel suites for her toilette. Braden Wessex spared no expense for the comfort of his family.

While he waited for Kerry, Braden leaned over to the right side of the double bed to look in the rocking cradle at his sleeping son, Garrett. Such an angel that face is so innocent, so beautiful. *I have two boys. How can a man be so lucky?* His musings were disturbed when Kerry walked into the bedroom, her slippers softly making the swishing sounds from the movement of her feet.

"What?" Kerry whispered as he quickly turned on the bed to his left side and those eyes of his twinkled mischievously.

Braden lifted the down quilt and patted the bed. He wore a devilish grin.

Kerry untied her red velvet robe seductively allowing it to fall off her shoulders and drop to the floor revealing a clinging pink silk negligee.

Braden made a growling sound upon the sight and Kerry slipped into the spot of the bed her husband had previously indicated. Braden was on top of Kerry instantly. The only thing separating their hot flesh was the cool fabric of silk that seemed to suddenly become very warm. A hot bulge of manhood pressed on to the valley between her hips. Kerry pulled Braden's head down to her mouth and her tongue traced the outline of his lips.

"You want me husband." Kerry murmured seductively.

"Oh yes, I want you wife." Braden's hands in caressing motion slowly lifted her silk negligee up to her breasts. "I want to taste and feed on the honey from breasts that nourish my son."

Kerry arched as one hand cupped her breast and his hot mouth took in her breast and sucked greedily. The other hand slipped between her thighs and gently massaged the nub between the bushy patch. Kerry felt her response flow warmly from her and drench her husband's fingers.



Braden groaned and he shifted his body to place his hips between hers and positioned himself for the entry in Kerry's inviting wet warmth. Easily he glided in and penetrated deeply to sheath himself completely. He balanced on his elbows holding his head above his wife watching her respond to his lovemaking.

"You're purring." Braden quipped as he repeatedly withdrew and penetrated deeply into her loins.

"You are a master lion tamer." Kerry whispered in a husky voice. Kerry was feeling deep heated passion and physical pleasure that could only be enjoyed by such love as they shared.

"Ah, my kitten, my dear sweet kitten." Braden breathed erratically. His body became more rigid and his thrusts deeper, more frequent and more demandingly urgent. Braden felt Kerry shiver beneath him and a low growl emitted from her lips.

"Oh God, I love you." Kerry moaned and dug her nails into Braden's back as her body became rigid and her heartbeat raced.

Braden responded in his own climax and his seed spilled into his wife's welcoming haven. He sank down on her and breathed raggedly, moist skin now touching moist skin. "You are heaven on earth my love." Braden said as his forehead rested on the creamy curve of Kerry's neck. "And my kitten has very sharp claws."

"My scratches serve you right for that whip you use mercilessly in me."

"All the better to tame you, my love." Braden's mouth now covered Kerry's and they shared their tongues in delightful dueling play.

"You think this will ever tame me?"

"Oh yes, my love."

"Just how is that?" Kerry taunted.

"A lioness such as you is quite docile when she is carrying my baby." Braden rolled over and pulled Kerry on top of him, "and I intend to make you docile many times in our lifetime."

Kerry laughed and entwined her fingers around the soft hairs of Braden's chest. "When I have results such as Garrett Stuart Wessex, I must confess I enjoy being domesticated."

A tiny voice was heard from in the next instant. Garrett was waking for his late night snack.

"I hope you left enough milk for your son." Kerry teased as she watched the muscular and quite naked frame of her husband walk to the cradle and reach down to pick up his son.

"He's wet. I have to change him," was the unexpected reply Kerry received. She watched lovingly as Braden walked to the trunk and opened it retrieving a triangular piece of cloth, fragrant powder, and new soaker. The masculine silhouette of strength gently changed the infant and when finished the cooing baby wrapped in a soft woolen blanket was presented to his mother.



Garrett locked on to the teat immediately and suckled greedily. Garrett's little hand kneaded against the softness of his mother's breast.

"There is nothing more beautiful for my eyes to behold than this sight." Braden whispered into Kerry's ear. Braden relaxed against Kerry's back and with a protective arm covering her, Braden stroked the soft dark hair of his son as the little babe fed.

The first night in the London hotel was filled with the joy and serenity the family shared. They were waiting for passage on the Britannic, a luxury iron ship from the Liverpool White Star Line. It would be nearly two weeks they would spend in London waiting for their luxury liner. An outing had been planned for the entire family on a family friend's estate just outside London next week at the Bancroft Estate. The entire Wessex family would be there and Dyllis was buzzing about it continually.

Several of the days of waiting for the Bancroft picnic was spent shopping with Morning Song, Celeste, and Auntie Audrey, Kerry had bought another steamer trunk worth of gifts for her Sosoni' family and brothers waiting for her in Geneva.

The day before the picnic Kerry had returned to the London hotel with Celeste. "We'll have such a good time at the Bancroft's Manor." Celeste bubbled excitedly about spending time at the picnic with her dear friend Margaret Bancroft. "Don't forget to bring that wonderful cheese and wine you bought for the outing," Celeste reminded Kerry as she parted for her suites in the hotel.

Kerry walked into her hotel room to see Bennett gently rocking the cradle of his little brother. Braden was bent over the desk reviewing papers that were brought to him regarding his investments and properties.

Braden looked up as he heard Bennett say, "Shh, Mamma. Garrett is sleeping." Braden chuckled as he watched Bennett put a straight finger over his two lips for the Shh." His chuckle brought a fierce look of disdain from Bennett.

Quietly Braden got up from his papers and walked to hug his wife and assist her and the bellboy with her numerous packages. "What's all of this?" Braden asked quietly.

"Wine, cheese and bread for tomorrow's picnic at the Bancroft's manor. I also purchased some gifts for all the children attending" Kerry replied turning over the packages to her husband and pecking him on the cheek. Kerry then walked over to the cradle and knelt by her sons. "Ben, Grandmamma Celeste is going over to your Auntie Dyllis this afternoon and wants you to go there to play with her and your cousins, Corliss and Malden."

Bennett's face turned pale and he stopped rocking the cradle. With a dart Bennett ran from the suite's parlor into his room screaming, "No, No. I know we can't keep bad people away, but we can stay away. You promised me!"



Bennett's shout of terror woke Garrett and the baby responded to the fear in his brother's voice by screaming loudly as if in pain.

Braden had turned at the sound of Bennett's voice and watched as Kerry picked up Garrett and rose to walk to Bennett's room. "No love let me find out what this is. You take care of Garrett and soothe him."

Braden was surprised when he went to Bennett's door and found it was locked. "Bennett, open up. It's Papa."

