
Stone's Revenge

Sylvia Hubbard



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by Sylvia Hubbard

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This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual person, living or dead, business establishments, events, or locales, is entirely coincidental.

Stone's Revenge

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Synopsis:

There is a copycat killer in Davenport and William is the number one suspect. William is the son of a serial killer; Therefore William's nemesis, prosecuting attorney Ramsey McPherson feels the apple does not fall too far from the tree. Ramsey makes it his number one mission to put William behind bars.

William vows revenge against Ramsey with every intention to hurt what Ramsey holds dear in his life and that is the prosecuting attorney's daughter Abigail, who thinks someone is trying to frame William. Abigail and William fall in love and they keep their love affair a secret from Ramsey.

Yet with a murder so gruesome happening on a night when Abigail and William are together, Abigail is forced to choose between not telling where William was or revealing to her father that she is truly in love with William.

Through revenge, pain, and murder, a love so strong cannot be stopped. Together, William and Abigail discover the truth, keep promises to one another, forgive the past, and live united for the future.

Author Bio

Sylvia Hubbard, of Detroit, Michigan USA, has wanted to become a writer since the age of 12. Her mother, who told her to stop telling lies and just write them down on paper, encouraged her. *Stone's Revenge* is Ms. Hubbard's second published novel. Her first novel, *Dreams of Reality* was published in 2000.

As a divorced mother of three, Ms. Hubbard currently works at the Detroit Police Department. She is Coordinator of Motown Writer's Network (an on-line writing community that markets, promotes, and networks writers in Michigan) and is a Writer-in-Residence for the InsideOut Program, which places writers in schools to teach students about creative writing. Near the end of 2004, Ms. Hubbard will join with two other local groups to create The Essence of Motown Writers Conference. In her leisure time, Ms. Hubbard conducts lectures on marketing and publishing on the Internet.

The author, coordinator, and lecturer has been featured on Up Close Today television talk show with Denise Strong, Radio Talk shows on 90.9 and 88FM, Detroit Writer's Guild bi-monthly newsletter and D.U.P.A.S.S. newsletter. Various Internet sites have featured Mrs. Hubbard: Essence E-Zine, Romance In Color, Metro Times Around the Town, Timbooktu, and Pipe Dreams.

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DEDICATION

First and foremost, my Father in Heaven; for giving me the power to put pen to paper.

Secondly, I'd like to thank my mother, who has given me encouragement all my life and has known that I was a writer even before I knew it.

Also, thanks to all the rest of my family and friends for their wonderful support of my writing endeavors.

A special thanks goes to Ms. McHenry, who fell in love with William even though everyone else couldn't stand him. "Thanks for feeling me, gurl."

Chapter 1

Quietly opening the front door, thirteen-year-old William Yared Castro-Chavez Stone hurried upstairs. Before opening the door he made sure, by looking through the small pane glass in the door, that his stepmother, Lydia Stone wasn't near the doorway. As he came to each corner in the house, he checked to see if she was there.

Finally arriving in his room, he took off his sweaty black jogging suit and the rest of the clothing that he had been wearing for the last two days. William had been at the YMCA for two days because he had felt ashamed of letting his step-cousin, Enid Stone find him touching himself. He often disappeared from home for days at a time and Edward Stone, his uncle and guardian, never questioned his whereabouts. Edward allowed his nephew a great degree of independence because Edward did not care; as long as William never disgraced the family or caused any trouble in public.

Edward Stone was a widely known man in Davenport, Ohio. This year he was running for city council chairman and was believed to have the election in the bag with only six months until the November election.

Yet. Edward Stone was not the all-American man with the all-American family like everyone in the city of Davenport believed he was. Edward Stone had enough bones in his closet to fill a graveyard the size of New York. Most of the bones represented his past life; then came his mysterious second wife, and third was his stepdaughter, Enid, from a previous marriage. William's father was an integral part of Edward's past.

In New York, about thirty years ago, when Edward was ten, the police found Edward hanging upside down in a closet. He had three fractured ribs and internal bleeding in his stomach from a beating his father, Yared Chavez had administered to him because Edward refused to tell his father where his 15-year old brother, Javier Chavez, had run away to. The police had also found the remains of a woman's body parts, amputated and nailed to the closet walls around Edward. It was later discovered that the woman was Edward and Javier's mother.

Animal blood was found in the basement; along with human and animal body parts inside the freezer. Yared Chavez was arrested and brought up on over twenty charges. He died in an asylum four years ago, as far as William knew.

Javier was never found and Edward, after years of state psychiatric treatment, was given to a foster family in the state of New York. He ran away after a year; before he turned seventeen, and received his GED at Albany Community College. He then went on to earn an associate degree in Criminal Justice/Political Science. He met his first wife, Cleo Allen, at Albany.

Cleo already had a two-year-old daughter named Enid. They married and Edward adopted her child as his own. Three years after their marriage, for no reason at all, Edward and family moved to Davenport, Ohio, a small town about the size of Tampa, Florida. At the time of the move, the city had a serial killer on the loose for the past two years. It was not a big thing in the beginning and it took little notice in the papers. Bodies were being found in dark alleys, abandoned buildings and junked cars, with the stomach missing, the neck slashed, and bones broken in places that would not have exactly killed the person. Yet had the victim been alive during the time the bones were being broken it would have been tortuously painful.

As the years passed, the police picked up clues. Most often, the victim tended to be male most times, with children, had a minor criminal record (usually suspected of child abuse) and was generally middle class in income. There was no evidence of the killer on the victims' bodies and there were never any witnesses. The killer moved like a thief in the night; never leaving anyone the wiser as to whom he or she was.

Ramsey McPherson, Chief of Police at the time of the killings, was obsessed about the case. He swore to every citizen he would put this killer behind bars and he meant it.

One year ago, the killer had been caught in the act of gutting out the stomach of his victim, a top city prosecuting attorney, who had been accused of abusing his five and eight year old daughters. It was too late for the lawyer, but not too late to put the killer behind bars, just as McPherson had promised.

William was the most in shock when the newspapers announced who the killer was....

It was Javier Chavez, William's father.

* * *

One year after Javier had run away, he ended up in jail at the age of sixteen for stealing cars in Los Angeles. Giving the false identity of a homeless teen, he received a six months sentence and when he got out he remained on probation for two years. During those years he stayed out of trouble with the law and even graduated from school on time. As soon as he graduated, he was off probation and got out of California; going from one end of the country to the other doing odd jobs under his new name, but his specialty was automobiles. He had a knack for fixing cars and was extremely good at it. He finally ended up in Cincinnati, Ohio a thirty-mile drive from Davenport, working at a fix-it shop where he met Marie Perez and unfortunately got her pregnant.

By this time the murders had started, with one occurring every six months. When William (named after Yared's father) was born, they increased more and more. While her son was in school, Marie worked as a waitress in a deli shop to bring in extra income for the family.

Marie got tired of the beatings and abuse Javier's explosive temper evoked and left Javier and William, to marry a Cincinnati policeman, Harrison Douglas. His father raised William the first seven years of his life, and every once in a while he would see his mother. Marie got full custody of William when she saw the cuts on her son's thighs and back. To William, he went from bad to worse. At least when his father knocked him around he apologized and bought William an ice cream or two to make up;; even though William knew it would not be the last beating. Harrison would knock him around all the time and not say a thing, except for William to get up and take the beating "like a man." Harrison was so good at abuse that he did not leave the brutal marks Javier was prone to do. William was never one to bruise easily, like his mother, who received abuse from Harrison as well.

Javier had started the killings in California -- usually neighborhood pets and other animals. He killed his first human victim in a Cincinnati Park scuffle. Javier lost his temper and broke the man's hands, arms, and shoulders; then gutted him out with a twelve-inch double edge blade that he always kept strapped to his ankle.

He became obsessive with this form of killing, but then he became specific with his victims and decided to make Davenport the designated town where all the bodies were found.

William had never known his father was like this. He knew him to be a brutal man, but not the type who would actually kill. Javier had hate in him and often William remembered his father snarling, "No stomach. Hurt a child and you have no guts, but I got to teach you a lesson, boy. A lesson you will never forget."

William's lessons were what nightmares were made of and in the darkness of the closet where his father often locked him in, William swore to become big and strong so he could beat the crap out of his father along with any other person who tried to hurt him. He promised himself that he would never let anyone ride roughshod over him without getting some type of revenge.

He had lived his next four years with his mother until Harrison knocked William across the shoulder with the butt of his gun and William got up and punched Harrison in the groin.

William had always been strong for his age. Even now in the eighth grade he towered at five feet eight inches with a broadness about him that made him seem huge. With his constant working out at the YMCA to relieve a lot of stress and untamed anger inside of him, he looked like a full-grown man with a boyish face.

All William knew was that he had busted a vein in Harrison's groin and Harrison had made Marie choose between her son and her husband. She chose Harrison and sent William to live with his Uncle Edward in Davenport, since his father was serving a lifetime sentence in a high security psychiatric prison.

At the time William moved in, Edward had been married to his second wife, Lydia for a year. Enid's mother had died in an "accidental" fall down the steps and had broken her neck. Lydia was rather absent-minded and quiet. What was strange about her was that if William asked Lydia what her past was like, she couldn't tell him. Edward explained it as a handicap in her brain, but William believed it was much more than just that.

Lydia would sometimes, all of a sudden, speak a strange Spanish when she became angry. Once when William disappeared for a longer period than usual, Lydia told him off-handedly she was worried not because he had been gone a long time, but because she missed her dead brother, yet Edward assured William that Lydia had no other family.

Standing in the middle of his room, William stared in the mirror cutting his dark gold speckled hazel brown eyes to observe the hardness of his body still present from his strenuous workout. His short crew cut, jet-black hair went extremely close to his scalp - almost looking bald - so he looked cold and distant. His father, who William was an exact image of, had always worn his hair shoulder length and wild. Edward would not let William grow his hair past his ears so that William could not get the cold and ruthless look his father always had. With his strong definite facial trait, William knew without the long hair, he looked gruff and fearsome like a Spanish gringo looking for trouble. Whenever he had a bad day and his light hazel brown eyes lit up to a golden-bronze, people gave him wide berth wherever he went with that look in his eyes.

"So you finally decided to come home," Enid sang at the doorway of his room. "I saw you hiding from me at school today."

"I wasn't hiding," he angrily denied. "I was avoiding you."

She sauntered in the room leaving the door cracked. She switched her teenage hips in a sort of sexy manner, clearly trying to excite him. Disgusted, William was not attracted to Enid no matter that she was voted by every guy at school the best looking cheerleader and female in the school with her deep brown,

wheat-colored hair contrasting against her light caramel skin. Both her parents were African-American and Enid looked like her mother; very skinny and very well endowed features. No doubt Enid was beautiful, not a seductive beauty like William's mother, who William found attractive; but Enid had comeliness that was just nice to look at.

“Billy, I've been waiting a whole year to get my hands on you and now I've got you.” She pressed her five foot seven lean body against his. “You'll do as I say or I'll tell Lydia and Edward what I saw you doing to yourself.”

His eye twitched at the annoying name she called him. Even though “Billy” was a nickname for “William,” he couldn't stand the name “Billy” and didn't like it when anyone called him that name. “You wouldn't,” he challenged her scowling darkly.

Enid stepped away, losing her courage from the way his bright cat-like yellow eyes menacingly glowered at her; but then she became brave again, her lust winning out over common survival sense. “I most definitely would,” she haughtily challenged back.

His eyes narrowed in hatred and just to show how much he really feared her threat, he snatched up his towel and walked into the bathroom slamming the door behind him. William got into the shower without giving Enid Stone another thought, until he felt something warm pressing against the back of his body.

He bolted out of the shower bellowing. “What the hell's wrong with you?!”

“What's wrong with YOU?” She stood naked in the shower.

William turned off the water, grabbed his towel and wrapped it around his lean waist. “If you think I would even consider doing something so gross with my own cousin you're sick as hell, Enid.”

“I'm your step-cousin, Billy,” she snipped smartly. “You Stone men aren't only crazy, but you're also stupid. We aren't even blood related.” She stepped out of the shower and stood brazenly in front of him in her birthday suit.

William didn't especially like being referred to as crazy and he especially didn't like being compared to any other male member in his family. “Even if we weren't related this way,” he growled. “I still wouldn't have sex with you. Now get the hell out of here, while you can still walk on your own, Enid.”

She ignored his threat. “Liar,” she said, pressing her body against his and putting her arms around his neck. They stood almost the same height, so it was easy for her to reach him, but he was stronger and he was getting sick to his stomach at the thought that she was forcing herself onto him. “I know you want me, Billy.”

“I want you to get the hell out of my face!” He pushed her away, stormed in his room and took out a clean jogging suit set along with some underwear, but just as he was about to slip into his boxers, she snatched the towel from around his waist. He turned to her to see the wicked smile on her face and then her body again pressed against his. This time her arms locked around his waist.

“Your mind says no, but your body says yes, Billy. I can feel your hardness pressing against my stomach. You can't deny that it would feel good.” She dared and looked up in those cold golden eyes. “Make love to me, Billy,” she whispered seductively.

His eye twitched again in anger. He tried to unlock her hands without hurting her. It wasn't that he cared, but he didn't want any bruises on her or her screaming, because Lydia had good eyes and good hearing. “Enid, you've fucking lost it.” He tried to back out, but he was too close to the bed. The back of his knee hit the bed and William lost his balance. He fell on his back on the bed, while she fell on top of him.

His manhood was right near her woman's softness and he could feel the wetness and instantly stiffened - all over.

“I knew you wanted me, Billy. You were just trying to deny what you felt.” She moved her fingers through his hair. “I'll teach you everything, so you won't have to use your hands anymore.” Her other hand reached down and grasped his thick swollen man root. He had not built up a body control as much as he had mind control. He had learned at an early age that if he blocked his mind to pain, he wouldn't feel it, but Enid's fondling him was nothing painful at all.

Now if only he could have body control, he wished, as his teenager's body began to respond to Enid's ministrations. He forced his hands to stay at his side and did not move, too scared of what he might do.

He closed his mind, partially listening to her seducing words of how she had promised herself to have William, but had to settle with Edward instead; until she had caught William in his “act.”

His mind was like a tape recorder and he went to rewind. “...to have Edward until I finally caught you in your act.” She smiled triumphantly as if she had won a gold medal.

“You put up with Edward?” he forced out.

Enid's smile widened, thinking she had his acquiesce. “He's old, but he's a good teacher. Or is it that all Stone men are like this, just naturally?” She sat up and fully straddled his hips. “We can be together William and no one will ever know.” She started to guide him into her.

He snatched both her wrists, held them high in the air and rolled her on her back with him on top. His actions were so quick she shrieked in fear. “I'm not like any of the Stone men, Enid. I'm not even a

Stone man. My last name is Chavez and Edward made me change it because everyone knows my father and grandfather.”

“You're hurting me, Billy,” she snapped.

“You wouldn't know pain if it slapped you in the face, Enid, and I want to show you real hurt; but Lydia wouldn't forgive me if I hurt you. But if you ever...EVER come near me again, I'll hurt you so bad you'll be in trauma for the rest of your fucking life.” He painfully tightened his grip on her wrists. “Do you understand, slut?!”

At first she seemed confused, but then she glanced past his broad shoulder to the doorway and suddenly she began to writhe and cry hysterically. “Please stop! Don't, please. You're hurting me!”

“William!” Lydia screamed at the doorway.

He turned in shock, but didn't release Enid.

“Get off of her!” Lydia ordered, coming into the room.

William obeyed immediately and wrapped his towel around himself. Lydia stood two inches over him; yet even if she did not, she represented the only real authority and respect for a person in his life. . Her usual earthly light brown skin suffused with red in her upset over what she was seeing. Her unique olive green eyes flashed in anger, which went along beautifully with her pony-tailed, chestnut hair.

She had a sort of motherly beauty that was unforgettable. Lydia had been like a real mother to William in the short year he had known her and William felt she was the only person, let alone woman, he could really feel close to.

Enid rushed to Lydia, bawling extravagantly loud, “H-he raped me, M-mother.”

William knew whenever Enid called Lydia, “mother,” it was usually in sarcasm or Enid was trying to get her way. Right now it was the latter and to his disbelief, Lydia looked ready to believe Enid. “You aren't going to believe that lying slut!” he boomed

Enid stood behind Lydia, her black eyes slanted with deviousness, but occasionally she let out a whimper for Lydia to hear and William could see this was a losing battle with Enid clutching to Lydia's arm for dear life.

“I suggest you put on your clothes and get out and don't come back until Edward comes home,” Lydia ordered.

“She's lying! She's lying and you're believing her, Lydia!” It took a lot not to curse, since it was his nature, but he never liked getting slapped either and he knew Lydia would if he did curse. He could stand a beating until he went unconscious, but something rubbed him raw when a female slapped him.

“The matter will be solved when Edward comes home. Now get out!” she screamed, as Enid began to wail again.

He stood fists tight, feet apart, fighting for control. He wanted to throttle the living shit out of Enid. He wanted to just knock Lydia out the way and choke the lying breath from Enid’s body, but he respected Lydia too much to do what he felt was right.

Grabbing his clothes, he went in the bathroom; hurriedly dressed and then came out. Enid was not in the room anymore, but Lydia was still there. He got his wallet and book bag, then headed for the door.

“William,” Lydia called out softly in an almost pleading manner.

He stopped, but didn't turn around.

She was calm as she explained, “I don't know whom to believe, but I'm sure Edward will clear the matter up. It's just a couple of hours and you need to cool down.”

William knew Edward would not believe him either -- not after what he had just heard Enid say. He knew he could not come back because Edward would probably use this as an opportunity to put him in a youth home. William always had a feeling Edward was looking for a reason to send him away from the world. Although Edward did not express it out loud, William felt his uncle thought William would turn out like his father.

Going to his closet, he grabbed a large dark green duffel bag and shoved all his clothes (which was not much) and possessions in. “Lydia,” his voice was grave and filled with disappointment. “I respect you. You're the only person I ever did really care about in my whole life.”

“Where are you going?” she seemed a bit paranoid and very worried.

He zipped up the bag and faced her. “Edward's not going to believe me, Lydia and I'm not coming back to take any more abuse from him. I've fully decided that no one is going to hurt me without getting just revenge for it; which I will extract personally, and since I know Edward is the only family you have, then I can't hurt him, because I would be hurting you.” He stepped to her, wanting to hug her, but being affectionate, emotional, and showing his true feelings had always been difficult for him.

She threw her arms around his neck, but his arms never moved from his side. “Good-bye, William. Be careful.” She kissed his cheek. “Don't be a stranger.”

He did not say a word. He only gathered his things and walked out.

Chapter 2

He took Lydia's advice and walked his anger off. Letting his mind travel, he could vividly remember his father's words, "Damn women! They're nothing but a bunch of bitches. You may meet a nice one someday, but deep down, they're bitches." William could only refer to Lydia being one because she threw him out instead of Enid. He continued to walk until he found himself on the other side of town. The neighborhoods were the surrounds of a picturistic Rockwell painting, with trees on every front lawn, a nice car in every driveway and children playing in front of one of the houses near the corner.

William looked at his watch and was surprised to see it was nearing five o'clock in the evening. With it being a May evening, the sun wasn't ready to set yet, but dusk was reluctantly approaching. He was surprised to see children out playing this late, but it wasn't an abundance of them, not even a crowd, only three to be exact. They played beside the house in a yard the size of where a house used to be, but was now used as a play area. In the front was all grass, but nearing the back where the alley was, there were different types of trees. He saw that the property didn't have a gate around it to close it off to others. It was a big orange, brown and white brick house, like most of the houses in Davenport, and it had a wide porch with a patio.

The three children ranged between his age to the youngest of about ten years old based on her small frame. He stood six houses away from the corner house, where they played across the street from him. They were playing monkey in the middle and the smallest one was the monkey; which William thought was quite a disadvantage, seeing that the other two were much older and taller than the small child. He moved a house closer to get a better view of them. Why he was interested in these particular children was beyond him. He wanted to see what was going to happen. His legs slowly moved him closer to hear their voices.

The smallest tried her best to get the ball, but couldn't, and finally became frustrated, stomping her foot in anger and yelling at the top of her lungs, "I QUIT! I don't want to play anymore. Give me my ball, NOW!"

The only boy in the trio, who looked about a year younger than the oldest one that looked thirteen, caught the ball. The oldest girl had just thrown him, and tucked the ball under his right side. "Abigail, you can't just give up when you're losing!"

"I'm tired!" she whined. "I don't want to play anymore, Robby." She dropped to her knees staining her old coveralls with grass, but not caring. She looked so drained and exhausted.

"Abby is a sore loser!" the oldest girl taunted. "Abby is a sore loser!"

Energy seemed to shoot through Abigail like a bolt of lightning. Jumping to her feet she faced the girl as if she were a warrior preparing to attack the enemy. "I am NOT!" she screamed. Turning around to

face her brother, she demanded, "Give me my ball." She charged for the ball, but Robby tossed it to the other girl.

Abigail calmed herself and saw the game they were playing. With a supreme air, she crossed her arms over her chest. "I'm not playing anymore and I'm going to tell Daddy."

"I'm really scared now," the girl saucily feigned. "You wouldn't dare."

"I would too, Angie!" Abigail challenged. "Just like I'm going to tell Daddy you were sucking face with Ethan Crosby."

Robby laughed, but the older girl found nothing funny and hurled the ball at Abigail's chest as hard as she could. It knocked Abigail off her feet and knocked the breath out of her small body. Angie pinned Abigail to the ground with her knee in the little girl's stomach and her arms above her head. Abigail struggled, but it was futile. "You tell anybody about that and I'll rip your eyes out Abigail."

"I'm telling!" Abigail choked out.

Robby pushed the older sister off of Abigail. "Wha'da ya want to do to her Angie, kill her?"

Angie stood up and boxed Robby's ears. "You push me again and I'll beat you up too."

Abigail came to her feet and started for the ball, but Angie saw her intentions and kicked the ball away. "Get the ball, Robby," Angie ordered.

The older ones began a game of keep away from the younger one.

William saw that the older ones were red heads, which were unusual for African-American children, while the youngest had deep coppery-brown hair, with auburn strands that caught in the dimming sunlight, making it an extraordinary color. From the way they spoke to each other, he could see they were all siblings and Abigail was the unfortunate odd ball. Unlike the other two, who were rather frumpy, Abigail was skinny, appearing malnourished, yet William knew this was a before-puberty stage. He seemed drawn to the youngest one, who had her beautiful hair pulled back in a messy ponytail that was mid-back length. Her facial features were strong, unlike the others pudgy and thick features.

She was close to tears now and getting even angrier than before. "I want my ball!" she demanded, stopping the chase of her sister who presently had the ball.

"Abby, you're a sore loser and a tattler. If you tell Daddy, I'll tell Momma you were adopted and she'll give you away, just like all the others. Won't she Robby?"

Robby snickered wickedly, seeing Abigail's terrified expression. "Yep. And they'll take you to an orphanage."

Angie's tone was malicious and vengeful. "They'll rape you and beat you every night, just because you are weird looking and you're a Daddy's girl. Orphanages hate Daddy's girls."

William knew they were giving her a load of bullshit, but he could tell Abigail believed her siblings, because she burst out crying. "Please don't tell. Please don't tell Momma."

William was sickened at the mental abuse the older sibling were putting upon the younger one. He was glad he never had any siblings; but regretfully he had a father who dealt his share of physical abuse. William then had to question, which was worse: physical or mental abuse?

Angie slapped Abigail. "Shut up crybaby! Or I'll really tell Momma."

Abigail stifled her sobs, shuddering every few moments for her efforts. "C-can I have m-my ball now?"

"No, crybaby." Angie tossed the ball to Robby who held it too high for Abigail to reach. The older ones laughed at the efforts of the youngest one.

Abigail, very sick and tired of these games, stopped jumping and kicked Robby in his leg with all of her might. Robby angrily shoved Abigail to the ground and hurled the ball carelessly, just to get it out of his hands. William watched the ball as it sailed high in the sky right towards...him. He caught the ball with ease, holding it with one hand, despite the fact that the bouncing ball was about the size of a basketball. He saw the name: ABIGAIL MCPHERSON written on it in thick black marker. The trio approached him warily as he tucked the ball under his arm in a very possessive manner.

Angie, being the oldest, came forward, giving her brother a "stay back" look. Robby held Abigail back across the street from the man with the ball and both younger siblings watched as their older sister approached the huge stranger, whom they had not noticed standing across the street in black sweat pants and black sweater. As Angie got close, her steps faltered as he noted she recognized his face. He recognized her as well because she went to his school. She most definitely knew he was in the smart class, but a lot of people stayed away from him. William assumed she didn't know his name, but she had probably heard rumors that he was dangerous, by the way of her wary expression. Most people thought the same of him wherever he went.

Gathering all her courage, she spoke quietly, "Give me the ball."

From all the way across the street on the curb, Abigail heard this. "It's my ball!" she protested, trying to wrestle from Robby's grip. She snatched from his grip and made it across the street before Robby caught up with her, grabbing her arm. She screamed high to the heavens her frustration at being caught.

“Shut-up!” Robby sneered, pinching Abigail in the arm. Abigail sobbed in pain until she fell to her knees. Robby stopped pinching her, not because he wanted to, but because the stranger took a step towards them.

Angie stepped forward to draw attention from her siblings, now very scared as she looked into his weird eyes as they began to almost glow a deep golden yellow. “We didn't do anything to you. Look I know you go to my school. I can tell the principal on you. Just give us the ball.”

William could smell her fear. He could always smell fear and the fear he provoked in people always gave him a weird sense of delectation. He knew he was born with this sense to evoke the fear in people and cursed himself sometimes for using it wrongly, but then could not help himself when it felt so good to do so.

Abigail slowly got to her feet and looked at William with her eyes slit in anger. Obviously Robby had warned her quietly not to go over there and she was responding to his statement. “I don't care how big he is or how mean he looks, I want my ball now. I'm not going to let Angie get it away from him.” She stepped towards the stranger, and then Robby grabbed her shoulders. With all her might, she pushed him away and ran to Angie's side. Robby followed, standing on the other side of Abigail facing William, but didn't try to hold her, knowing she would create another scene.

William had not said a word, but his eyes were staring directly at Abigail. She met his eyes without a blink.

Angie decided to ask again for the ball, which the boy had tucked under his arm. “Are you going to give us the ball-”

“-MY BALL!” Abigail angrily spat cutting her sister off.

William's eyes went down to the ball as if he didn't know he held it. He read the name out loud on the ball, “Abigail McPherson.”

“That's me!” the little one said proudly taking a step forward.

William pierced her with his yellow glare, but her eyes didn't falter. Her eyes met his with no backing down, meeting his anger. “Come here,” he ordered.

Angie held Abigail's arm. William knew the oldest could feel the danger emanating from him. He should not be trusted and Angie was a smart older sister, but Abigail was stubborn in her effort to get her ball. William also noted how protective Angie seemed to be now as if Abigail's worth was far greater than the danger they were in. He remembered the oldest one calling Abigail “Daddy's girl.” Yes, it was said in jealousy, but what did Abigail and “all the other ones,” have to do with how precious Abigail really was to her father.

“Abigail,” Angie said, not taking her eyes off William, “Dad told us not to speak to strangers.”

“He's got my ball!” Abigail protested.

“Abby, he's a stranger,” Angie reiterated. “We'll talk to Daddy when he gets home. He'll get the ball-”

“My BALL! And I can get my own ball.” Abigail looked at the stranger. “Do you know who my Daddy is, you stupid bully?!”

William stiffened at her childish name-calling. She talked as if she were ten feet tall and ate bullets for breakfast. “Do you think I fucking care?” he snarled.

She snatched away from Angie and faced the stranger in full fury. “My Daddy's Ramsey McPherson and he puts punks like you in jail all day long.”

Either this chit was stupid or very brave because when William took a step towards her - now within arms reach of her - she didn't back away. Her siblings stepped back three to his one, but the littlest one didn't move an inch, although this meant she had to strain her neck up to see him. She even had the audacity to place her hands on her hips, but his thoughts went into rewind of what she had just said. The name she had spoken had sounded very familiar...

Ramsey McPherson? He was responsible for putting William's father, Javier Chavez, away for life! Talk about a small world.

He knelt to her eye level. “If you want the ball, come and get it,” he ordered, holding the ball just inches from her body, but when she made an attempt to grab at it, he jerked it back out of her reach. She stepped forward, following the ball.

Angie was about to yank Abigail back, but the cold piercing look he gave the older sister made her not do it. He knew she was terrified at this point, but there was nothing Angie could do about the fear. He was enjoying the power he evoked in her, and this gave him even more drive to unleash even more disquietude in the trio. Yet the youngest child showed no fear at all, and this was a first for William in his life to not be able to awaken alarm in someone.

When the fearless child stepped forward, William met her eyes and was surprised by the color - A strange cyan camel with a touch of gray. Mystical, beautiful, breathtaking. He was captivated upon sight, along with the girl's beauty, he'd have no doubt she would be drop dead gorgeous within a decade.

“Ask nicely,” he ordered.

“No!” she said stubbornly. “You give me my ball and I won't tell my father on you, you bully. He'll find you and hurt you.”

“You love your Daddy, little girl?”

Abigail smiled proudly. “Yes. And he loves me and if anything happened to his little sweetheart you'll be sorry.”

“Oh really? I'm really scared now,” he said with sarcasm.

She stepped closer now, about his hand length away. “You can't have it. It's my ball, mister!”

“And you want it?”

“Yes!” she screeched, upset.

He looked at the other siblings and licked his lips like a lion going in for the prey. He then looked back at Abigail. “If you want it, step closer.”

She frowned hesitantly for the first time. She was suddenly becoming wary, he noticed, especially when he looked at her as if he were going to eat her alive. William could read this child's thoughts as if she spoke them out loud. She knew this man with the haunting bright golden eyes wanted to do something with her. Her eyes clearly asked him, could he hurt her despite the threats she had made? “Why?” she questioned his request with only a hint of wariness, but it was as if she were only asking to prepare herself to attack first.

His voice was lowered, directed just at her, and he could see the older siblings straining to hear and terrified to react. “Because what I have to do, no one else can know, but you.”

She stepped closer, their faces inches apart. He was huge compared to her. “What?” she asked curiously.

“I want you to promise me something.”

She looked down at the bright neon ball and placed her small hand on it next to his large one. “My Daddy says not to make promises to strangers.”

“Am I really a stranger?” he questioned.

She met those strange eyes again and the energy flowing between them was kismet. They were both aware there was something was happening between them that was much bigger than themselves or the world around them. Looking down because she felt his hand take over hers, she saw the strange mark around his left wrist. A permanent burn by an object. “Will I get my ball back?”

“If you promise,” he said.

“Promise what?” Her ears pricked up to show her curiosity.

“You'll first have to promise to do it.”

She bit her lip in thought. She looked at her ball, then back up at him. “Okay, I promise.”

“No you have to really mean what you say. Don't say it, if you don't mean it. Promise me you'll do it no matter what happens.”