"You promised!" The strained voice yelled from behind the door. "You promised!"

"We have to talk son, we have to talk about my promise." Braden said to the door. "Open up Bennett. Let's talk!"

"You won't make me go to Auntie Dyllis's house?"

"If you don't want to go, you don't have to."

Braden heard the lock open. Slowly he put his hand on the knob and walked in to the tear stained and pale face of his son.

"What is it Bennett? Why are you so upset?" Braden gently asked as he knelt beside his son and wiped the tears from his cheeks.

"You won't make me go there?"

"Bennett, if you don't want to go there you won't." Braden vowed and drew his son into his gentle arms. "Will you tell me why you don't want to go? Were Malden or Corliss mean to you during Christmas Holiday?"

Sniffing Bennett wiped his nose on his sleeve, "You said we can't stop bad people but we can stay away, and you promised I would never get hurt again."

"What bad person is at your Auntie's house?" Braden was concerned over Bennett's fearful behavior and wanted to get to the bottom of it.

Neither of them noticed Kerry holding Garrett standing by the doorframe almost hidden by the half open door.

"You promised you'd believe anything I told you, remember?" Bennett reminded his father.

"I remember son. I also remember telling you that you should never be afraid to talk to me."

"It's Corliss and Malden, they... well, they..."

"What is it son?"

"They told me that Madam Hudson is their nanny now and they're afraid of her like I was."

Braden went pale. He had no words just rage that Mildred Hudson was still rendering cruelty in his family. He wanted to shout that he should have had her imprisoned in New York but he did not want to terrify his son anymore. Gently Braden said, "Bennett it is a good thing you told me, why did you wait so long?"

"Corliss and Malden said their Papa really likes her, really likes her and he wouldn't believe them, Madam Hudson told them later should would really hurt them if they ever said anything to anyone again. I'm afraid for them Papa!"



"It was her I saw talking to Glyn at the hotel when we arrived. And that is why their nanny didn't accompany the children to our home for Christmas, because Mildred didn't want us to know." Kerry spoke quietly directly to her husband. Walking to Bennett she took his shaking hand, "You never have to go anywhere near Madam Hudson ever again. We'll take Garrett in his pram for a walk in the park. Would you like that?"

Bennett nodded his head rapidly and a little smile crept over the tears.

"I'll take care of this problem." Braden said as he rose from Bennett's side and placed a sweet kiss on his wife's cheek.

"Don't let anyone know!" Bennett pleaded. "Corliss and Malden, she'll hurt them."

"No one will know son, but we will be rid of the bad lady. I promise." Braden walked swiftly to the parlor and grabbed his waistcoat and hat. He bounded down the hotel stairs and in moments had hailed a cab for a trip to his sister's house.

Braden was greeted at the door by the family's butler, Judson. "Good Day, Viscount Wessex. I am sorry but Lady Dyllis is not about today. Your Mamma told Madam to meet her at the hotel restaurant for lunch before they would come here.."

"Is Lord Perkins available?" Braden asked unsure how he would get by the butler to locate Mildred Hudson.

"He is in residence but asked not to be disturbed." Judson cleared his throat uneasily. "He desired to nap."

"How long ago?"

"About twenty minutes, sir."

"Good, he's not asleep yet and my business is urgent." Braden walked in and gave Judson his coat and hat. "Don't bother announcing me, I know the way."

A throaty uncomfortable protest was heard from Judson as Braden took the stairs to the Master Bedroom three at a time.

Without knocking Braden opened the door and began speaking, "Glyn there is something of great importance I need to discuss with..." Braden's voice dropped off as he saw his brother in law half dressed in bed with Mildred Hudson half dressed. It was obvious he had interrupted a tryst.

Glyn bellowed angrily, "Get out Wessex. There is nothing that important."

"You're right, nothing that important until **now**." Braden remembered his promise to Bennett. This allowed him to handle the matter with out revealing where any information regarding Mildred Hudson's employ came about. "I'm not leaving this room so you two might as well get dressed, and the discussion will occur here out of the ears of the servants."

"You're a bastard Wessex." Glyn growled as he sat on the bed and began putting his trousers on.

Mildred Hudson just glared at Braden until he reached for her dress at the foot of the bed and tossed it too her, "please get dressed Madam."



Mildred snarled, "are you jealous, Wessex, that Glyn has captured my interest?"

"Madam, disgust is more the word. You would throw yourself to a one legged brigand if it would bring you closer to the title and wealth you desire." Braden snipped back.

"How dare you break into my privacy?" Glyn roared as he stuffed his shirt in, "and insult me and Madam Hudson."

"I had no idea I would find this," Braden waved his hand out to the two of them. "But since I have there are matters to settle."

"Don't be a self righteous ass with me, Wessex. Your brother Carlton has a mistress installed in a London townhouse that he visits every evening he's in town and when not, makes occasional business trips to stay there. Not withstanding you that would marry a colonial Yank! Enjoying husbandry rights without benefit of marriage. I can count you know."

"His mistress is not a servant in his house, and we both know that Edith has locked him from her bed for some time now." Braden replied deceptively casually. Braden was not at all content about the once happy and now unhappy marriage his brother lived in. "As for my Kerry ours is loved shared even before marriage, not lust. Kerry is also more titled than you are even for a Colonial, but that is not the point here is it?"

"You really are pompous aren't you?" Mildred Hudson sneered as she fastened the buttons of her dress. "You fired me to get that trollop as your governess, and got her into your bed. You obviously had fun with her, but she fooled you didn't she and she got with child?"

"Mildred told me everything about your little trollop." Glyn sneered. "Dyllis would be quite interested in that little tidbit, wouldn't she? Sleeping with Bennett's governess?" Glyn was grasping for straws to protect himself from his wife finding out about sharing his bed with Mildred Hudson.

"Ah Hah, let's get down to the real business at hand, shall we Glyn?" Braden smiled wickedly. "Nothing has changed in the months I have been in the Colonies, you are still living off the rents of the Wessex estates and the stipend the Wessex family lawyers dole out to you each month, are you not?"

Glyn grunted and Mildred could not hide the surprise from her face.

"Yes Mildred. Our good Lord Glyn comes with title but absolutely no funds except for the properties of his wife, my sister." Braden licked his lips and went in for the kill, "Madam, your lover is penniless and lives quite well as the husband of my sister. He can offer you no more than what the Wessex family lawyers allow him."

"Is that true?" Mildred snarled at her lover, "you own nothing, all those promises, nothing?"

Glyn just grunted again. Perhaps it was a good thing Braden had come in and found them, he started to see the real Mildred Hudson.