“I promise I’ll do it no matter what happens.” She swore honestly. “What do I have to do?”

He leaned closer and placed the ball between them on the ground. His hands then moved up and cupped her cheeks gently in his palms covering the whole side of her face. The power behind his hand was evident and he realized with a swift movement, he could just break her neck and not blink twice about killing her. That she trusted him like this was very evident or maybe it was trust misplaced over her eagerness to know what her promise was for. This power he had over her at that moment in time, was the most powerful and William languished in the omnipotence that touching her produced in him.

Abigail stiffened, wanting to draw away, but he could feel deep down inside her, she had a need for his touch and her face leaned into his palm. His contact had made them one and to both of them; nothing else existed.

“Promise you won’t forget me.”

She frowned. “How could I forget you?”

“Through time.” He leaned closer to her. “But if you promise to remember the name I tell you, you won’t forget me.”

“What is it?”

He moved his hand to her arm and pulled her close. She came willingly. His lips were at her earlobe and his breath did crazy things to her own breathing. “Yared,” he whispered in her ear his lips fluttering against her earlobe.

He had given her his middle name he hardly ever used from his grandfather. He even rolled the R, making it sound foreign to her young ears.

Reluctantly he stood and moved away, finally putting the other two siblings at ease. Passing Abigail the ball, he winked at the other two, and then began to walk away.

“What did he say to you?” Angie demanded to know.

“Nothing,” Abigail said evasively.

“Come on Abby, let’s go in. Dad just pulled up,” Robby said.

Abigail always greeted her father in the living room. Always! Not today. Today she had to make sure she remembered the stranger. He was almost to the end of the block when she yelled, “Hey mister!”

William turned around to see the little girl hurriedly hand the ball she had fought so hard for to her brother, then run down to him in her dirty overalls and oversized T-shirt with dirty shoes. If she had two pigtails he swore she would look like a country girl, but he liked her hair down. He loved the color and he loved the way it flowed around her.

“Did you forget already?” he questioned.

She blushed, shaking her head, very out of breath.

He looked at her wild hair and flushed face. In a few more years she would definitely turn heads and along with her spirit and strength he knew she would break the hearts of many men. For the first time in his life, he wanted to be a part of someone's life. Hers! But would her father allow this? She was so young. Would anyone understand his heart was lost already? “You're a beautiful girl, Abigail,” he found himself saying, as if she couldn't already read his thoughts.

Again her cheeks turned bright rose and he could see it in her light complexion caramel skin. She seemed to glow in his eyes. “I-I came to ask you something. Will you forget me?”

“Never!” he swore vehemently.

She took his callused left hand in hers and pressed his rough knuckles against her soft cheek. “Through time,” she said, repeating his words. “You may.” Reaching up to her hair, she pulled three long strands. Her hair was so thick it didn't hurt - much, but she knew her hair was about the only thing people remembered about her. She turned his palm upwards. “Open your hand.”

He did so and she saw another old gnash between his thumb and index finger, which looked rather painful. She placed the strands in his hand and closed it so the wind wouldn't blow it away. Looking up at him, she said, “Remember me.”

“Abigail!” a loud voice boomed behind her.

William saw the fear; yet happiness appear in her eyes.

“Good-bye,” were her parting words as she gave him her back and ran down the street all the way to her house. William watched her until she disappeared then he looked down at his hand. Carefully, he balled it up; loving the softness and then he looked back at the house.

A broad-shouldered, older man was standing on the porch. His hair was dark and he looked rather tall. Without a doubt in his mind, William knew who this was. He had seen him in the newspapers many times and in a way, William began to feel jealous. Not anger at this man, but jealousy, because this was Abigail's world and William knew he could never have her. Not because she was young, but because this man knew who William was. This man knew his past and William was positive McPherson wouldn't ever let him get close to his daughter ever again.

He turned away and ran. Ran until he fell in a dark alley so exhausted physically and emotionally, but he swore to go back tomorrow to see his Abigail.

Chapter 3

Ramsey McPherson only saw the guy briefly. Tall, with black hair, black jogging suit, and dark colored shoes was all he could see from the distance, before the guy turned and ran. Going back in the house Ramsey had a strange feeling about all of that... a really bad feeling he didn't like at all. Yet a lot had been happening around the house and at his office to make him nervous.

When he'd approached Angie about the boy, she seemed evasive. "I see him around school, but I don't know who he is. He stays to himself and people don't go around him 'cause he's scary."

Ramsey felt the girl was lying to him about how much she really knew about the stranger, but he didn't press the subject, because her mother decided to make her set the table and then help in the kitchen for dinner.

Robby had told him all about the incident in detail, but when Ramsey asked Abigail about it, she said there wasn't anything to be afraid of.

"You know you aren't supposed to talk to strangers, Abigail," he had said, as he tucked her in that night.

"But he had my ball, Daddy. The ball you brought me from Detroit. I had to get it back," she insisted.

He understood and forgave her, but warned her again about strangers. She apologized for disobeying him and hugged her father.

She placed her hand over his. "He wasn't going to hurt me, Daddy, if that's what you were worried about."

"How do you know he wouldn't have hurt you?" he asked.

She motioned him to come closer. "I think he likes me, Daddy."

"Did you like him?"

"He is a nice person," she avoided the question on purpose. "On the inside he seemed like a very nice person."

He saw the mysterious smile playing on her lips. "What was wrong with the outside?"

This question made her remember the scars and she frowned. "He's lived a hard life Daddy." Her look saddened and Ramsey could almost see her wish she could take whatever pain this young man was experiencing. "I hope he comes back."

Ramsey prayed he did not. For some reason he didn't like the fact that this guy had affected Abigail so much. Ramsey did not like it at all.

* * *

When the lights were off Abigail thought about the strange boy and the fluttering of her heart when his lips had brushed her earlobe. How she had felt faint; yet far from sick. In truth, she had never felt so alive in her short life. She had needed his touch because she had not felt so secure with a man, except her father.

When he was walking away, fear of not seeing him again had caused a sinking feeling in her gut and she had wanted to see him again.

Maybe he would come tomorrow. She wouldn't care about what her father said about strangers. She remembered her mother saying once that when a person found their soul mate, it was hard for the fates to keep them apart, no matter what obstacles were thrown in their way. As young as Abigail was, she believed now in her life, that soul mate had come and she didn't mind it being the young man.

Although Abigail was only ten and too young to understand having a soul mate, she knew there had been something between them. Something no one, not even her father - who knew almost everything and tried to protect her from everything - Could explain to her.

* * *

For the first time in five years, William missed school. He decided not to go; instead he found himself on the corner again about four o'clock that afternoon watching them all play "Hot potato." Neither of the older ones would throw the ball to Abigail, except on number ten; but by then the game would be over, Abigail would be the loser and the older ones could play a round by themselves without including her.

"I don't want to play anymore!" Abigail announced loudly. "Give me my ball." She went to Angie, who presently handled the ball. A small cat rubbed up against Abigail's leg and she picked it up, cuddling up to it warmly; then she set it back down turning her attention back to the situation at hand. "Give it to me now."

"No I won't," Angie snapped, throwing the ball to Robby.

The cat seemed drawn to Robby and moved over to the brother. A wicked smile went across his face. "Hey Abby, you want your stupid cat?"

Abigail faced him. "You leave Candy alone!" she screamed, running over to him.

He kicked the cat and Abigail kicked him right in his groin. As he fell to his knees in the utmost pain, he hurled the ball in the middle of the street, not caring where he threw it. Just as Abigail ran in the grass curb to see Candy was not injured, the old black Cadillac screeched around the corner where William

stood. Angie ran to see if Robby was all right. At the same time, Abigail noticed that her ball was also in the middle of the street. With forethought, she ran to retrieve her ball.

“Abigail!” Angie and Robby yelled as they watched their sister kneel in the street to get her ball

Abigail picked up the ball yet it was too late to notice that she was in grave danger until too late, as she finally looked up and saw the car headed right for her. It was a few feet away from her and would have hit her if Angie had not yanked her away.

“RUN!” Angie screamed, still holding Abigail's corduroy strap.

Abigail did not need to look back to know that the car was right behind them. It was so close behind them that she could feel the heat from the vehicle on the back of her neck and she jumped over the curve. The vehicle's tires bumped right over the curve after them. Angie pulled the younger sister in front of her, in an effort to protect Abigail; but Abigail's short legs were not as fast as Angie's ending in Angie tripping, but she knocked Abigail forward purposely.

Abigail continued running, but glanced back to see the car run over Angie and not slowing down, continuing on its monstrous path of murderous destruction towards Abigail. Robby grabbed her arm and continued to run for the back of the yard, where the trees were and where they could dodge the car on its murderous goal to end their lives. Abigail's legs were tiring, her ankles hurt and she knew she could not keep going. She was going to die. In her young mind she was positive she would never see another day. She would never see another night. This was it!

Abigail's hand began to loosen from Robby's and she knew her brother was oblivious to the fact that she would not be able to make it to the trees for cover. With all his might and concentration, he pushed Abigail to get out of the vehicle's deadly path, but he didn't push hard enough and the car covered Abigail. He glanced back to see what had happened to make Abigail scream like that and unfortunately, didn't see the tree in front of him.

The car came at Robby about fifty miles an hour as he turned around and the car crushed his chest against the tree all the way to the spine. Death was not instant for him as it had been for Angie, he could still see Abigail lying on the ground covered in blood and not moving, then he looked up. Bright red lights were everywhere, but before he looked up to see where the lights came from, he saw that mannish-boy from yesterday. He also heard screaming from far away.

He opened his mouth to speak, but warm blood came out in place of his words. There was a high piercing noise and as Robby let his body relax against the hood of the car, pinning him against the tree, he realized it was his mother - screaming.

* * *

It happened so fast. The car had been coming, then it had suddenly turned off the road into the yard and all William could do was think about Abigail. Abigail's screaming was what had gotten William into action, but when he crossed the street to the yard, he saw it was too late, as he witnessed Robby bumping into the tree and the car following him.

William rushed to Abigail. Half her body was still under the back of the car a half foot away from the passenger's back wheel. She was covered in blood and her eyes were closed.

Rage filled him as he went to the already opened driver's door. There was a large redheaded man inside (in his forties) with a knife in his stomach and his head resting on the steering wheel.

William cursed. He had no one to pay for his Abigail's death. NO ONE!

He heard sirens. He had to go. He could not be found here with his past. He went back to Abigail one last time. Leaning down to her ear, he cupped her head in his hands and whispered her name through his anguish. Then he got up and ran, grabbing the ball she had so cherished.

Tucking the ball underneath his arm, he decided he would go far away from this place and never come back. He had to go away, for now he really had nothing to live for. To hell with Davenport! It was nothing but heartache for him.

Chapter 4

THREE YEARS LATER

David Reichard, a Davenport public defender knocked on the door of the McPherson's home that was badly in need of a paint job. Marilyn McPherson opened the door to her home and forced herself to smile in greeting. He had known the McPhersons all his life. They had grown up in Albany, New York as children and then moved here to Davenport together. Marilyn had loved Ramsey since she was a little girl, but David, along with a lot of other men, had loved Marilyn. Ramsey thought Marilyn had too many freckles at thirteen and there was the bright-red flaming hair, unique for an African-American, but Marilyn's grandfather was from Dublin, Ireland and came to America, married an African-American only for citizenship into the country and ended up falling in love with his wife. Ramsey married Marilyn right after high school.

They deserved happiness, David thought seriously. Not the tragic loss of their children. Not the terminal illness they were suffering now.

“Come in,” she invited him moving out the way to let him in.

He hugged her coming into the house. “How have you been?” he asked in concern. He always kept his voice quiet. Everything was always quiet here.

“Fine, I guess,” she shrugged solemnly.

“How’s the little princess?” he asked with even greater concern.

Her look saddened. Just mentioning the only child that had survived that day, could make her spirits go down. “She’s adjusting. I’m glad she’s finally home from the rehabilitation in Detroit. It seemed so far away.” She looked towards Abigail’s new room on the first floor which was the first door to the left of the front hallway. It had been the family room, but Ramsey had redecorated the room and turned it into Abigail’s room, since Abigail could not go up the steps anymore.

“Everything’s going to be fine, Lynn,” David tried to assure her. “Just hold on a little while longer.”

“I do, but it’s torturous to watch her miserable everyday. I guess she finally realizes she will never walk again,” Marilyn said close to tears.

“Are the doctors sure?” David asked.

Marilyn shook her head, with her eyes so filled with misery and doubt. “No, not one hundred percent, but they are ninety percent, yet she still goes to therapy...” she choked up, her deep brown eyes filling with tears. “S-she tried yesterday...and ...and she fell and broke her arm.”

He held her close as she cried silently in his shoulder. When she could not cry anymore, she pushed away slightly to look up at him. “I’m sorry. I can’t stand to watch her go through that. I wish the doctors were honest to her and us. I wish they would just tell that her she will never walk again. I could accept that, instead of watching her kill herself over a possibility.”

He passed her his handkerchief to wipe her face. “I think Abigail will stop when she feels there really is no hope, Marilyn. Try to be supportive.”

“I-I do. I promised her to stop crying and this is my first one all day.” She smiled meekly. “I-I’m usually in my fifth one by this time of day.”

“You’re going to be okay, Lynn,” he assured her smiling at her attempt at levity about her crying spells.

Taking a deep breath to regain her equilibrium, she said, “I hope so.”

“How’s her arm?” he asked.

“In a cast, but she feels all right. Ester and I have to comb her hair now, because she refuses to get it cut, but I love her no matter how much she becomes stubborn like her father. She's my angel and I know she's just stubborn enough to get up out of that chair.”

From behind, they heard a throat clear. “Am I interrupting something?” Ramsey questioned at the doorway to his study beside Abigail's room. “You wouldn't be trying to steal my wife again would you, Reichard?”

They drew a part and David gave her a chance to recover while he greeted his long time friend. Ramsey had brought up old history between them, but David knew it was all in jest. Ramsey was not worried about his friend stealing his wife anymore. Ramsey had paid big for his mistakes concerning his over protective feelings for Marilyn and realized too late how much he loved this woman, but he had also made up for his mistakes and would never let her go again. “I figured I'd wait until you die and with the rate your temper explodes, your heart won't take it much longer.”

“I only stay alive just to piss you off.”

They all laughed.

“Why don't I go make some ice tea?” Marilyn offered, heading to the kitchen past David and Ramsey.

Ramsey pulled his wife in his arms. “Are you all right?” he asked, very concerned.

She nodded and kissed him tenderly. “I'm fine now.”

He released her and she went on to the kitchen. The front hallway stretched all the way through the house. From the living room, that connected with the dining room, and across from that was the downstairs half-bath. The room that used to be the family room - now Abigail's room - was next to the half-bath and then following the bathroom was Ramsey's study/family library. They had given Abigail the family room, because it was easier to make a bathroom of her own connected in her room due to the plumbing of the near-by half bath and also the family room was so much more pleasant, with a private patio on the side of the house opposite the large yard, all closed in for even more privacy, and a large closet to store her extra wheelchair. Marilyn had redecorated the room with sky blue wallpaper. The white carpet had been pulled up, like most of the carpet on the first floor, because Abigail seemed to tire easily when she had to navigate over carpet.

Most of the time if she wasn't at school or in therapy, she was in her room. It was the only place in the house where she had room to really move around, since the room held her full-size bed, a night table beside it, and her studying desk with computer. That was it. Her closet held a foldout table; just in case she wanted to eat in her room or just play a board game. Her room also held privacy, which she had become to value. Her parents and Ester, the nurse and housemaid, respected her when she closed and locked her door.

They never disturbed her unless it was an emergency and even then it was reluctantly since they knew Abigail was slowly becoming very anti-social about her condition. She was now realizing that her chance of walking was diminishing with each passing day.

Soon Abigail would be thirteen years old and fast maturing in her own world, without a friend her age in sight. Her parents and David worried for her.

“Actually for a first, I've come to speak with you on a private matter, Ramsey,” David said, addressing new business to get away from the depression of the house.

“This is a first,” Ramsey teased. “Honey, I'll pass on that ice tea.”

“Me too, Lynn, but thanks anyway.” David said, as he followed Ramsey into his study. It was a man's study decorated in red wood and leather seats. Ramsey was always bringing his work home with him and the desk proved it with files, papers and envelopes all over it. No one really came in here and if the help did come in here to clean they were not allowed near his desk.

Before David had a chance to broach his own subject with Ramsey, the phone rang and Ramsey answered it. “Hello Edward...”

David stiffened at the name from Ramsey's lips and knew Ramsey was evident of David's feelings about Edward Stone.

Ramsey continued the conversation. “Yes, I heard about the ball, but Lynn has not been feeling well, so I've declined the invitation again this year, but I will make that donation...It is a pleasure councilman...You too. Good-bye.”

“Council Chairman Edward Stone?” David guessed when Ramsey hung up the phone.

Ramsey nodded. “Marilyn says he gives her the creeps for some reason.” He sat behind his desk while David sat up front in one of the chairs facing the desk.

“I'll join her club on that,” David said in agreement.

Ramsey asked, “So what was so private?”

“Has a Detective Hamish contacted you or called you in the last few days?” David questioned opening his briefcase.

“Sounds familiar, but I've been too busy with the campaign for Head Prosecuting Attorney to return personal or even private calls at the office, except for home.”

“I don't mean to bother you over trivial matters on your day off Ramsey. I know you are busy and you said you wanted to spend more time around the house, but I felt I needed to talk with you about this matter as soon as possible.”

Ramsey shrugged nonchalantly with a wave of his hand. "It's no problem, Dave. What did this Hamish guy want?"

"He told me something interesting. About four days ago down in Tampa, Florida, the city was to celebrate Cinco de Mayo. It's, I think, a Spanish independence holiday or something...anyway from witnesses' reports they said Lowell Crane-" Ramsey perked up at the very familiar name. "- was seen rough handling a girl believed to be his daughter. Obviously, to make money, he had been sending her out for johns, but that night she wasn't feeling well and begged him not to send her. He did so anyway, but she had not brought in enough. So he dragged her outside the back of this bar they were in to give her a beating in private."

"Witnesses saw this?" Ramsey asked, sickened.

"Yes. From the bar and kitchen help, but they confessed this was a usual occurrence, so they went on with their job and ignored her crying and screaming."

David could see Ramsey was incensed about the matter. He'd been too when Hamish relayed this to him as well. How could a man not forget Lowell Crane? The man was responsible for destroying his wife, his family, and his life then got off scott free for murder. "Did they bring him in on charges?" Ramsey questioned.

"I'm not done," David said, as if apologizing for not ending his story there.

"Hurry the hell up will you David? The suspense is killing me," Ramsey growled.

"All right, but this is where it gets confusing. About eight o'clock the next day, Tampa Police found Crane's lifeless body in the alley next to the daughter, who looked as if she had been beaten pretty badly. Someone had crushed the bones in his hands, cracked several ribs and beat him senseless; then took Crane's own registered gun out of his jacket and shot him in the head." David set the faxed report on Ramsey's desk. "It's all there."

Ramsey looked as if he could not believe what he had just heard as he slowly picked up the report. "So he's dead?"

"Deader than a doorknob."

McPherson didn't know if he should look as satisfied as he did. "What the hell happened?"

"His daughter in the hospital delirious from a VD infection gone to hell, told the police in her first confession that a large man with glowing eyes did it. That's all she could talk about the man's eyes. She said her father took her outside and began beating her like never before. The man told him to pick on someone his own size and Lowell pulled the gun suddenly and shot at the man before they wrestled for the gun. She

could barely see due to her swollen face, but she heard bones crushing and her father screaming in pain. She heard another shot and then the man ran away.”

“So this mysterious man killed him? What kind of man could actually break bones with his bare hands?” Ramsey inquired in disbelief.

“Evidence proved this was the only possibility because he had no bruises near the breakage to indicate it was done with a heavy weapon of some kind.”

Ramsey shrugged, not really thinking clearly. “A very strong man, I suppose,” he guessed.

“Ram, Hamish believe the person to be William Stone, which was why he called you up. He thought you would be interested in knowing this fact more than anything, but when he spoke to me he told me you didn't comment on any of his findings. He contacted me because he knew we were good friends, but he also knew you probably had a lot on your mind. Do you remember any of the conversation you had with Hamish?” David asked, exasperated.

“Vaguely, actually,” Ramsey said. “That name sounds just as familiar. Even more familiar than Hamish.”

“William Castro-Chavez Stone.” David hinted hoping Ramsey would catch on.

The light came on in his head as his brown gray eyes with a hint of cyan swirled with excitement giving him a majestic look. Abigail had inherited her father's beautiful copper penny kissed brown hair, yet with rare streaks of her mother's red flaming hair here and there and Ramsey's lovely eyes. “That wouldn't happen to be Javier's son?” Ramsey asked to be sure.

David only nodded.

“Hell I thought that boy would be in a mental home by now. The apple sure do not fall too far from the tree, if that's all the truth.”

David responded gravely, “He's not in a mental home. He ran away from here three years ago and Edward Stone has not found him since.”

“Why does Hamish think it's him?”

“His file, his past. Plus, about eleven o'clock that night before, Crane's body was found in the morning, Stone's landlady said he came in his room clutching his shoulder in pain and the drug store down the street said he purchased a sewing kit, tweezers, alcohol, and the strongest pain reliever on the shelf.”

“Did he bring the kid in for questioning?” Ramsey questioned.

“No, because William left town. He's headed here.”

“And I should pick him up? He's crossed state lines, David. That's out of my hands without legitimate proof and you know that.”

“I knew you would say that.” David said obviously. “If you weren't such a law-abiding citizen, I bet you would have killed Crane on your own when he walked out that courtroom a free man, wouldn't you?”

Ramsey refused to answer, pursing his lips to show David he had nothing to say on this matter.

“Don't answer, Ramsey. I've been your friend too long and know you too well to know the answer to that.” David said, a little sickened by the sort of pleasure on Ramsey's face. “This kid is no threat to you yet, because he did your dirty work. Hamish thinks this kid is trouble. William could be a walking time bomb and end up just like his father, gutting out some lawyer like a pig.”

“Let's back-track. You said this is confusing and she had a first confession. How does it get confusing?” Ramsey asked.

“Well it is when most of what the girl said the first time was a lie.” He indicated a handwritten fax, which was a copy of the original. “Her suicide note,” David explained. “She wrote it before she choked herself with the sheet at the hospital. The stranger was there, but she described it in a little more detail.”

Ramsey inquired eagerly, “So what was it?”

David took the fax from Ramsey and read the report from Hamish's office. “She said the stranger challenged Crane to pick on someone his own size. Crane faced him and told him to mind his own business. The stranger said his business was with Crane. The girl saw that her father did not recognize this man as being familiar and asked who he was. The stranger replied, ‘your worse nightmare.’ The girl cried for the stranger's help and her father punched her in the eye. She fell to the ground and the stranger came forward. Crane pulled out the gun and shot at him. The stranger knocked the gun out of his hand and then he broke Crane's fingers by just squeezing them in his own. The daughter watched as the stranger beat Crane senseless and then let her father's body, still alive, drop to the ground. She heard him say to Crane, ‘This is for what you did to her, you gutless bastard. I'm leaving you here to painfully suffer for the rest of your miserable life.’ Then he walked away. Crane gurgled a cry for help to his daughter, who carefully placed the gun in her father's other hand, pointed it at his face and pulled her father's fingers to kill him. She then passed out.”

“So she killed her father, not the stranger?” Ramsey deducted.

David again nodded. “The police want to charge him for aggressive force. His defense was overdone. Don't you agree?”

Again Ramsey didn't answer, pleading the fifth with just his eyes, but had the nerve to question the look on Dave's face. "What? You expect me to hand him over for doing what he did? No, the hell I won't. If he walked through that door, Dave, I'd congratulate him."

With incredulity, David exclaimed, "I can't believe you're protecting him after what his father did to Lawton Charles!"

Defensively, Ramsey said, "I'm not on his family's side, David, but somewhere there is true justice and I believe if Mr. Stone did do it, justice was served."

"Well, Hamish can't arrest him anyway, since they can't find any blood, fingerprints, or even the damn bullet to connect Stone."

"Do you think a bullet hurt him badly?" Ramsey asked.

David shrugged and answered, "I'm not sure. His grandmother was a nurse and rumors say she passed down her medical skills, teaching her sons how to heal themselves from their very abusive fathers. William could have been taught this very same skill from his own father and used it on himself that night. That way no one would have any record that he had abstracted a bullet from himself, if it had been him that night."

Ramsey had that murky smile on his face that always gave David the chills. "Maybe I'll invite the guy over and show him I really don't have any hard feelings for him. It's his old man that was crazy."

David was at the end of his rope when it came to Ramsey's sick sense of humor, which had reached its peak after that last comment. "Dammit, you forget Javier's old man was just as loony and you even said it yourself, insanity runs in this family. Don't you even wonder how this son knew which bones to break?"

"Do you really think I care?" Ramsey asked with that murky pleased glow in his eyes. "Plus Tampa is not my jurisdiction, so Mr. Stone's business outside Davenport is none of mine."

David stood up in agitation. "In two days it will be, Ramsey. There's a plane landing with him on it and he'll be arriving in Davenport to come to his mother's funeral. I think you should take precautions and bring him in for questioning."

"He has not caused any trouble, as far as I know, and if Hamish isn't issuing a warrant for Stone's arrest, then I won't bother the boy. Innocent until proven guilty is what I always say."

"Dammit, Ramsey!" David bellowed. "I think you should be on guard, or I think I will be saying in a couple of days, I told you so."

Ramsey shot out of his chair, not at all liking David's tone of voice in his house. "You probably will, but who cares. He did something I wish I could have done when that bastard was given a mistrial and

walked out of that courtroom a free, fucking man. He put my baby in that wheelchair and killed Robby and Angela. If anything, Billy has my gratitude.”

Marilyn stuck her head in the office looking very concerned. “Is everything all right?” she asked.

“Just male bonding, honey,” Ramsey smirked. “How do you feel?”

“I’m fine. Abigail heard the yelling and became worried.”

“We’re fine, Marilyn.” David assured her and waited until she left then went to the door, but stopped at the doorway to look back at Ramsey. “All right, Ramsey. Be stubborn and simple-minded if you want to be, but when he does cause trouble, I’d gladly be his lawyer just to piss you off. And don’t call him Billy. He hates that name.” He then stormed out of the office and the house.

* * *

Abigail pushed away from the wall and went to her balcony doors that were wide open to let the light summer May breeze in her room. For such a beautiful day, she knew she should probably go for a stroll or just go to Lowry City Park, but she didn’t want to. Why should she when there was no one there for her? With no friends, she didn’t want to go anywhere.

‘Well Ab, you’ll just have to get use to it. You know, being alone. No one wants a cripple and that’s exactly what you are,’ she told herself in a voice close to Angie’s sneer.

She could hear David’s car screeching off and she looked down at her legs disappointed that her father had made her godfather so angry that he had not even come to say hi or bye. Her legs were deathly pale and skinny due to the fact that she kept them covered by staying inside all of the time and skinny because she never used them. Therapy helped a little in the exercising of the muscles, keeping them firm.

Taking a deep breath, she picked up her upper thigh. Nothing. She hated this chair. She hated not being able to walk. She hated being in this house feeling so alone and trapped. Most of all, she hated the fact that she could not remember the accident or anything before it all happened. Bits and pieces of her life jumped in her brain. Often she dreamed about a ball, but she didn’t remember ever having a ball. She never made mention of her recollections to anyone, not even her therapist/psychiatrist Dr. Ella Banks, who was also her mother’s best friend.

Angrily she hit her legs. “I hate you!” she sneered, then covered her face and quietly cried.

She had listened through her closet wall that connected behind the half bathroom to her father’s study. Ramsey’s desk was right by the wall so any phone calls or even discussions inside the room could be heard clearly by Abigail when she pressed her ear against the back of the closet wall.

It didn’t matter that Crane was dead. His death signified nothing special to her. His death didn’t give her back her legs or her memory. She didn’t know why, but she felt as if she had her memory, she

would feel a little more complete, because right now she felt like an empty shell, waiting for something to come. Someone or something. She also felt as if she were forgetting something important! Something that mattered.

She would try to get it back - whatever she had lost. Something had to trigger her memory back, but what?

Chapter 5

Lydia looked down at Marie St. Martin Castro-Chavez Douglas. She saw nothing of William in his own mother, except the dark Spanish hair. Moving away from the casket, she followed the procession back to her seat next to Enid, who had not gone to take a last look at the body before they buried it.

Edward was talking to Harrison quietly. Lydia made note that Harrison had not shed a tear for his wife through the whole thing. Matter of fact, in Lydia's opinion, he looked rather pleased. Well, why shouldn't he when he would receive a two million dollar insurance policy that Marie had taken out for herself a long while ago. No one had questioned where she had gotten the money to back up something like that and Lydia had no idea how she could afford to pay on a policy that size. Marie's death had been by drunk driving. She had crashed into a pole, shot through the windshield, and broken her neck in the accident.

Just as the last person was looking at the body, the rear double doors to the room opened and everyone turned. Most were in shock, others who didn't know the tall-built, young man were in awe.

Lydia smiled, very glad to see him. He was even more seductively handsome. She proudly noted how well he was dressed and how well he carried himself. He was different from the other men in his family and she knew in her heart he would rise above the rest of them and be his own person. He would not allow his past to rule his heart, but he would let his future take him to the stars. She waited eagerly for him to notice her.

She took a good look at William and was breathless at the sight of him. He had grown immensely to six feet four. His pitch-black hair was cut short and his looks were so much more mature. He was pure handsome to anyone who set eyes on him and anyone could see that he was headed for greatness. He was not like his father, uncle, or grandfather, although he looked like them so much. William was a different breed of Castro-Chavez men. He was going to go far with his looks and his characteristics. She would be proud to call him her son.

He did not look anywhere but forward and when he got to the casket, he stood there for several minutes, and then moved away, turning towards where Harrison was standing. He gave the man a cruel evil look and then faced Edward, who only nodded.

His eyes clearly showed he wanted to get out of this place. William had only come to pay his respects. This woman had brought him into the world and he should at least be thankful for that, but it had been a miserable world to him since the loss of his Abigail. Davenport offered nothing else for him. He had never had a motherly bond with Marie so he never really loved her as a son should love his own mother. He had a closer bond with Lydia than he had with Marie. Thinking of motherly affections, his eyes searched the crowd for Lydia. He spotted her sitting three rows from the front, looking at him concerned. A warm feeling washed over him, knowing that after all these years her look still softened him. She smiled faintly at him and stood up as he came down the aisle.

“William,” she called softly, making him stop.

He turned to her not saying a word. He could see Enid sitting down looking up at him with a glow in her eyes to make his skin crawl in disgust. Lydia still looked the same and deep down it was nice to see her, but he kept his look distant and hard. Edward came to stand by Lydia's side, looking his cruel and conniving way. William also noticed Enid was holding a baby that looked about a year or more, but he didn't question it.