"I think you should tell my dear brother in law the real reason your position was terminated from my employ." Braden looked at Mildred Hudson with venom clearly shooting from his eyes. "Indeed Kerry had something to do

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with it, but it was not lust was it Mildred. You were the one lusting for me, my title, my wealth and I would not have you. Tell Glyn the real reason for your termination."

Mildred Hudson fled the room pushing her way past Braden leaving Glyn and Braden alone.



CHAPTER 35

Glyn rose from the bed after he was fully dressed. The silence was deadly between the men. Glyn wasn't sure what Braden had in mind and he certainly did not want Dyllis to find out about his tryst. He had a title but nowhere to go other than a younger brother that was in more dire straits than he. Glyn walked to an overstuffed chair and sat down. Slowly he eyed the young handsome brother in law that now stood with a leg up on the chest placed before the tall four-poster bed. "Just what do you want Wessex?"

"Are you in fear that I would tell my sister of this little affair?" Braden asked as he lips curved suspiciously towards a smile.

"Would you? Should I tell my wife that Kerry is your governess and that you bedded her but got her pregnant and had to marry her?" Glyn shot back

Braden pulled up to an erect foreboding stance with his brow furrowing in anger, "That is not the way of it between Kerry and me. Nor, would I hurt my sister with this little escapade of yours, but we do need to discuss Mildred Hudson."

"What do you mean?" Glyn snarled like a bear backed up in its den.

"Oh calm down, Glyn." Braden ordered losing patience with Glyn Perkins. "The truth of Mildred Hudson is all I wish to discuss with you now that I have discovered her in your bed. How did she get there?"

"Why is that any of your business?" Glyn asked a bit more calmed.

"Because my dear brother in law, Mildred Hudson was dismissed from my employ because she was beating my son with a strop."

"What?" Glyn questioned and he immediately paled. "We hired Mildred Hudson as our children's governess when she returned from the Colonies."

"Surely your hearing hasn't been impaired?"

Glyn choked quietly, "Malden tried to tell me she was cruel and had hurt Corliss."



"You didn't believe him." Braden stated with experienced understanding.

"Good God man, he's a boy and Mildred said he must be imagining such things." Glyn looked to Braden, "she was so passionate with me I just couldn't imagine her hurting a child."

"I suggest you view your children in their baths tonight and see for yourself the truth to Malden's words. Mildred Hudson is a cruel and vicious woman that indeed hides the truth very well. I speak from personal experience."

"She hid it from you?"

"Well enough. It was Kerry that discovered the truth. Bennett confided in her and when Mildred thought I was gone, she revealed her real self to Kerry and threatened Kerry." Braden winced at the remembered words and later sight of his son's battered body. "I overheard it all. Then later I saw the evidence on my son's body. She had threatened and beaten him to silence. Just as I am sure she threatened and beaten your children, my niece and nephew."

"My God, what have I done?"

"You said you hired her when she returned from the Colonies, just what did she tell you and Dyllis?"

"Dyllis met her at the exchange, our governess left to be with her ailing widowed brother and we had to seek employment of another governess. Dyllis recognized Mildred as your old governess and asked her why she was there at the exchange and seeking employment when you had taken her with you."

"What did she say?"

"To Dyllis she said that she couldn't tolerate the Colonies and you were nice enough to send her back and she was currently with out an income so she needed a temporary position until you returned." Glyn laid back his head and continued, "later when we, well you know..."

Braden nodded his head in understanding.

"Well then she told me that she quit and left the Colonies because you had met this young pretty whore and fired her to make the Colonial whore your governess so you could bed her."

"Kerry was Bennett's governess for about a month, as a favor to help me after I fired Mildred Hudson." Braden then did smile, "If the truth be known, I was in love with Kerry the first time I laid eyes on her and I did indeed use every male wile to get her as my wife. Marriage was my intent all along with Kerry."

"So you did discharge Mildred Hudson!"

"Indeed I did and when I saw what brutality had befallen my son I wanted to imprison her."

"You didn't send her back to England?"

"I did. I paid her passage in first class, but she left the Colonies with a Bobby escort. You see, she tried to kill Kerry in the hotel lobby. Mildred Hudson is quite capable of violence and unstable."



"No wonder she refused to go to Brenham with us for Christmas. She told me that you would be upset with her taking employment from us and not choosing to return to you."

"That is hardly the case Glyn. She knew her employ would not be long with you if I knew she was working for you and had charge over my niece and nephew. She would have been exposed. What did you promise her once she invaded your bed?"

"Nothing a man doesn't normally promise in the throes of lust."

"Marriage, title, house?" Braden chuckled. "You see I wouldn't know what is normal in an affair since I have never engaged in one and have no need or desire too."

"Bully for you. Your sister happens to be an ice princess in bed and I am lucky I was able to get two children." Glyn glowered.

"You do love your children, don't you?" Braden questioned his brother in law cautiously.

"If nothing else Wessex, I do love my children and would never purposely allow them any harm."

"I believe you, Glyn. I won't say a word of this but you must see to it that Mildred Hudson leaves your employ immediately and send her back to her sister in Oxford. No other child need endure her brutality." Braden sighed. "I don't even know why she chose to be a governess. She hates children."

"I'll dismiss her immediately with a month's tenure." Glyn said as he rose from the chair, "and although this has been quite embarrassing, thank you Wessex."

"A month's tenure is not enough for Mildred Hudson, and I want to make sure she returns to her sister never to come back to London. Write a check to her in the amount of 5,000 pounds for services rendered. I'll cover it with my bank, and then purchase a ticket on the next train for Oxford. I'll pay for that also."

"I'll do as you say." Glyn looked at Braden sheepishly, "you won't tell Dyllis?"

"No." Braden responded and then turned to walk out of the bedroom.

Mildred was waiting downstairs in the parlor and saw Braden Wessex leave. When she saw Glyn walk down the stairs she went to him immediately. "What did he say to you?"

Glyn pulled her into the library and closed the doors, "Braden told me enough madam. We will discuss your tenure Madam."

Fifteen minutes later Mildred Hudson left the library red faced and went to her room to begin packing. In her hand she clutched a check for 5,000 pounds.

Braden had already been to his bank in that time and transferred the funds to Glyn's account.

Braden was sitting on the settee in the parlor enjoying a relaxing brandy when Bennett, Kerry and Garrett came in from their jaunt in the park.



Bennett looked expectantly at his father, "Papa?"

"It's all handled Bennett. Corliss and Malden have nothing more to fear, and neither do you."

Bennett rushed to his father and wrapped his arms around Braden so tightly 'oomph' escaped Braden's lips.

Back at the home of Dyllis and Glyn, Malden came out from his private talk with his father a happy child again. Neither Malden nor his sister Corliss had to fear the dreaded Mildred Hudson. His father assured him that the truth had come out and his Papa believed him. Malden told his Papa everything and Glyn with tears in his eyes apologized to his son.

Dyllis was told that Mildred Hudson was called to be with her sister and would be leaving shortly. That was the agreement Glyn had made with Mildred Hudson to protect both their secrets.

Inside Mildred Hudson's misaligned psyche, the hatred for Kerry Wessex flamed stronger. When Glyn had first told her of the arrival of his new sister in law at the hotel she couldn't believe it, but when she watched them from behind the lobby columns she saw Kerry walking with Braden and with child she was furious. That was her dream, to be Mrs. Wessex and bear him a child to keep him, his title, his money, and his properties. Mildred had never been informed of the wealth and titles of Braden's wife, not until Braden's private conversation with Glyn, and her envy was poisonous. *Kerry, Kerry, all because of Kerry!* And now her plans for Glyn and his title were gone also. It was all because of Kerry. Mildred began to plot her revenge. She was scheduled to take the train to her sister's tomorrow evening and that would give her time to wreak havoc with the ever so perfect and wonderful Kerry Wessex.

The carriages arrived at the Bancroft Manor at the same time and the picnic planned for the entire family was lavish. The Bancroft's and their entire family were present as were the Astor family, since they were friends also. Tables were lined up filled with meats, vegetables and breads. Wine, champagne, mead, tea, lemon ice and milk were abundant. Cakes, biscuits and ice cream for the children covered more of the children's clothes and faces than the tables. The children played their games and a quartet played soothing music for the women that weren't huddled together discussing the current ton gossip with Dyllis or the discussions of motherhood with an elated and pregnant Eloise Astor.

Garrett had been laid down on a soft woolen picnic blanket under cool shade trees aside from the picnic area for a nap and Bennett had stopped playing to rest next to his little brother.

"Are you sleepy Ben?" Kerry asked as Bennett lay quietly next to his baby brother.

"A little." A wide yawn came from Bennett's mouth, "but I think I'll get some lemon ice first, I'm thirsty."

Kerry volunteered to get some for Bennett and he promised to watch his little brother for his Mamma.



Kerry had just taken the lemon ice glass for Bennett when she heard him scream. Turning to look for Bennett she saw a figure pulling Bennett's arm dragging him along and in the other arm was Garrett. The glass dropped and shattered into pieces on the ground.

No one noticed Bennett's scream in the middle of the din the other children were making as they played except Kerry, but they did notice Kerry running hysterically towards the wooded area beyond the picnic and screaming Braden's name. Kerry had lifted her skirts boldly exposing not only ankle but also calf as she ran to the woods.

Carlton noticed her running figure and commented, "Braden just what has gotten into your wife exposing those lovely limbs for all to enjoy." Then Carlton's face turned serious, "What the bloody hell!"

Braden turned to see what Carlton saw. A figure was pulling his son Bennett, and baby Garrett in her arms running to a carriage beyond the hill. Carlton started running towards the road and Braden hearing Kerry screaming started running to her as he saw her fall in a heap.

"Nooooo!" Kerry kept screaming and tried to get up, but her ankle was badly twisted. Kerry fell again in wracking pain. Suddenly she was in Braden's arms. Grant, Grady, Henry and Robert were pursuing the figure with Carlton shouting at the figure to stop.

"Braden, its Mildred Hudson, she took Garrett!" Kerry was out of breath, her lungs burned with pain and her ankle had already started to swell. "She took Bennett!"

The women surrounded Kerry and helped her up. A manservant came to lift Kerry and take her in the house. Braden flew toward his carriage and literally pulled the footman off shouting orders to overtake the carriage.

Carlton and Robert jumped on the carriage and eased themselves in. Grady, Grant, and Henry were all winded and walked back to the house. Soon these men were in carriages and on their way to the local police to report the child's abduction.

To the consternation of Braden, his carriage was heavier and could not catch up to the lighter one that held his two children. The chase led back to London and the lighter carriage was soon lost in the streets. Braden only had one thought, *Mildred Hudson, where would she go?* Glyn had told him at the picnic that the train ticket had been bought and Mildred would be on her way to her sister's home this evening.

"Go to the train station." Braden ordered the driver.

When Carlton and Robert got out Braden told them he would find the train to Oxford and asked them to find the nearest bobby and get him. "I am sure she will take the Oxford train with Bennett and Garrett."

As Robert and Carlton went to find a bobby they heard Braden cursing himself, "Damned I am for seeing to that vicious animal's comfort. I paid for a first class ticket. She requires a first class prison cell."



Checking with the ticket agent he found the train to Oxford just in time to see his Bennett being dragged by Mildred Hudson to the train. "Bennett, run!" Braden shouted.

Bennett turned to see his father and twisted away from Mildred's hold on his jacket. Bennett ran to his father as Braden began to run to his son.

Mildred reached to grab Bennett back and gave a brief chase until she spotted Braden running toward her. Quickly she pulled a small derringer from her reticule and stood silently waiting for Braden.

Scooping up Bennett in his arms Braden kissed him gently on the cheek and walked towards Mildred Hudson.

"Give me back my son." Braden said gently but forcefully.

"Your son?" Mildred laughed maniacally. "This is the son of the trollop Kerry. The babe that should have been ours, Braden Wessex."

Braden set Bennett down and reached for Garrett.

"Papa!" Bennett screamed as he saw the derringer put to the head of his baby brother.

Garrett had been crying fitfully since he was taken in the arms of this strange woman and his cries were becoming more hoarse as the infant was becoming exhausted. This new tense feeling surrounding him made him cry more and twist and turn in fearful contortions.

"I should kill this brat just to shut it up. It would be a favor to you Braden Wessex." Mildred said wickedly. "Now little Bennett, come to me quietly or you won't have a little brother any longer."

Braden grabbed Bennett as he obediently started walking toward Mildred Hudson. "No Bennett. Stay here with Papa."

"You really don't care if I kill this little brat do you?" Mildred sneered maliciously.

"What do you want from me Madam?" Braden asked calmly and reasonably.

"What I have always wanted from you." Mildred scowled fearfully. "I wanted to be your wife, the lady of your lands, your title, mother of your child."

"You hate children, why did you want to have mine?" Braden asked pushing Bennett behind him.

"I knew you loved your son, and I hated him for that." Mildred sneered. "I knew you would want more children and if I gave you one I would be your wife. You are such an honorable man."

"I never felt anything towards you Mildred." Braden stepped closer.