“It's been so long,” Lydia said hugging him, but he didn't return the hug, yet that didn't deter her affection or concern. She guided him out the room so the funeral could finish. She was glad Edward did not follow.

“Don't go,” she insisted.

He still had not spoken, but those eyes said a thousand words as they pierced her with a cold bright golden yellow glare, looking hard and contemptible. He was waiting for something.

Lowering her own olive green eyes to the floor, she said humbly, “I'm sorry William. I should have believed you. I did believe you, but I was confused. I saw....I know you wouldn't, but...I saw...” she was lost for words.

He finally made an effort to communicate by taking her hand in his. “All is forgiven, Lydia. I could never really hate you. You had your reasons, right?”

She nodded so relieved at his forgiveness. He could tell those words of forgiveness had meant so much to her. “Please don't disappear so fast,” she implored. “Come to the house for dinner. Edward won't mind.”

People started to come out of the room and soon Edward and Enid were by Lydia's side. Enid was holding the baby bundled up very securely in her arms.

William frowned at the bundle, and then looked at Lydia for explanation.

"Enid just had a little boy. She named him Dakota," Lydia explained reluctantly as if she didn't want to speak on the subject.

"Charming," William responded not the least bit enthused.

"Would you like to hold your cousin?" Enid offered as a chance to get close to him.

William backed away. "No, I don't. He's not my cousin anyway. Remember, we aren't blood-related," he reminded her throwing her words back into her face.

She flushed, remembering them, but smiled mischievously as if she knew something that he didn't. William didn't question the smile. He had a feeling Enid was planning something he knew he wouldn't like.

"You will come for dinner, won't you, William?" Lydia questioned insistently.

Grudgingly William agreed. He didn't want to, but Lydia meant a lot to him as a person. Matter of fact, at this point in his life, she was the only person that meant anything to him, now that there was no Abigail. It was amazing how that little girl affected him so much in just the brief minutes he had the pleasure of knowing her. He knew if she were alive, father or not, he would go to her and take her away with him to Tampa, and he knew if she were alive, she would actually consider it. "I guess so, but I won't stay long." He took a step back and said before he left, "I'll be by at six."

* * *

William went to the YMCA where he was staying while he was in town, changed his clothes then went to a bar. Due to his six foot four, wide-built frame, no one questioned his age and he never really drank enough to get drunk. Just enough to put him in check.

His father had been six foot five while Edward was six foot three, so William figured at sixteen he either had a few more inches or he would stay where he was, although his grandfather was known to be six foot seven. It didn't matter to him, that much, he was tall and he accepted this about himself. Beside the fact that it got him a lot of women and it always made people wary of him, but he wasn't much of a people person anyway, so it didn't matter either.

During his three years away from home, he had made a goal for himself: To finish his education and go to college. He wanted to be a car designer. He was a genius when it came to automobiles and he loved to put his skills to work. So during his three years away he worked in auto shops as mechanics gas attendants and even as an automobile salesperson, but he quit that after a day not at all liking the fact that he had to be cordial to people. Just this last year, one of his supervisors felt pity on him and arranged for him

to get his GED early by lying and saying that he needed to take it early. He passed with flying colors and knew he could make it in college.

The news about his mother's death surprised him, but he knew out of respect, he should show his face, plus he was a little concerned as to what was happening with Lydia.

What he saw shocked him. That bundle in Enid's arms was a baby. Not just any baby, but a baby that looked very familiar to William and if his hunches were right, he was going to get Lydia out of there, after he told her the truth about everything.

Going back to his room at the Y, he picked up a newspaper in the lobby on his way up to his room. A very prestigious city council member had approached the chief prosecutor of Davenport to run for mayor. The article went on to say that Ramsey McPherson spoke in a press conference at his city office with his wife saying he would not be running for office due to the strain the campaign would put on his family that was still recovering from the fatal car accident that killed two of his children and crippled his youngest daughter...

William immediately stopped reading and reread what his eyes had just scanned over in the paper, "...crippled his youngest daughter?" Did that mean his Abigail was still alive? Could she really be?

He put down the paper and changed his clothes, but as he was about to rush out the door, he stopped himself. As if she remembered him.

'You made her make a promise,' he told himself. That was so long ago and bringing up memories...Ramsey would not let William get ten feet near her.

"You Chavez right?" an old scruffy-looking man asked, standing in the hall.

William was still standing in the doorway of his room, contemplating whether to go see if it was Abigail or not. "Yes. Who wants to know?" he demanded to know, quite upset at being interrupted in his chain of thoughts.

"Some suit came in here asking questions 'bout you to Charlie at the desk. Said you been suspected of murder in Tampa," the scruffy man said, trying to make an effort without slurring his words to William. He viciously reeked of alcohol, but he was twitching uncomfortably, so William had to assume the man probably had not had a drink all day and didn't look as if he had the money to buy what he was craving at this moment in time.

A wicked satisfied grin curled William's lips, making him look rather sinister. He remembered Florida. "What's it to you, old man?"

The man took a step back looking a little frightened by this man's proximity. "I'm just lettin' you know the details." Pausing to suffice a belch, the man continued, "He told me they can't charge you 'cause they got no proof, 'cept a girl who saw you, but she died."

“How do you know so much?” William asked suspiciously.

“He was tellin' it to Charlie an' ole Charlie can git pretty nosey when he don't wanna tell info. Specially to no suit.”

“And you were listening?”

The drunk shrugged. “Ain't much I don't know 'bout what goes on around here or who comes in d'is place, Chavez. I pretended to be sleep near the stairs. I 'member you kid. Used to come here all the time a few years ago.”

“Did this guy give his name?”

“Charlie kept callin' him Davie, but that's all I 'member. This guy's been here before inquiring 'bout your background a few weeks before now.”

“Did this guy say anything else about anymore witnesses?”

“They think the girl's brother saw the killer, but got scared and ran. The police down in Tampa ain't found the kid yet, but they suspect he's probably dead too cause he was a heavy drug user.”

William frowned. He wasn't familiar with a Davie or any other person that came close to that name and he figured no one knew he was in town except his immediate family. “What's your name?” he questioned.

“My name's Lou, sir,” the man said proudly.

William took out a couple of bills. “Well thanks, Lou. You've been a good help.”

Lou smiled very grateful and kissed the bill. William could see the man was already salivating for a drink. Lou could sing like a bird, probably a lot, and the old man looked like he was sneaky enough to know a lot of secrets about not only what went on in this place, but the city as well. The old man looked like he had been around a long time.

William would watch his comings and goings because although he had a feeling Lou liked him, he would sing like a bird for the others as well for the right price.

Chapter 6

William knocked on the windowpane he remembered breaking so long ago. Same house and same people except for that baby Enid had been holding. Yet nothing had seemed to change. Unfortunately, everything had gotten worse. He wanted this night over and done with so he would never come back here again, plus the sooner this night passed, the sooner he could see Abigail - if she was still alive, that is.

Enid answered the door with the baby in her arms. Her eyes passed over him in appreciation. William sickened at the memories of her body touching his.

“Still living dangerously, huh, Enid?” he sneered giving her a very definite stay the hell away from me glare.

“Not since I had Dakota.” She turned the baby to him and William was shocked as he looked into eyes just like his. “He *is* your cousin, Billy. He was conceived from Edward and my love. You want to hold him?”

He stepped away disgusted. “Why would I want to touch a child conceived out of lust? You don't love my uncle and if you did it's just as sick as knowing you fucked him.”

She seemed very hurt by his words.

“Is that William?” Edward asked, coming into the foyer where they both stood. “Hello Billy.” He looked at Enid. “Go put him down, Enid and quit holding him all the time. If you keep that up the boy will be spoiled. A Stone man's got to be tough and strong. Right William?”

William wanted to say he wasn't a Stone man. Edward had forced him to change his name when he moved in with Edward long ago, yet people still referred to him as Stone, even though his name was back as Chavez.

She huffed and left them alone. Edward walked into the living room fully expecting William to follow as if he were some kind of servant. William wanted to call Edward an incestuous, corrupt bastard, but he kept his mouth closed. Nothing had changed furniture wise in the whole house it seemed, but kept in very good condition. He noticed Lydia's collection of tiny figurines had grown. For as long as he had known her, she had collected these figurines. For some reason they held a fascination for her, but even she didn't know why.

“So where've you been William for the past three years?” Edward inquired.

“Everywhere sir. I went to California first, where my father had friends. His buddies helped me out there and I got my GED early through their help, then one of them decided to go to Florida to start up his own business in auto parts distribution. I went with him to help him out. I guess I have a good head for business, but my first love is automobiles. I'm hoping to open up my own auto place. I've found a couple of investors and I have other ways to get money, but I'm looking for a good location.”

“Seems you're going to do something good for a change.” He sat back on the couch and lit a pipe.

William shrugged, trying to ignore the sarcastic tone Edward was using. “I just do what's in my heart, sir, and fixing cars is in my heart.”

“Why don't you go see Lydia? She's in the kitchen.”

William took his suggestion, glad to be away from Edward. Lydia was in the kitchen with another Hispanic woman who was short and in her late-thirties. She noticed William first and narrowed her black eyes to slits in pure distrust. In Spanish, she asked Lydia, “Who is that man right there?”

William understood her very well. He had spent a lot of time in Florida where his great-grandfather came from and his own father knew Spanish as well, so William responded in Spanish. “William Castro-Chavez Stone, Senorita. How are you?”

She smiled, charmed at his compliment of calling her a young lady. “It is Senora, amigo. Isabella,” she introduced herself.

Lydia rushed in his arms, but he made no attempt to return the hug. It had always felt strange when other people touched him. In the beginning when he had gone to California, it took him a long time to get used to people patting him on the shoulder, or women brushing themselves against him.

“I thought I heard someone at the door.” Her warm green eyes looked up at him in pure motherly love, full of pride. “You're early.”

“Only five minutes.”

“You were always prompt.”

Isabella spoke in her Spanish tongue, since Enid decided at that moment to enter the kitchen. “If I did not know better, I would say that he is your son, Lydia. There is something about him that is familiar.” She gave them both the same strange look, and then shrugged it off. “But maybe it is my old age catching up and taking over my eyes.”

Lydia spoke to Isabella in Spanish with a strange dialect. “You can leave for the night, but don't forget to take the apple pie to your daughter. I owe her so much for what she did at the Pendleton's. I made it just for her.”

No one but William heard Enid huff in anger at not being able to understand any of them and left the room. “You speak Spanish, Lydia?” he questioned.

Isabella shook her head. “Senora Stone also speaks Italian.”

William frowned darkly. “When did you learn all this?”

Lydia shrugged, confused. “Somehow I just picked it up. When Isabella first came, right after you left, she didn't speak much English and somehow I just started talking to her in Spanish. It's as if her language triggered something in my brain.”

Isabella looked suspiciously behind Lydia to the kitchen doorway. William noticed her caution as she changed the subject speaking in English. “You go to bridge club, tonight, Lydia?”

Lydia didn't turn her head, but William had a feeling Isabella had just given Lydia a warning by calling her by her first name. "Much later on, after dinner, I might. I'm not sure."

"Then I had better be going, but first, I want to straighten up the boy's room." She touched William's shoulder with a tight grip to stop his protest. "Just in case you decide to stay, William." She then left the kitchen.

"William, I thought you wouldn't come," Lydia said.

"I considered it seriously, but I knew you would be disappointed." He helped her gather some drinks on a tray and followed her to the living room. On the way he asked her, "When did you start playing bridge? I thought you hated card games."

"Bridge?" she questioned at first not getting it, but when she did, she laughed. "Oh no, William. You mean the game?" He nodded. "I do hate card games. Isabella was referring to Dr. Tom Bridgeclub, a friend or more like a client of mine that I'm helping to plan an entertaining evening. You know what a great organizer I am, although when it concerns myself, I just can't remember anything. I've taken it as a home business to pass the time while Edward is busy...doing things. I do parties, weddings and stuff like that. I find the entertainment, help the bride, and that sort of thing."

Edward and Enid were in the living room together as William and Lydia entered. Enid played with the baby on her lap, while Edward was looking over some files, still puffing on the pipe. "Have a seat, Billy," he insisted.

William still hated being called Billy. It came in first place of his list of pet peeves. Second place was a woman slapping him, because he knew if he slapped any woman back he might kill her. Although he was tempted to lay some painful hands on his uncle for what he was doing to Lydia. He sat on the loveseat in front of Edward, Lydia sat by him, and Enid sat beside Edward.

Lydia started off the conversation. The tension in the air was very evident to everyone. "I'm so glad you did come to dinner, William. I fixed your favorite, beef stroganoff without the mushrooms. I know you hate mushrooms."

Stiffly, William replied, "Thank you Lydia."

"So is your mother's funeral the only thing that brought you back to Davenport or did you miss this old small town?" she continued to try to keep the conversation going.

"Well, I had not planned to come back for the funeral until Gerald Holt contacted me. For the longest time, I had always thought that Holt was my mother's lawyer, but my grandfather had hired Gerald to handle his affairs."

Lydia was very shocked. “Your grandfather had money to hire a lawyer?” Even she knew Yared had lived like a penniless man in the slums of New York with his family, as if he didn't have money because he couldn't hold down a job.

“Yared had a lot of money that no one knew about.” He looked suspiciously at Edward. “Did you know about the lawyer?”

“I remember the name a lot a few months before your father took off, but being young at the time, I was not interested in their conversation.”

For some reason, William doubted that. “Well, my father had taken what rightfully belonged to him and left with it, which turned Gerald Holt into my father's lawyer.”

Lydia was confused. “Please explain, William. What did Javier take?”

“Marie gave Gerald Holt specific instructions upon her death. He found me in Tampa, Florida and informed me of my mother's death. Then he told me that two days before the accident she had changed the beneficiary name on her insurance and will without Harrison knowing.” He looked at Edward. “Did you know my father owned a piece of Bellinodos wine in Italy?”

“I knew it had been passed down through the family, but I thought Yared sold that land back to the Bellini family.”

“Well he didn't and it was in Marie's possession all the time. The night my father ran away, he was suppose to go with Yared to Holt's office to sign the right of the stocks back over to Yared, but instead, he took the stocks and ran away. Javier was long gone to California with the stocks safely hidden.”

Edward looked as if he was straining himself from saying something and forced a rather innocent look on his face. William was positive Edward knew exactly what was going on, because that was the night Edward had gotten the worse beating of his life.

William wanted to seriously reply, “That's why you got your ass beaten by your old man that night.” Instead he refrained himself and turned his eyes on Lydia. “When my father went to jail, he made Marie swear on everything that was holy to pass these stocks down to me and not keep them for herself. She was the only person he trusted at the time to keep these stocks good for me. Harrison found out about them though, about a year ago and had been trying to make her give them to him, but she kept them in a safe deposit box. Any money coming from the stock, went to an account, which is how she got the policy for two million dollar insurance on herself, but no one ever knew about the other seven million-”

“Seven million?!” Edward exclaimed, cutting him off, almost choking on his pipe.

He clarified. “My mother put seven million dollars in a bank account which was to go to her beneficiary.”

“Harrison gets all of that?!” Enid asked.

William shook his head. “That’s why Gerald contacted me. She changed her beneficiary after she found Harrison had a mistress with two kids by him. The new beneficiary became her son.”

“You?” Lydia questioned, astonished as everyone else.

“I should hope so, since as far as I know I’m her only son.”

“So you have nine million dollars?” Edward asked to be sure.

“Just as soon as I go down tomorrow and sign those papers, but Holt mentioned that there might be some complications. He assured me that I should receive at least half of that.”

Lydia frowned. “But what if Holt had not been able to find you or let’s just assume you died, then would that money go to Harrison?”

“No, it would go to my beneficiary or my next living blood relative.”