"It wouldn't have mattered if you had just once succumbed to a man's need. I could have had your child and been your wife, but then that trollop came along and spoiled everything."

"Mildred let me have my son." Braden pleaded.

Neither Braden nor Mildred noticed the four men approaching her from behind.



CHAPTER 36

Kerry was put into one of the Bancroft manor's finest guestrooms against her protests and Lady Bancroft sent for a doctor immediately.

"I've got to get my sons, she has them." Kerry screamed over and over again hysterically.

Morning Song, Audrey, Eloise, Edith, Dyllis, Celeste and Lady Bancroft were all at her side trying to calm her.

"Grady, Grant, and Henry have gone to the constable." Celeste tried reassuring her terrified daughter in law. "Braden, Carlton and Robert Astor are in pursuit. Everything will be fine, you'll see."

Nothing seemed to assuage Kerry as the women restrained her. Kerry wanted to be up and on a horse she wanted her six-shooter and wanted to be after Mildred Hudson.

Kerry swore to kill the woman if one hair of her sons were harmed. Morning Song left and returned with some chamomile tea and forced Kerry to drink it.

After several hours Morning Song had calmed Kerry somewhat and the doctor entered.

Doctor Weldon wrapped Kerry's ankle and announced it was only a sprain and fortunately not a break. Cool cloths were applied for the swelling and after being apprised of the situation before he entered the guest room he already had laudanum prepared to give to Kerry to calm and help keep her restrained.

"Thank you doctor, the ankle feels much better." Kerry told Doctor Weldon and immediately tried to get out of bed.

"What are you trying to do young lady?" Doctor Weldon asked Kerry as he grabbed her wrists and carefully pushed her back into the bed.

"Doctor Weldon, I must get up and go after my sons. A terrible and cruel woman has taken them!" Kerry said rationally trying to disengage the Doctor's hands from her wrists.



"I am aware of the circumstances Lady Wessex and you are going no where on that ankle, not for sometime."

"The hell I'm not!" Kerry shouted and suddenly with a surge of energy was on her feet and fell to the floor in the pain of suddenly standing on the floor.

Celeste and Morning Song rushed toward Kerry recognizing the stubborn streak Kerry could have.

Dr. Weldon patiently picked Kerry up from the floor and with the assistance of Celeste and Morning Song sat her comfortably on the bed. "If you insist on this nonsense I would advise you to take this powder to ease the pain."

"Thank you, doctor." Kerry said trustingly believing that it was pain powders."

After Kerry sipped the milk containing the powders Doctor Weldon spoke quietly, "we'll wait a few moments until the powder has time to work."

Shortly after Kerry's eyelids became very heavy and she fought the sleep the laudanum powder had provided as it began to work.

This time the thank you doctor came from Celeste and Morning Song.

Dr. Weldon acknowledged their gratitude and left several powders just in case with Celeste Wessex. He left the Bancroft manor to another call that came while he was attending Kerry.

As dusk settled, Kerry was cradled in Morning Song's arms listening to the soft Sostoni' lullaby she had heard as a child and slipped into oblivion.

Morning Song laid Kerry's head gently against the pillows and wiped her stepdaughter's tears away.

Grady came from behind and wrapped his strong arms around his wife.

"Any word?" Morning Song asked hopefully.

"Not yet." Grady responded. "The constable went to London with Lord Bancroft and Grant Wessex. Even Glyn Perkins went with them to identify Mildred Hudson."

"I wish Tracker was here." Morning Song sighed.

"So do I my love, so do I." Grady said wishfully. "Instead we must wait. Lady Bancroft has informed me the children are being prepared for bed and then we will all wait."

"Wait, there is nothing else to do." Morning Song murmured in melancholy just as frightened for Kerry as her grandson, Garrett.

"I'll stay with Kerry for awhile. Go downstairs with the rest and eat dinner." Grady ordered his wife.

As Morning Song left the room Grady sat on the edge of his daughter's bed and took her hand. "I swear to you on your mother Ashley's grave, your sons will be brought back to you or I will spend my fortune hunting Mildred Hudson down and seeing her pay with her life. You have my oath."

Downstairs Dyllis was beside herself. "I can't believe Mildred Hudson is capable of abducting children. To think she was governess to my darlings."



"Oh do quit your pacing, Dyllis!" Celeste ordered her daughter. "None of us suspected and we are all upset as it is without you're driving us to distraction."

Morning Song entered the dining room for her meal and was surrounded by the women.

"How is Kerry?" Eloise asked worriedly. "Is she calmed yet?"

"The doctor's laudanum has taken affect. Kerry is resting. Grady is keeping watch over her." Morning Song answered clasping her niece's hand.

Edith looked to Morning Song's questioning eyes. "No madam, we have not heard a word from our husbands as yet."

The housemaid came in the room to inform the ladies that all their children were settled for the night and would soon be sound asleep. Two Bancroft maids were staying with the children. Although the children were unaware of what was going on, the intensity in the air was unsettling for them and they were not planning on spending the evening at Bancroft Manor. There were no doubts in their minds that something horrible had happened and Bennett and Garrett were not amongst them.

To every one's surprise Celeste stood up and announced, "I think we all need a good stiff drink to settle our nerves. Melissa, please go to the master's library and procure for us a few of his brandy bottles." Then looking to Lady Bancroft her good friend, "if that is all right with you, Margaret?"

"It was on the tip of my tongue to suggest and you just grabbed the words from my mouth." Margaret Bancroft smiled and turned to look at her maid Melissa. "Please fetch us several bottles of my husband's brandy. I have a feeling this is going to be a very long night."

Morning Song walked to Eloise and stroked her protruding belly, "Man's liqueur is not good for baby, and you need rest more. You should go to bed. We will wake you upon any news."

"I am rather tired I must admit. If you would excuse me, may I obtain a room?" Eloise asked graciously. Audrey Astor was very proud of her daughter in law. After all the concerns, Robert had chosen well.

"I'll take you to a guest room my dear." Lady Margaret Bancroft answered as she rose from her chair and led Eloise Astor to a guest room. A maid quickly assisted Eloise out of her dress and into a borrowed nightgown.

Celeste poured a snifter of brandy for every woman and an extra one for her friend Margaret Bancroft. Then she sat down and said after a sip, "all we need now is a good cigar and perhaps we could understand the calming effects these addictions seem to have on our men."

That brought a round of laughter from the women and a "Salute!"

"If you want Mildred, I will come with you. Just give me my son back." Braden offered trying and saying anything to get Garrett away from this insane woman.



"You think I'm mad! I give you this brat back and I have no protection and no way to get even with your trollop." Mildred scorned menacingly. "Be a good boy and come here to me, Bennett."