At the dinner table, William questioned Edward about his campaign. “I hear you’re going up for city mayor. Nice position.”

“I figured I have a good chance, especially with Ramsey McPherson as Head Prosecutor.”

“He hasn’t gotten the spot yet. The election isn’t until November.”

“True, but he’s a sure winner. If I get him to stand behind me, there’s no doubt I’ll be a sure winner.”

William frowned. “Do you really think he will, Edward? Considering your past and your relatives and what he did to my father?”

“Your father deserved what he got. My past is clean. It’s Javier’s past that’s dirty. I changed my name to get away from the Chavez name and I gave you a chance to change your past too. I’ve been on the good side of the law at all times,” his uncle said proudly.

William looked at Enid, who held Dakota, smirking wickedly at him. Edward had not committed a crime to throw him in jail, but he had committed sins of the utmost disgust.

Edward excused himself early. He had campaign work to do. “You know William, your room is just like you left it. Feel free to use it tonight. It would be just like old times.”

“I’ll be leaving first thing in the morning, and I still have business to attend to. No thanks on the invitation, Edward. I’ll find somewhere else to sleep.”

“Sleeping at the Y is no place for a Stone man.”

He wanted to protest that he wasn't a Stone man. He was William Yared Castro-Chavez and proud to be part of the Castro-Chavez line which had roots all the way to Italy. "How did you know I was staying at the Y?"

"Just because I didn't hunt you down after you left, doesn't mean I never knew your business, William. I'm still legally responsible for you and I have a right to know where you are - at all times."

"As if you could stop me from leaving," William challenged.

Edward backed down from the challenge, but he did not look pleased. "Fine. I can't make you stay in Davenport, but I can ask that you at least stay the night here instead of the Y, can't I?"

As soon as Edward left, Enid was no longer the docile quiet shy creature she had been around Edward. She stepped close to William. "So did you miss us, Billy?" she asked. "You could have kept in touch you know. Lydia and I were so worried."

He snarled at her. "Oh really? When it was your lies that made me leave."

Seductively leaning close to him, she whispered, "Surely you don't hold grudges forever William."

For a brief moment, he thought about Florida, but then returned to the present as a feeling of disgust arose in him at her proximity. He pushed her further away from him, his eyes glowing to a deadly madness. "Oh no, Enid. I don't hold grudges. I just get rid of the person I have a grudge against."

He could see the fear in her eyes. William knew how menacing he looked when he had an angry visage. Quickly, she left the room.

He went to the kitchen where Lydia was putting the dishes in the dishwasher. "I'll help you with that," he offered.

"Oh William, Isabella will do that in the morning."

"How old is the child, Lydia?"

Lydia looked far off and very hurt. "He'll be two soon. He's small for his age, but Edward said you were too."

"So he is blood," William confirmed.

She spoke as if he had not just said a word. "Edward said he was small too and didn't catch up until he was seven."

William dropped the subject to help Lydia get some coffee ready. They went into the living room to drink it. "How can you live here? How can you stand to be here knowing the kid is his?" In truth, William didn't hate the child, he hated how the kid had come into this world.

Lydia took a deep breath. "Where else am I to go? I've known about it for the longest time, but what could I do? Edward is my only family. The only person I know."

"You know me, Lydia." He took her hand in his. "I'll take you from here. We'll find you a good doctor and see if you need help."

He could see that Lydia liked that idea. She needed help, but William knew Edward had just been telling her it was all her imagination. She wanted help of some kind to tell her all those strange dreams of dark tall men who told her they missed her, were not real, but just dreams. "Fine," she resolved. "I'll go with you. When though?"

"Tomorrow. After I sign for the money. We'll leave Davenport. I spoke to those people in Italy and they said they had connections in Chicago. I'll see if I can get more money by selling the land back to them. Even a million should be enough if spent wisely. I was never materialistic and we'll make it together. I can open up my own business."

Lydia said excitedly, "We can leave early in the morning, but I'll have to get in touch with Dr. Tad James. He holds something for me and I have to get it from him."

"When is the earliest you can get it?" William asked.

She checked her watch and thought a second. "He lives close to Bridgeclub. I could go over there tonight. I'll leave now and then I'll come back and pack late in the night." She kissed his cheek. "Thank you William. I now have something to really live for."

"Hurry back, Lydia. The sooner we leave, the better."

"I will. Promise to stay here until I get back?" she asked hopefully.

Reluctantly he promised. "Okay, Lydia, but don't stay long." The idea of being alone with Enid made his skin crawl.

"Don't worry. Edward won't suspect a thing."

When she was gone, he went to the kitchen to get something to drink and noticed that Isabella had left the apple pie on the counter. The maid was supposed to take the pie to her daughter for Lydia. He left it there, wondering if she might come back later tonight to get it. If she didn't come back by the time Lydia got back, he knew Lydia would put the pie away.

He went to his room and looked around. Edward was right. Everything was just the same. Isabella had kept the room in excellent condition. He took a shower and laid down with his jockey shorts on. In the back of his mind, he was consumed with thoughts of seeing Abigail. He knew if she were alive she would be thirteen by now.

Still quite young, but he knew just as beautiful, probably even more. He remembered so well drawing her close, whispering in her and smelling her innocence.

“Oh Abigail...,” he whispered in the darkness, wishing he could pull her to him again and feel her closeness. He let his mind and body relax as he fell into a dream-filled sleep.

As a little boy again he found himself tied by his ankles upside down, in the dark closet. His chest hurting and the dizziness of all the blood in his body rushing to his head was over coming him, but he would not close his eyes. He knew what would happen if he did. The tips of his fingers still hurt from the last time Javier had found him with his eyes closed. He let his body stay in that closet while his mind left that dark smelly place and went to somewhere pleasant...

...a woman's arms. He rested his head against her soft breast and held her tight. “Don't go,” he begged. “Don't ever leave me.” Soft hands caressed his face.

“I won't,” she whispered. He rolled her over until she laid over him. “Oh William. I promise to never leave you or ever forget you.” The voice was Abigail's voice, he was sure of it, with a sensual feel to it that aroused him to fullness.

“I know, but after all these years and all that has happened how do I know you've kept your promise?” he asked with a desperate tone to his voice needing to know she had remembered him.

“We know what we share is more powerful than life itself, William.” She took his hand and pressed his palm to her heart. “They beat as one, as we speak. I can feel you and you can feel me. Soon we will be together.”

“I want to be together now, Abigail.” He pulled her even closer and kissed her deeply. He couldn't believe how real this dream seemed. William never wanted to wake up. This was what he always wanted to hear from her lips.

“Soon my love,” she whispered holding him close.

He felt a strange shift as if the dream was changing, but he ignored this change, fighting to keep the dream going. “I missed you so much. So very much.”

When the voice spoke this time, it was different - of higher pitch and strangely upsetting to him. He frowned deeply in his sleep listening to the voice. “Oh Billy, I've missed you too.”

He still continued to ignore the change as he felt her straddle his legs. He dreamed he could feel those beautiful, tarnished, penny-colored eyes filled with love for him, looking down at him, but the voice was still not Abigail's anymore. “Take me Billy. Take me like you've always wanted to.”

He moved his hands upward past her...wide waist? Her full breasts? For some reason he knew what he was feeling was definitely not Abigail. He knew by now her body would be just developing, but not this...womanish?

“Abigail?” he questioned out loud in this sleep.

“No Billy! Who is Abigail?” the strange voice questioned.

As he recognized whom the voice really belonged to, disgust and anger filled him completely. He prayed this dream had turned into a nightmare and he would awake alone in his room, because if this dream had become reality, he would kill Enid!

William forced himself awake, coming to reality like a slap in the face.

Chapter 7

The room was dark, but the light coming from the hallway with the door partially opened gave him enough light to realize that it was not a horrible nightmare gone very badly. Enid leaned close to his face.

“Billy make love to me. Let's make love all night long.”

He was thoroughly disgusted and his lip curled in animosity. In a blink of an eye, he jumped up so fast he knocked her to the floor. She cried in pain as her back hit the ground hard. “What the fuck are you doing in here?!” he bellowed.

“Don't pretend we weren't just getting it on, Billy! You just said you wanted me,” she yelled, turning on the lights.

He fixed his boxers, glad that his manhood had gone down. “Get the fuck out of here, you little tramp, before I choke the living shit-” William watched as Enid's face started to change. Instead of the passionate angry look she had, it turned to a deathly pale, fearful expression, just like...before. He then heard movement behind him and turned to the door to see his uncle pointing a .38 caliber at him.

Enid cowered in fear. “H-Help me, Edward. He was t-trying to rape me,” she cried.

William groaned. Talk about de ja' vu's and all that crap about history repeating itself. “Dammit, if you believe one fucking word that bitch-”

“It doesn't matter what she says. I'll believe the story I tell the press when they find your dead body tomorrow.” Edward took a step into the room aiming the gun at William's chest.

William stood there stunned. Enid wrapped the sheets around her and went to Edward's side, smiling triumphantly.

“*Why?*” was the only word that could come out of William's mouth.

“Why?” Edward questioned back, cocking the gun. “One word – Money. Millions of dollars that could be mine. Blood means nothing to me William because all my blood ever did was hurt and disgrace me. I'll get that money when you're out of the picture, Billy.”

“Don't call me Billy,” he sneered, taking a step forward, but Edward didn't seem too afraid, just like William wasn't daunted by a loaded gun pointed at his chest.

“I've got it all planned, Billy. This is too perfect. With Lydia gone out of the house, a bullet in your chest will clearly tell everyone I was merely defending Enid's body from your ravishment. Everyone here knows why you were forced to leave and Lydia will believe that you were really trying to hurt her so long ago. No one will know it's a frame because no one will care. Everyone knows I'm a respected member of the community, but you're Javier's son. A son of a menace to society. A cold-blooded killer. They'll be glad to see you put to rest six feet under Davenport, right where you belong, in hell, next to my old man.”

Enid giggled. “Oh lover,” she said pressing against Edward. “You are a genius.” She stepped up to William. “You should have given me my way a long time ago, William and then we could have been rich together.”

In a motion so quick, William moved forward and snatched Enid by the arm, then dragged her in front of him.

“Let her go!” Edward demanded.

She screamed in pain. “He's hurting me Eddie!”

William shoved her towards Edward. It was hard to get in the way of the gun. Edward knocked her out of the way, but he was not fast enough to follow through with shooting the gun as William came in hard with a punch to his jaw.

The gun fell to the ground, as did Enid while William and Edward struggled wildly around the room. Enid backed from them to get out of the way.

Edward shoved William away and dove for the gun. William tackled him hard against the door. Edward brought his knee up and struck William in the groin. William backed away in pain, but when he saw Edward heading for the gun, he grabbed Edward's legs and struggled to hold him down, but Edward managed to crawl for the gun and get it. He turned, aiming it for William, but William moved out of the way and the bullet went into the wall about a foot away from Enid.

She shrieked and jumped over them running for the door. William was able to grab Edward's wrist, but at that instant the gun went off and the bullet entered Enid's back.

Both men ceased their fight instantly to watch as Enid fell to the ground, clutching her chest.

She opened her eyes and looked up at him. When she opened her mouth, blood ran down her cheek, but she managed to speak. “E-Edward...my love...take c-care...of our son.”

“Enid,” he cried.

William stood to watch as his step-cousin slowly died. Blood was spreading rapidly over her chest.

“E-Eddie,” she choked, in a soft, strained voice. “Don't...” a mouthful of blood came from her lips. “...d-don't...let me...die...die w-with...wedding...” She convulsed for air. “...die with my w-wedding ring...on.”

Edward hurriedly took her left hand and pulled off the gold band similar to his own wedding band. “You're going to be fine, love. I promise you.”

She weakly shook her head. “I-I have...have always...loved...” Her eyes closed and she released her last breath.

The room was quiet and William was speechless. How could Edward have married Enid if he was married to Lydia? He was so caught up in thought he didn't notice Edward reaching for the gun, but he was quick to react and caught Edward's wrist. The gun went off, but the bullet hit the dresser. William could hear the baby crying loudly from all the shots that had been fired. They struggled, both men equaled in size and strength, but William knew Edward had his anger behind him. William just had survival in his mind, but he didn't make it this far to die by his own uncle's hands.

He swung Edward around, until Edward's back was against the door. The gun, still held by both of them, moved between them, pointing downward in the struggle.

“Bastard,” Edward sneered. “You'll die.”

“In hell, you'll never get that money, you greedy son of a bitch-”

The gun went off suddenly, just as both men heard sirens over Dakota's screams.

Behind him, William heard someone scream, “Police! Put your hands up.”

William didn't move. His eyes stayed locked with his uncle's. William began to feel a hot stickiness on his chest. Both of them looked down only to see that the blood wasn't coming from William's chest. It was coming from Edward's. They looked at each other in disbelief.

“Put your hands in the air!” the cop bellowed again.

William saw the glazed look come in his uncle's light brown eyes as he put his hands up. Edward's lifeless body slowly slid to the ground at William's feet, but William was no longer looking at his uncle. He realized he felt a strange weight in his hand and when he looked up at his arm, he saw the gun there. How it had gotten in his hand he did not know, but he was holding the gun that had killed Edward and Enid Stone.

Chapter 8

Abigail turned off the radio when the DJ announced it was fifteen after eleven. She was supposed to be in bed, but she just couldn't sleep as she sat in her wheelchair by the closed balcony doors. The curtains were wide open, but she wasn't worried about privacy, because there was a thick wooden wall surrounding the property. It was raining heavily, but what could one expect, it was April.

“Shit! Shit!” she heard Ramsey bellowing in his office. She heard just about everything that was said in that office and of late, most of it had been about the murders in Lowry Park. Ramsey was basically obsessed with the suspected killer.

Listening to her father's conversations had always been a source of entertainment and learning for Abigail, especially when her parents treated her like she was still six years old and on top of that an invalid.

She may be unable to walk, but she was not a retard, nor was she still a baby. In June, she would be twenty.

Pushing away from the balcony windows, she guided her wheelchair to the closet where she knew she could get a better listen on her father's conversation.

Abigail's room was easy to maneuver around without the carpet in there and the little furnishings of a full size bed pushed up against the wall by the door, a night stand beside it and across the room, between the balcony and the closet, there was a place to study with a computer on it. There was a low dresser on the other side of the room right after the private bathroom. In front of everything, opposite the bed and entrance into the room, was a private balcony. The locks were broken on the doors, but Ramsey had never gotten them fixed and Abigail to leave them wide open in the summer time to catch cool night breezes. The high wooden fence around their house gave her security and enough protection. She also had a private bathroom equipped with enough bars in it for her to tend to herself without calling Ester, who now occupied Abigail's old room upstairs.

Abigail pressed her ear closely to the wall to listen to her father yell angrily at Adam Brown, his personal assistant and legal aid.

She remembered going to Lowry Park when she was very small - about six years old - with Robby, who pushed her into the Lowry pond on the way to school, ruining her favorite dress for picture day.

The murders all started a year ago when William Stone was released from prison on a wrongful conviction of murder. She remembered her father handling the case six years ago, before the murders started that sent William Castro-Chavez Stone to prison. The Hispanic maid who worked in the Stone household had seen and heard it all, which was how William had been released from prison. Her testimony had gained his freedom.

That night of Edward and Enid's murder, Isabella Luis had come back to retrieve the pie that Lydia had baked for her daughter. She heard the screaming of the baby and decided to see why Enid had not come to quiet the baby, then she heard the gunshots. Of course hearsay would not hold up in court of law and Ramsey had every intention of using that against Isabella, but she had brought her ten-year-old son, Michelangelo with her to the house that night and he had heard everything that had come from William's room. They were questioned separately and both came up with the same answers to all the investigator's questions.