"You can't have Bennett, Mildred!" Braden said dangerously with threat.

"Which of your brat's is more important? Laura's brat or Kerry's brat?" Mildred sneered. "I trade one for the other maybe?" Carelessly Mildred took the hand with the derringer and pointed it at Bennett hiding behind his father.

At that moment Carlton's large powerful hand grabbed her wrist from behind so painfully tight the derringer dropped to the ground.

Braden lunged for Garrett as Mildred let loose of her hold on the infant and he began to fall from her arms.

In Braden's strong and familiar arms and with his soothing voice Garrett began to calm. Completely exhausted from his crying the long lashes closed and to Braden's terror his infant son became motionless. "My God, I must find a doctor."

Mildred's arm was pulled painfully behind her back and a London bobby led her away with a constable to the nearest local London prison cell. Robert Astor accompanied the police escort and told his cousin that he would meet him back at the Bancroft Manor after the charges were filed against Mildred Hudson. This time there would be no leniency for Mildred Hudson; she would be tried for her crimes.

Carlton stepped to his brother's side and picked Bennett up in his strong arms. "What is it, what's the matter Braden?" Carlton asked noticing the distress on Braden's face.

"Garrett, he's so still. He is too still. I must find a doctor."

Carlton looked around and saw a man standing waiting for a train arrival with the typical medicinal bag a doctor usually carried. Swiftly he walked to the man, "Are you a physician kind sir?"

The man was startled but acknowledged he indeed was a physician.

"We need your help. My brother's child was just abducted and we have apprehended the brigand, but the child seems to be at risk." Carlton babbled in one breath.

"Please help, doctor. It's my baby brother!" Bennett beseeched innocently showing his own fear.

"It is my duty." The doctor answered thinking about the train he would miss and wondering where he would obtain funds for another ticket to return to Wales. His practice was a poor one since nearly all of his patients could not pay for care. The doctor however left his fate to destiny and walked to Braden holding his son. Pulling out a tube he listened to the baby's heart. Gently the doctor held the tiny wrist and timed the heartbeats.

"What's wrong with my son?" Braden asked tearfully choking back his emotions as best he could. He could not bring Kerry back a dead baby, his son dead? *God no don't let that happen.*



"The child is sleeping soundly. In my opinion it is exhaustion. I have seen it before in colic babies they cry into exhaustion." The doctor smiled, "you have nothing to fear but when was the last time the child was nourished?"

"It has been about six hours since his last feeding." Braden guessed as darkness began to fall around him.

"I suggest you give him to his mother quickly, the infant would be quite hungry when it wakes."

"Garrett was abducted sir. His mother is at least three hours hard ride from here and we can't ride in the dark." Braden cuddled Garrett closer. "What shall I do?"

Carlton answered him knowing his brother was still under stress and not quite capable of thinking clearly, "We'll take Garrett back to the hotel and they will find a wet nurse."

Braden looked up at his brother, "Thank you Carlton."

"No problem brother. I just helped to spare myself the anguish of your going through another tragedy." Carlton winked. Never before had he felt this close to his brother.

"Doctor, thank you. How can I repay you for your assistance?" Braden asked.

"Since I have missed my train," he pointed towards the train that was well on its way past the station, "perhaps you can share your hotel room with me until I can obtain passage on the next."

Carlton stepped forward, "My London townhouse is currently empty as my family is with Braden's at Bancroft Manor. Please take the key and ask my servants to assist you." Carlton then pulled out several thousand pound notes from his wallet and handed them to the doctor. "With our thanks, this should cover a cab to my home and a new rail ticket for you."

"It would help if I knew your names?" The doctor questioned aghast at the amount of pounds in his hand. It would take him several years of working to even see such an amount and he could not help but wonder who these people were that were so generous and offering their own home. "For the servants that wonder how a humble physician obtained your keys?"

Carlton chuckled, "Lord Carlton Wessex and my brother Viscount Braden Wessex at your service sir, and you are?"

"I am Doctor Winston Hills." The man bowed slightly.

"Where were you off too?" Carlton asked.

"I was on my way back to the wastelands of Wales. I had failed in obtaining funds for a hospital I wished to build in a small poor village there."

"Then please do stay awhile in my home. We will return later and my family I am sure will supply complete funding for your hospital." Carlton offered as he scrawled a note of introduction to his staff and his address on a small piece of paper from his wallet.

Winston Hills couldn't believe his good fortune. In turning down his rail ride to Wales and helping strangers when asked, he would soon have the



needed hospital. "And that was the last of my money spent on the ticket." He mumbled quietly.

Carlton and Braden just smiled as the man walked away to the nearest cabby. Braden and Carlton again holding Bennett followed to obtain their own cab.

After a long silence with the exception of the horses' hooves pounding on the cobblestone streets Bennett suddenly spoke, "Papa, I'm awfully hungry!"

Carlton put his arm around the boy, "So am I Bennett."

The cab stopped in front of the hotel and Carlton took Bennett from the cab and carried him into the hotel. A quick conversation with the man at the lobby desk and within minutes a kitchen maid appeared to wet nurse Garrett who was just starting to stir. He was wet and hungry. Braden led the kitchen maid up to his suites and while she prepared to feed the infant, Braden changed his nappy and soaker. Handing Garrett to the wet nurse in his master bedroom he left them alone and closed the door.

Carlton and Bennett appeared moments after Braden poured a glass of brandy to drink. Behind the pair an army of waiters appeared bringing in delectable foodstuffs.

Braden looked at his brother in question and Carlton laughed, "Bennett said he was hungry and so am I."

"Carlton, I have never felt so close to you. I can't thank you enough for all you've done." Braden admitted wiping a small tear from the corner of his eye.

"Self protection brother, self protection." Carlton laughed more. "It seems that for once I was able to help out my little brother. I kind of like that."

"I do too." Braden smiled.

"Braden, I have always been envious of you it seems. You were the athlete and I was the student. Papa always seemed proud of you and your achievements. I always felt I never measured up to Papa's expectations. You married Laura, the most beautiful woman I had ever known. You had a son first and I only had daughters for the longest time. Then our family grieved for you and my marriage fell apart more. You remarry to a woman even more beautiful, kind and gracious than Laura and she gives you a son. Envious I have always been of you, Braden."

"Carlton, I didn't know you felt this way." Braden responded with surprise.

"It doesn't matter anymore. You see I would not trade my dull security for the hell you have had to live through these past years and from what I understand recent months. Ayden told me about Kerry's abduction." Carlton smiled, "No indeed brother, I would prefer my dull life to yours any day."