Stone was released and that was when the murders began. The first one seemed random. A woman about the age of thirty was jogging through Lowry Park one night. Her body was found three months later, when the winter snow had melted. The autopsy results were the ultimate deathblow. There was no evidence of rape and a second autopsy proved that the stomach was carved out after the victim was dead. The marks in the stomach were not as old as the deceased.

Abigail remembered reading the story in the newspaper, it was as if the “killer had returned to the body at a later time – the same day” to remove the stomach.

The next body was found six months after the first victim was found. Everett Lloyd who was a prominent lawyer, was walking his dog, when he was attacked. He was beaten to death by an unknown object - believed to be a bare hand - crushing several bones in his chest and face, then his stomach carved out. He was found at the bottom of Lowry pond.

The third murder, three months later, found Cambridge Horn, nephew to the city police commissioner, dead under the Lowry Park Bridge. The killer had taken a knife from Horn's groin to his stomach, slicing him in half, ripping out his stomach and burning his hands. The killer had also stripped Horn's body naked and raped him.

This was where evidence of the killer had shown up. At first the paper said, police found pubic hair on Horn, but then it retracted and reported that the hair came from the top of someone's head. There were no other DNA traces, but there were signs that the killer had used a condom. With further testing and a deeper autopsy, police were able to get a substantial width and length of penetration the killer had reached and the exact measurements of his member.

With the hair sample, the police were able to get a positive ID of the killer: William Stone. It was his hair found in the groin area, but when he was dragged down and the police made a cast of his penis, the cast did not come close to whoever raped Horn, because William was much larger. On top of that, Stone had an alibi. He was in Italy a whole month at the time of Horn's believed death.

If this was a frame, who would want to frame him? Many thought it had to be enemies of Javier Castro-Chavez. The police had sought out enemies of Edward Stone and even Marie. They were even questioning Harrison about his whereabouts and investigating him.

The police had arrested Stone and was presently holding him until they were proof positive there was no possible way Stone could have gotten to the United States to murder or have been in the United States any date on or near the murder.

David had just come over demanding Ramsey to release Stone, who was his client. David had first approached Stone about becoming his lawyer when the young man was initially incarcerated for the deaths of his uncle and step-cousin. He was the one who had fought to find the evidence needed to release Stone and now he was currently representing Stone in this as well. All fingers pointed at Stone, but David stood his ground, along with a few others, including Abigail. For some strange reason, she didn't believe anything those papers or police had to say. He was innocent and all this was just to frame him.

"Ten thousand?! Are you crazy?" David had protested over the bail Judge Sheldon had set for William. Everyone knew Sheldon was a golfing buddy of Ramsey's.

"If he can afford one of the city's top-notch defense lawyers, then he can afford the bail," Ramsey said in a deceptively, calm voice.

"Especially since you've threatened every bail company not to help him out, right, Ramsey?" David sneered.

Ramsey feigned innocence. "I did no such thing, David." His voice filled with wickedness. "I just made them think twice."

David's temper exploded. "You've gone too far, Ramsey. TOO DAMN FAR!"

The door opened and Marilyn came in. "Keep it down the both of you. Abigail is trying to sleep. You know how rare that is."

Both men apologized and the door closed. Abigail guessed her mother had left. They kept their voices down, but their upset was still evident.

"Will your client be able to pay the fine, David?" Ramsey inquired, very interested in the answer.

"Of course he will. He's got a business to run. He can't stay in jail."

"Fine. Next time I'll make sure it's even more extravagantly larger."

"Dammit!-" David cut himself off.

Ramsey could rile the pope to anger if he had a chance, but David must have been thinking about Abigail, because he calmed himself when he said, "You're deceitful and hardheaded, Ramsey McPherson."

“I’m just making the city’s streets safe, David. That’s my job and when that killer is behind bars with consecutive life sentences I’ll only rest then and maybe even take my wife on a vacation.”

“He didn’t murder anybody!”

“Just his uncle and cousin, which we proved. The others, we’ll get to that. I put that asshole’s father away and I’ll gladly put the son away. I’ll make sure that he doesn’t have any bastards when I rip his fucking dick off and shove it down his damn throat. Why don’t you get it through your hardheaded skull that the son of a bitch is loony, just like his father and his grandfather and his whole damn family!”

David refuted this intensely. “Because he’s not! Edward wasn’t crazy. You people were going to elect him Mayor.”

Ramsey agreed. “He wasn’t. Yes, he gave me the creeps sometimes, but Edward Stone was probably the only one that was close to sanity, but that’s because he’s had therapy.”

“Haven’t you heard of self-healing?” David asked incredulously.

Ramsey huffed in disbelief. “There is no such thing, without professional help involved, in my book, David.”

“Well you should believe in it, because that kid of yours has done it. She didn’t make it this far without it.”

Now that made Ramsey upset. “You leave my daughter out of this. Matter of fact, I don’t want her name and Stone’s name to come up in the same sentence ever again. Self-healing my ass. He’s a crazy son of a bitch. I don’t care who says he isn’t.”

David stormed to the study door. Abigail could tell (by the way his voice was almost muffled) from the distance he was away from the wall she was trying to listen through. “Leave him alone, Ramsey, or my client won’t be responsible for his actions. You’re making him crazy, Ram, and I think that’s exactly what you want, isn’t it?”

Ramsey snorted, “Is that a threat?”

“It’s not a threat from me, I’m just warning you, leave William Stone alone.”

“When he’s in jail and will never come out, I will, David.”

David slammed out and Abigail moved away. Why wouldn’t her father listen and when was David going to stop everyone from thinking Stone did it?

Abigail had been keeping herself abreast of everything about the case, because she truly believed in William Stone’s innocence. She truly believed he wasn’t the man everyone made him out to be. He was different.

When Stone got out of jail, he started a small engine repair shop with a gas station, but when word got out his shop did excellent work, the business grew to full service. He had business from all over Ohio coming in and his staff had grown from two men - (a young man from down south looking for work named Stuckey and a parolee named Camp who was old, but could disassemble any car in less than one hour) - to a ten-employee business. The shop served cars twenty-four hours a day.

Abigail remembered when her mother's Volvo had broken down and the only place in the State of Ohio to get it fixed was at Stone's repair shop, but her father had towed it all the way to Michigan just to avoid taking the car to Stone's. Her parents had a big argument about it and in the end it only proved how stubborn her father was and would always be when it came to his animosity for William Stone.

Yet, she kept her opinion of the case to herself. There was no sense in letting people who knew her think she had her spirit back, when just the sight of seeing all those people walking, skipping and running around campus brought her spirits down. After she had come back from Detroit, she let her mother decide home study for her all the way through to college. She was enrolled in Ohio University going only once a week to turn in her papers and complete tests plus lab time and drafting hours. She was aiming to get her bachelor's in architectural design. She wanted to go for her Masters in building studies and was looking into colleges elsewhere, but Marilyn and Ramsey didn't know that. She would be twenty-one in four months and she knew she couldn't stay home forever. She didn't want to stay home forever. She wanted to get out, meet other people her age and above all be Abigail Yvonne McPherson.

Lively, spirited, and fun. She hated being this docile, fragile creature afraid to take chances and live life. Most of all, she was afraid to reach out to anyone? Why? She didn't know. She knew something before the accident or during the accident had made her like this. She knew deep down inside that she was afraid to reach out, because whomever she reached out to in the past did not help her when she needed help.

Chapter 9

The next morning, Abigail quietly listened as her father ranted over the speakerphone in his office to Investigator Hal Peterson, who had been assigned the serial murder case at the police department homicide division. They had found another body. This one was still fresh from early this morning. The victim was James Parson, son-in-law to the mayor's sister. He wasn't blood, but a close member of the family.

“What does his child going to day care have to do with Stone?” he demanded on his speakerphone.

“Well, sir, I've found two interesting things. One: All those victims had their car serviced at one time or another before their deaths at Stone's repair shop. Two: they all sent their kids to Davenport Academy Day Care Center, except the first victim didn't have children, but his girlfriend worked there.”

“Is that all you've found?” Ramsey asked desperately.

“One tiny other thing. I talked with a few friends who knew Stone down in Tampa. They said two days after Stone left Tampa, some scruffy teenager comes down there and started asking some serious questions about him. The guy was a pretty good mechanic and when he found out enough, he just disappeared. A lot of them said he had Tampa plates on his car, but kept telling everyone he was from New Orleans.”

Her father didn't really care about this information. One could hear it in his tone of voice. “But no proof on Stone, huh?”

“Well-”

“Listen. Haul his ass back down to the station and keep him for questioning until I get there. Go to Jamison for the arrest warrant. You hear me?”

“Every word, boss.”

“Then get his lawyer down there. Tell David I'll be speaking with him personally before releasing his client. Got it?”

“Yes, boss.”

“And quit calling me that.” He hung up and went into the kitchen. Abigail pushed herself to the door of her room and cracked it a bit to peak into the kitchen. Marilyn came around the table and kissed her husband on the cheek as she placed his breakfast on the table in front of him.

“I hope you're going to make up with David. July fourth is in three weeks and I won't have the two of you moping around here like the worse enemies spoiling our good time.”

Abigail came out of her room into the kitchen and said her cordial good morning to everyone. When they were all settled at the table, she decided to speak out, “Daddy, why do you think he's guilty?”

It was the first time she had ever questioned her father's job in a long time. When she was younger she always did it, yet now her questioning took her parents by surprise.

Ramsey played dumb. “Who are we discussing?”

“The only man you've seemed to become obsessed with convicting. The only man whose face appears in every news media around here. Need I go on?” she asked, her voice filled with sarcasm.

“No,” he said rather crisped. He looked up at her mother a little disturbed then looked back at Abigail.

“So why do you think he's guilty?” she asked, repeating her question.

“Do you think he's guilty?” He was placating her. Trying to turn the discussion on her thoughts and she knew this.

“I'm not the head Prosecuting Attorney and if you want my opinion, Daddy, no, I don't think he's guilty. Now answer my question.”

“Abigail-” His cajoling tone came into play, but Abigail was serious and she didn't want to be cajoled out of her present upset. She wanted answers.

She cut him off sharply with a demand. “Daddy, answer my question!”

Marilyn sat between the two and nudged her husband. Abigail would persist until she made herself very angry, they both knew that.

Ramsey took a deep breath not wanting her to get too upset. She had not responded like this in a long time. He was curious, Abigail could tell, as to what the end results would be to her questioning.

“Because of the body hair-”

“He was in Italy,” she cross-examined.

“The time of death was unsure.”

“He was framed,” she said quickly.

“By who? That's the question we can't figure out.”

“So you pin the murders on him to keep the public pointing fingers, right? When the finger pointing should be at the prosecuting attorney's office for doing such a lousy job on a very serious serial murder investigation.”

“Abigail, that's enough!” Marilyn ordered.

“No it isn't, Mother!”

Marilyn would have protested more, but Ramsey put a hand on his wife's hand to calm her.

Abigail continued. “He was framed, Daddy. The man has his own enemies, plus his father's, uncle's, grandfather's, and even his stepfather's. I heard the investigation on Harrison pulled up some excessive violent charges.”

“Where did you hear that from?” Ramsey questioned suspiciously.

Abigail blew this off, not wanting him to know she could hear right into his office and she listened all the time. "I watch television and I read the newspaper."

"Do you think he's crazy, or close to mentally disturbed, like the rest of his family, Abigail?"

"High-tempered and not great under stress, but far from crazy. His family's insanity may affect him in a lot of ways, but I do not think it would drive a man like him to insanity. Matter of fact, I think the man's quite intelligent. At the age of sixteen he received a perfect score on his SAT's and ACT's, which is pretty rare. He got his bachelor's in business administration, while he was locked away, not whining away time like most prisoners. He's not like his family at all. He understands the insanity and accepts it not fight, it like his father and grandfather did."

"What about Edward Stone?"

"His uncle only hid the morbid side of him. He changed his name, he tried to live normal. He hid what he knew was true and that just made it worse."

"I must agree, Abigail, Stone is smart. He's smart and more ruthless. He killed his uncle and cousin in cold blood."

"Accidents. I don't believe for one moment he did it, with intention of any kind."

"He had the gun in his hand!"

"The struggle to get it away from his uncle did it," she retracted just as high tempered as he was getting.

"That's enough the both of you!" Marilyn ordered. "If you two can't speak like normal civilized human beings then don't speak at all."

"Why do you persist in harassing him?" Abigail calmly asked.

"Because he happens to be going around killing good citizens of Davenport. Just like his grandfather did in New York. Just like his father did all around Ohio. It's my job, Abigail."

"What his father did was almost therapeutic for him in my opinion."

He shot out his chair. "Therapeutic!" he cried.

"Ramsey, don't yell-" Marilyn insisted.

"Mary, she's gone-"

"Don't yell!" his wife exclaimed firmly.

He plopped himself down in his chair and calmed himself down dramatically. "Gutting someone like a hunted animal is not therapeutic. Breaking every bone in someone's body with their bare hands, while they are still alive is not therapeutic."

“If you look at how Javier's killings were from a psychological point of view you would say therapeutic, wouldn't you Mom?” Abigail asked.

Even though Marilyn had her Doctorates in Psychology, Abigail knew her mother didn't want to get into this and take side, but Ramsey didn't even let her answer. “Javier killed just as similar as his father.”

“But it wasn't just anybody. It was specific. People who had done things to children. He couldn't have been that crazy, if he knew what they were doing. He was doing it to get his father back. True, it was a rather sick way for revenge, but it helped him stay sane enough so that no one knew of his dark side. Even William didn't know of his father's killing-” she was cut off.

“Enough!” Ramsey stood up. “Wouldn't it be therapeutic for William to go out there and gut someone?”

“No. William is not like that. He's different,” Abigail stated obviously.

“How do you know?” Ramsey asked.

She didn't yet know, there was just this gut feeling inside of her that told her William Stone was different from all the other men in his family. He had arisen above them all and come out on top. He wouldn't allow the madness to lead him as it had led the others. He would survive, but she couldn't tell her father this. He would think she was crazy. “I don't,” she answered her father's question after a brief moment of confusing silence.

“I'm not going to reason with you on this subject, Abigail. Just like I wouldn't be able to reason with David.”

“Because there's no reasoning about it. He's innocent and if you keep pushing him he might do something.”

“Like what?” he questioned.

She remembered David's threat. “Like finding a way to push you back. He's not a man who takes the thing you to him do lying down.”

“Do you want me to fear him, Abigail?”

Her eyes met her father's directly undaunted and not intimidated. “No,” she said firmly. “I'm just warning you not to push your luck, because it's only a matter of time before your luck runs out with William.”

“I don't believe in luck.”

“Well, you better hope he doesn't either, Daddy.”

“SIX HOURS! Six hours out of this place and he's right back in it? You'd better have something now!” David demanded, pounding his fist on the table that divided him from Ramsey.

“More hair samples and sperm this time.” He dropped the autopsy copy on David's briefcase. “Your client has been strip-searched because we found nails missing on this victim's body.”

“Another rape-murder?”

“Damn right. I'd say you were defending a fucking homo.”

David swung violently at Ramsey, so enraged, but Ramsey ducked and his men came to his defense holding David back from doing any further damage. When David calmed down, Ramsey ordered them to release his friend.

“Is that his sperm?” David demanded to know.

“We're running tests, but because the sample is so small, the special lab we sent it to can't determine the results for two more weeks. He voluntarily took a blood sample and he's pleaded not guilty - AGAIN,” Ramsey pointed out.

“Because he's not guilty, you hard-headed asshole.”