"I can only hope to follow in your footsteps big brother and hope my life becomes just as dull." Braden chuckled and lifted his snifter of brandy to Carlton. "To us and dull lives."



Carlton raised his glass, "Salute! You should be so lucky. With that knockout bride you have, two boys to raise, and I imagine you will create more. Red Indians for in laws, I doubt you will ever come near to my quiet life of a gentleman."

"I can but try, big brother, I can but try."

The three men sat down to eat the wonderful dinner and were just finishing when the kitchen maid came from the master suite and closed the door gently.

"'E was an 'andful milord. Didn't take to me breast right away. 'E must ave known it weren't 'Is mum's, but 'E finally realized "'E was 'ungry and lord did the babe eat." The maid looked longingly at the banquet before her. "Do your lordship want me to feed the babe in the morning?"

"Yes please madam." Braden answered observing her look at the food.

"Aw lord, I ain't no madam or lady, I'm only Kate Drew, sir."

"Well Kate, would you like to eat with us?" Braden offered.

"No sir, it wouldn't be right to sit with lords and all, besides I 'ave me own babe and two 'ungry children to feed."

"Kate, please take a plate or two of food for your family and return to us in the morning." Braden told her and started stacking a plate high with samples of all the food set before them. "It really is too much for all of us to eat, Kate. Please help yourself." After the plates were filled to Braden's satisfaction and wrapped in a large linen, he took out a thousand pound note and gave it to Kate. "With my thanks and see you in the morning."

"Your lordship, this is too much. I've never even seen this much money in me life."

"My son is worth a lot more to me Kate, even my entire fortune. I won't take no for an answer. Come back in the morning and I'll give you another thousand pound note."

"Aye milord, I'll be here bright and early I will." Kate looked to Braden. "'E's sleepin on the bed now. You ought to be checkin 'im later. I put pillows around the babe so 'E wouldn't fall off."

"Before the sun rises, please." Braden requested. "And thank you again Kate."

"Aye milord." Kate responded and hurried off to her family. The cook had given her the rest of the night off at the request of the hotel's manager. Carlton had paid the manager a thousand pound note to cover the wages of Kate Drew when the manager told Carlton his kitchen maid would be able to assist.

CHAPTER 37

Braden and Carlton tucked Bennett in for the night when knocking was heard on the door. Carlton opened it and was surprised to see his father, Grant Wessex, Henry Astor, James Bancroft, and even Glyn Perkins.

Grant walked in and the others followed. "We went to your townhouse and found a certain Dr. Winston Hills in residence. He told us that you went back to the hotel with the boy and infant to find a wet nurse."

"He also said the boy and infant were well." Henry Astor added. "Is that true, Carlton?"

"It is. Braden is finishing hearing Bennett's prayers with him and Garrett is still sleeping soundly after being fed an hour ago." Carlton answered. "And as far as I know Mildred Hudson is safely in custody with the London constable."

"We went to the London prison first. We met Robert there with the constable. Mildred will be tried for abduction and incarcerated for it. I am certain." Grant Wessex replied. "Once we were certain of her proper incarceration we went to your home expecting to find you there."

"It would be easier to find a wet nurse at the hotel, Papa." Carlton answered defensively.

"Of course you are right, son. You always had the soundest and clear head on your shoulders." Grant praised. "How are my grandsons?"

Carlton beamed, it was the first time in his life he could remember receiving a compliment from his father. "As I said Bennett is being put to bed by his Papa, and Garrett is sleeping soundly on the bed in the master suite."

Grant went immediately to the master suite to check on the infant grandson himself.

James Bancroft, Glyn Perkins, and Henry Astor sat down on comfortable chairs as Braden came out from the bedroom indicating quietly that Bennett had just fallen asleep. Braden poured each gentleman a glass of brandy and sat down comfortably himself.



"It has been a trying day and night for you, Braden." Henry Astor observed.

Braden nodded his head, "yes, but the boys are safe. I only need to get them back to their Mamma in the morning."

"It took three footmen and all the women to keep your wife down and stop her from riding off with a gun to shoot Mildred Hudson." James Bancroft chuckled. "That is quite a vixen you married, Braden."

"Don't I know it." Braden laughed nervously, "but she is the most magnificent vixen in all of England and the Americas."

Grant Wessex came out of the bedroom carrying his infant grandson. "Garrett seems no worse for wear. He is sleeping soundly."

"A kitchen maid named Kate fed him. He'll be quite content until she returns to feed him in the morning." Braden told his father placing his brandy snifter down and reached to take Garrett.

Grant walked by ignoring his son's reach for the baby in his arms, "I'm going to hold Garrett for awhile, Braden. I want to reassure myself that everything is going to be fine with *my* grandson."

Braden sank back into the chair.

"Tell us what happened when you came upon Mildred?" Glyn asked.

Braden and Carlton related the entire story and soon the men were a bit tipsy with the exception of Grant Wessex who would not imbibe and instead held on tightly to his sleeping grandson.

The men fell asleep in their chairs and Grant took Garrett and slept in the master canopied bed of the hotel.

An hour before dawn the men were wakened to a gentle tapping at the hotel door. Braden woke up to find Kate there ready to give Garrett his breakfast. Braden led her to the bedroom rousing Grant to release his bundle and give over to Kate.

The main room reeking of cigar and brandy odors caused Braden to send for cleaning maids and breakfast. Braden wanted to leave early in the morning to return to Bancroft manor. The men quickly took turns bathing, shaving and eating breakfast that was sent for. Maids rapidly aired out the rooms and set it to rights before Bennett stirred from his bed. Henry and Carlton took charge of Bennett so Braden could see to paying Kate. Glyn and James were the first to get ready and obtained carriages for the ride back to Bancroft Manor.

The entourage of men was on their return to Bancroft Manor shortly after sunrise and arrived just before nine. The horses and carriages were ridden hard to get to Bancroft Manor post haste. The men were certain their wives would be flighty with worry. They were not prepared for what met them when the butler led them to the parlor. The room smelled of brandy and the women were passed out on the chairs. Four bottles of brandy had been emptied. "A bit tipsy my lords." The butler chuckled and left the men to deal with their wives.



Braden did not see the parlor of women nor hear the groans and complaints of headaches their husbands did. Braden carried Garrett and took Bennett's hand as he was led to the guest room his wife had been placed. As he entered the room he found Grady McGillinen still asleep on a chair next to Kerry's bed.

Grady stirred when he heard the door open and saw Bennett and Garrett. His smile was broader than the Grand Canyon. Grady watched silently as Braden walked to Kerry's bed and gently whispered her name, "Kerry, Kerry wake up. I have a hungry babe that needs his Mamma and Bennett needs you."

Bennett climbed on the bed and sat cross-legged taking his little hand and brushing Kerry's hair off her cheek. "Mamma, Mamma, " he called quietly.

"The doctor gave her a heavy dose of Laudanum, Braden. It will take awhile for the effects to wear off. Be patient." Grady informed.

Just then Kerry started responding to Bennett's gentle calls and touch. She fluttered her eyes and although blurry saw Bennett. Slowly she started to wake and the events of yesterday came flooding in all at once. "Ben, my baby, you're here!" Kerry squealed and reached for him pulling him close and hugging him dearly. Then she saw Braden and he was holding her Garrett. "Braden, my love, you brought them back to me unharmed." Kerry shook her head violently from the effects of Laudanum. "They are unharmed aren't they?"

"Yes, my love. Bennett can tell you he is well and Garrett, well in a short while he will be needing your services for lunch, madam." Braden chuckled.

Kerry opened her arms for her baby and Braden gently laid him there. The exchange caused Garrett to open his eyes and he heard the soft whispers of his mother. He cooed and twisted frantically searching for the soft warm breast of his mother that offered him nourishment and security.

Grady quietly left the room and closed the door allowing the young family their privacy. He went searching for Morning Song and found her in the dining room applying a cool cloth to her head. All the women had cool cloths on their heads with the exception of Eloise who was serenely eating breakfast with her husband Robert.

Grant Wessex sitting next to his wife and helping her eat looked to Grady, "It seems our ladies imbibed too much and became quite foxed."

"Ouch, shush." Celeste warned Grant. "Don't talk so loudly."

All the men chuckled and aided their wives with tender loving care.

It wasn't until later in the afternoon that the families left with their children to return to their respective homes.

Carlton was beside himself with delight to find his stuffy wife suffering from a hangover after getting quite foxed with the rest of the ladies. He openly discussed the Doctor that was waiting in their home and how he wanted to aide in the foundation of a hospital for him.

Edith Wessex came alive, hospitals had always been one of her favorite charities and this was the first time Carlton ever discussed anything of



a business nature with her. A spark was kindled that day between the two of them and shortly after Carlton dismissed his mistress. The Carlton and Edith Wessex marriage was renewed. Ten months after that day, Edith gave birth to another son for Carlton and would be named Carlton Grant Wessex the second.

A short time after the abduction the McGillinen family and Wessex family were on board the luxury liner Britannica and returning to New York harbor. This time the sea voyage was not unbearable and Kerry managed to keep from getting too seasick.

The Astor's barristers met them at the port. The Astor counsel informed them that Mildred Hudson was convicted of abduction and was serving time in a woman's sanitarium where she was receiving medical help for her insanity.

The trip to Nevada seemed to go quickly for the McGillinen's and Wessex family. Henry and Audrey Astor had watched them leave the train station on their way to Nevada using three private parlor cars. One parlor car was used for Braden, Kerry, Garrett and Bennett. One parlor car was for the use of Celeste and Grant Wessex, and one parlor car for Grady and Morning Song. Ayden had remained in England to handle the McGillinen family estates and pursue the elusive Paige Amherst; Kerry offered her father that information. Grady laughed, another vision of the shaman was coming true. Ayden would wed of another country and live there. Soon he would have a new daughter in law and more grandchildren that he would be sure to visit.

Ryan and Dwayne doted on their brand new nephew greeted the returning family warmly. Ryan told Kerry privately that he planned to leave Geneva for his own ranch that would soon be finished and he had fallen in love with a half 'breed Sosoni' woman he had met in Bright Moon's camp a few months ago. Her name was Oak Twig. Ryan fondly called her Twiggy. Kerry was beside herself for joy. Not only was she the happiest woman in the world content with her two sons, husband and home, two of her three older brothers would soon be wed and have a family of their own that would give Garrett and Bennett plenty of cousins to play with.

Grant and Braden Wessex set about building new strong stone homes upon the lands of Geneva for their families. Celeste and Morning Song became fast friends and often split their days between their husbands and the Sosoni' Indian camp of Eye of Hawk.

Two months after their return from England Kerry took her husband away from the house plans and went riding with him. She reined her horse and looked to Braden, "We're going to have another child, Braden."

Braden grinned broadly. "How long?"

"I think he will be born in winter since this time you seeded me in spring."

PAYTON LEE



"You won't give me a daughter will you?"

"Not yet Braden Wessex, not yet."

"And what do we name this little one?"

"His name will be Jared Grady Wessex."

"I like it, but if it does turn out to be a she, her name will be Christina Ashley Wessex."

"Conceded. Are you happy?"

"With all my heart. We are Geneva my love, and our children will be Geneva's Hope." Braden sat back on Socks and looked with love to his wife, "I understand it now, my love."



EPILOGUE

1893

Braden cuddled his three-year-old daughter, Christina Ashley Wessex in his arms as she snuggled in his warm woolen topcoat to absorb his warmth and protection from the early morning chill of New York harbor. Next to Braden, Kerry stood wiping the tears from her eyes as she watched Bennett board the luxury liner that would take him to Cambridge University. In Kerry's arms was the newest Wessex, four-month-old Ashley Anne Wessex.

Christina would not be the only girl in this family; she had a baby sister to the delight of Braden at her birth.

Kerry had finally relented to giving Braden his daughters after giving birth to Jared Grady Wessex now aged fourteen, Anthony Grant Wessex aged ten, and Braden Morgan Wessex the Second aged seven. Garrett, age fifteen, stood along side his brothers watching their oldest brother leave for his education abroad.

Refraining from showing the unmanly emotion of crying, Garrett held back his tears. Garrett adored his older brother and would miss him desperately. Garrett and Bennett were close to their other brothers and little sisters, but Bennett and he had a special bond.

Little Rain, the Wessex governess, was reproving the younger two boys, Anthony and Braden, for improper behavior when Bennett stood on the deck and waved to his brothers next to his Grandmamma Celeste and Grandpapa Grant Wessex. On Bennett's other side was their cousin, Carlton Wessex the Second, who had spent the summer at Geneva with his grandparents.

"He'll be home for the holiday, my love." Braden reassured his misty eyed wife.

"I know my darling, but we'll all miss him until then." Kerry sobbed softly.

Garrett and Jared returned the waves to their big brother sadly. "Good luck big brother, take your care until we see each other again."

The ship pulled away from the dock and slowly met the sunrise in the distance. The Wessex family watched until they could no longer see the ship.

Returning home to Geneva without Bennett until holiday, the family returned to their routine including the interaction and playing of nieces, nephews, cousins, family and friends. Geneva Ranch had grown in houses and family on her lands.