“I have proof-”

“That's not worth shit!” David cut him off. “Fuck your damn proof, Ramsey. Did you find scratches?”

“Hell yes! On his back.” Ramsey said triumphantly.

Hal Peterson, the detective in charge of the case, who was on Ramsey's side cleared his throat to draw attention to himself in the far corner of the room. “I would like to specify, David, we found traces of sperm outside of the victim's body and we believe a condom was used, due to the spermicide which was also found on the body-”

Ramsey cut him off. “The whole thing turns my stomach, dammit.”

David put his head in his hands- his usual thinking position - and leaned against the desk. When he had his thoughts under control, he took the file Ramsey had put on top of the briefcase. He searched through it, trying to find something he could use. There had to be something to show William had nothing to do with this, but whoever was trying to “frame” William was getting better and better at making it look as if William were guilty.

A knock on Ramsey's door brought in Dr. Albert Gallagher, who performed the autopsy of the current victim and was delivering the report to Ramsey's office. He explained out loud exactly what had been found. “The scratches on the back and the missing nails don't match. The width is too small on the

suspect's back. Mr. Stone's scratches were definitely done by a woman, when the victim is male, plus the scratches on Mr. Stone's back are about a month old.”

Ramsey and David looked at each other not believing their ears.

“Are you sure?” David asked now looking at Hal.

“Positive.”

“And the sperm?” Ramsey demanded to know.

“Strangely his,” the doctor said, “But it's also a month old. You'll need to ask Stone who he was with a month ago.” This was said to David. “The sperm had been frozen, most likely in the condom because I found some crystallization of spermicidal fluids inside the anus.

“So you feel it could be a frame up again?” David asked conclusively.

“You would like that!” Ramsey sneered before the doctor answered. “He's not qualified to answer that question.”

“I dispute you,” David refuted. “His medical opinion and years at his job make him qualified to know if something was done intentional.”

Obviously, Dr. Gallagher agreed with David's point because he answered, “That's what it points to. The sperm was not deposited there naturally, but I did find dried saliva droppings on the back of the victim. Someone with type O blood. Stone's an AB, just like his father and his grandfather.”

“And the hair?” David persisted.

“The hair is Stone's and this time it is from his public area, but it still doesn't make sense to me, since there was soap caking the hair found as if Stone didn't rinse off after taking a shower.”

“Who asked you?” Ramsey snapped, not at all liking the way the evidence was stacking up - as usual - in Stone's favor.

David gloated, “Did you take your report over to Judge Jamison, yet?”

“I faxed him a copy and he said he would be calling over his verdict after reviewing it, but I did inform him more information would be coming.”

“In whose favor?” Ramsey sneered.

“You be the judge of that , sir. The double edge knife did not wrench Parson's gut out this time, but a single edge. The blanket underneath the victim at the time of discovery was too neat.”

“What's that supposed to mean?” Ramsey asked.

“It's sad to say, but I believed Mr. Parson was willing to let this happen,” Dr. Gallagher answered.

“He wanted to die?” Ramsey questioned.

The doctor shook his head and responded, “No. There was no forced penetration. There was even Vaseline in and around the anus.”

“A lover's tryst gone bad,” Peterson concluded.

“It's only assumed. I suggest further investigation into the victim's lifestyle,” the doctor precluded.

Peterson left the room to get right on it.

The phone rang. It was Judge Jamison dismissing charges on grounds of insufficient evidence.

“I'll go down and free my client.” David left, while Ramsey wallowed in his anger.

Chapter 10

They had taken him out of the cell an hour ago, after he had trashed the confined room. He even ripped the phone from the wall in his anger. They had tried to restrain him with a jacket, but he'd gotten from that and they were forced to chain him.

A whole hour William sat in that room before anyone came. A whole hour felt like a lifetime when he was this angry. The first and second arrest was ridiculous, but he had gone along because David had asked for his cooperation, but now it was becoming stupid and disrupting his life. He knew where the blame belonged. Not the incompetent police force. Not even that asinine detective, Hal Peterson. It was the head of the prosecuting attorney's office who was to blame for all this crap! Ramsey McPherson was the pain and William was going to find a way to make Ramsey's life a living hell, just like the head prosecuting attorney had done to his. An eye for an eye.

“What the hell is going on here?!” David bellowed, coming into the room. “Get those off him!” he ordered the policemen.

“They were for his safety,” the guard explained, after ordering someone to bring the key.

“Safety my ass. Who ordered this?” he demanded to know.

No one seemed to know or no one wanted to tell.

David went to William. He was a huge man. Coming into the room to see the man chained to the chair had been a ghostly sight. Obviously the man had been fighting even in the chair, because as the chains were removed fresh bruises were evident on his arms and shoulders.

“Are you all right?” David asked in concern.

Even after the chains were taken off, he still couldn't get up because his hands were handcuffed behind him. "Does it fucking matter?" William sneered, trying to stretch his arms out somewhat to get the circulation going.

"Do you want to press charges against them, William? I'd do it gladly."

William looked weirdly disturbed as his eyes narrowed to slits. "And get the wrong department? It wasn't the police who ordered it. It was the damn prosecuting attorney. When I see him I'll--"

"What?" Ramsey sneered at the doorway, calmly crossing his arms in front of him and leaning against the wall as if he had nothing to worry about. "You'll do what?"

"Rip your fucking balls off, you goddamn bastard, because obviously you've got too much."

"Fuck you!" Ramsey said vehemently.

The handcuffs came off holding him around his waist at that moment and William stood so fast the chair toppled back. "You stay the fuck away from me, McPherson."

"I'll do what I please and I'll push you until I catch you making a mistake, just like your old man, Billy," he viciously taunted.

William tensed at the nickname. "I'm not my father."

"You're just like him, but you think you're smarter. You're nothing but a crazy fuck. Just like your father and your grandfather, Billy."

He moved so swiftly for a man his size, David blinked before he realized William was choking the life out of Ramsey. What was utterly amazing was not only William successfully holding Ramsey against the wall to achieve the hold, but he had lifted Ramsey a foot off the ground and was maintaining this position without any effect even as the two guards were trying to pull his arms away. Ramsey was no small man and it had amazed everyone in the room at how easily William made this feat seem.

"William let him go!" David ordered, realizing Ramsey desperately trying to get out of the steel hold of William's grip.

William had never been this close to Ramsey, so he had never noticed the man's penny brown eyes. So extraordinary just like...

"Now!" David bellowed.

Releasing his hold, William allowed the officers hold him back, too dazed to really fight.

Ramsey fought for regular breathing. "T-That will cost you a night in jail, buddy, and a hefty fine."

William threatened through clenched teeth, "That's just a warning to leave me the fuck alone."

“Fuck you! Your lawyer may get you out today, but I swear, I'll lock you away just like I did your old man, you crazy bastard.”

“Get a life, you rat's ass, before I really do some bone breaking on you. I'll crush you so bad you'd wish you'd died.”

“It just goes to show you're just as crazy as your father.”

Something clicked in William. An uncontrollable fury that surpassed common sense and he flung the guards off him like paper dolls, then charged at Ramsey.

Ramsey, being no small man and in very good shape, but five inches shorter than William's towering six feet six height took on this fight with gusto, but William's hatred was strong for this man and Ramsey was relieved the guards - about eight of them - pulled William off of him.

“I'm going to rip your fucking lungs out and shove ‘em up your ass!” William roared as they held him down - or at least they were trying.

David was helping Ramsey up, all the while William was hurling threats at Ramsey.

“By the time I finish with you, they won't even recognize you!” William promised.

Ramsey grinned even though it hurt to grin; he did it any how. “Your threats are meaningless to me, Stone.”

William's lip came up in a vicious snarl that looked as if he were going to foam at the mouth any minute. He looked like a wild animal with his shoulder length hair gone wild from the struggling, his clothes ripped and the marks on his face (Ramsey had managed to get in from the attack) were beginning to show.

He let the guards put the handcuffs on him from behind. All the while, David could see the young man was thinking or really searching for Ramsey's weak spot.

“I'm going to get you, McPherson,” William sneered, wanting to punch that grin off Ramsey's smug face.

With great confidence, Ramsey scoffed, “You don't scare me, Billy. I'd take you on anywhere any day.”

David groaned. “Just leave Ramsey.”

“And if I don't leave you alone?” Ramsey questioned William from his latest threat.

William's eyes went to slits, turning almost a burnt yellow. It was clearly seen on his face how much he wanted to hurt this man. There was no doubt given the chance, Ramsey could probably get close to giving William a fighting challenge considering Ramsey's size, but William had to find a way to rile him. “You'll be sorry, McPherson. Maybe I won't hurt you. Maybe I'll hurt that little red headed wife.” He

carefully gauged Ramsey's face for emotional. "Yeah, I see that ring on your finger." He licked the blood off his bottom lip where Ramsey had busted the skin.

Ramsey tensed, but he didn't say a word.

William knew he hadn't hit the spot yet. So his mind raced to find Ramsey's weak spot using slang to really irate the prosecutor. "Bet'cha have a kid or two? A son? Naw, you're too weak to have a boy." He smiled lewdly in satisfaction seeing the twitch in Ramsey's. "A girl. A little girl." William leaned into Ramsey despite the guards holding him. "Maybe I'll fuck that red headed wife of yours, then carve out her cunt just cause you fucked her then slice her like a ham at Christmas. And maybe after I show your wife what a real man is like I'll pole your kid." He sneered triumphantly as Ramsey's fist balled up and those eyes lit up in anger as William continued to hiss. "Yeah, I'll ream your daughter out and make her a real woman. I'll fuck-" He was cut off as Ramsey tackled him hard against the wall, then when he fell to the ground he felt a hard fist connecting with his face.

The two guards had to pull Ramsey off of defenseless William with handcuffs on and unable to fight back.

"You better think fucking twice about messing with me again you fucking asshole, because next time won't be a threat." The guards moved the cuffs to the front of William for his protection against Ramsey.

"I'm going to make sure those never come off, killer," Ramsey swore.

"And I'm going to make sure you're sorry for fucking with me, asshole." The guards were trying to drag William out of the room, but William let them pull him only so far. "I'll fuck that little girl so good she'll never want another man again, McPherson. She won't be your little girl again, she'll belong to me. I'll be the first to taste her innocent sweetness, won't I? Or is she a dirty whore like your wife was, huh?"

Ramsey roared in anger and David had to help hold him back. Other guards came to assist. Two guards stood by William's side in hopes of defending him from the prosecuting attorney.

"This isn't over?!" Ramsey threatened.

"Damn right you self-righteous son of a bitch. Maybe that bitch wife of yours will have my kid too."

"Shut-up!" David bellowed wishing William would stop taunting Ramsey. "Just shut the fuck up. Get him out of here!" he ordered the guards who held William as they put the handcuffs in front of him, just in case Ramsey decided to lose his mind again. They started to lead him out of the room.

"Bastard," Ramsey sneered.

William stopped walking right in front of Ramsey and spat a mouthful of blood at Ramsey's feet. "I bet she hits better than you. Tell the wife and kid I'll be over soon."

The guards held Ramsey, while the others pushed William with a sneering grin on his face. With his lip busted, blood running down his face and his pitch-black hair on the loose, he looked like the crazed killer everyone thought him to be.

David had never seen Ramsey escalate to such violence before. It was always the other way around. Ramsey escalated others. Neither had David seen William become so violent either. Did they do it to each other? Did they really hate the other that much?

Ramsey ordered everyone out, except David. When the door was closed he faced his friend.

"How does he know?" Ramsey demanded to know.

"Know what? About Angela and Robby? I don't know. This is the first time he's ever said something."

Ramsey bellowed, "Dammit, did you tell him?"

"No!" David said fiercely. "I haven't uttered a word to anybody."

"Then how does he know?!" he screamed hysterically. "No one knew, but Jamison, you, me and Marilyn."

"Let's not forget Lowell Crane."

"How can I?" He put his face in his hands to calm himself.

David was confused as well. "I'll ask okay, but trying to get a straight answer out of him will be hard."

"I need to know. Marilyn needs to know. If that...if it got out do you know how much..." Ramsey stopped himself too distraught over the ramification of the truth that William knew. The thought was terrifying to David as well. "They would hurt her all over again. She's been through too much already, David."

David wasn't sure if Ramsey was speaking of Marilyn or Abigail. "I'll try." He left the room and headed down to where they kept the prisoners after getting a bail drawn up, William's bail was ten thousand dollars.

"You'll be a broke man if this keeps up," he cajoled his client.

"Fuck you," William sneered. "I'll pay the damn bail."

"Are you going to answer me some questions?" David demanded.

“Does it have to do with the murders?”

“No.”

“Would it harm the case?”

“It would harm a friend of mine.”

William's derision was very evident. “If you think I fucking care about harming Ramsey McPherson, you're as stupid as he is. He can kiss my ass.”

“This has nothing to do with McPherson. It's Marilyn I'm concerned about and their daughter.”

William's eyes lit up and David watched in amazement as that cat like yellow appeared. “He really does have a daughter still?”

David was confused now and his face showed it.

“Didn't they all die? Ten years ago. I saw...I heard Lowell Crane killed them.” He said flustered.

David had heard the mistake, but didn't push it. “He killed two of them. Ramsey's daughter lived. She's in a wheelchair, but if you really know about Lowell Crane, you should know about that.”

“I knew Lowell Crane fathered two children of Marilyn's while she was married to McPherson. Which one? Which daughter lived?”

David sensed a real need to know, but why? Why did it seem so important to William? “You tell me what you-”

“No I won't,” William seethed.

“Then you'll never know will you? Stay away from McPherson and his family.” David left the room. He would tell an officer to inform William about the restraining order he knew Ramsey would get on William. Hopefully, Stone could stay out of trouble until he could get all this mess straightened out.

David decided to contact his legal aid and send him on a little trip to Florida. Maybe there was more to William's life while he was down there that David had looked over during his investigation.

Abigail went to her room quickly to hear her father speaking to Hal on the speakerphone. Hal was confused because William had called in for work two days in a row. Everyone knew William Stone was a work-aholic and never missed a day rain or shine unless criminal circumstances prevented - as they had very recently. William was at work more than he was at home according to Hal.

At the time her father was speaking to Hal on the phone, Hal was parked a house down on surveillance from the loft, William lived in an Industrial part of Davenport and speaking to her father on his cell phone, which had a bad connection, with a lot of static.

“He's still home?” Ramsey question on the other line

Hal cleared his throat uneasily, knowing he was on the speakerphone and he never liked those. “He's been there for the past two days. He hasn't come out for one thing. I'm sure he's there because two of his employees came over to see him.”

“Who?”

“Stuckey West and Camp Anderson.”

“How long did they stay?”

“Stuckey stayed about an hour and Camp stayed about five, left to get Chinese then came back. You think something's up boss?” Hal asked, who seemed to be trying to search for an answer to what was going on.

“I don't know. He's got something up his sleeve, but I don't know what. Call me if something happens.”

As soon as Ramsey hung up, something happened and Hal called right back.

David was parked about four houses away from Hal on the same side of the street. He had been on a surveillance of his own client and Hal since midnight. He saw Hal put down the phone and duck down in the car, so David looked through his binoculars aiming them towards the entrance of William's loft.

William came out of the apartments with dirty coveralls on to go over to the hardware store right across the street from his place. David remembered Stuckey going over there yesterday from his place with a long list of items and when Hal questioned the guy at the hardware he was told Stuckey had given him a list of supplies, board, and other things William wanted on his account and that William would be picking it all up at three the next day. David had called the man after Hal left to find this information out of what Hal had done.

David looked at his watch. William was an accurate young man for twenty-two, but he could set a watch by the boy and his perfection tendencies terrified David.

Soon as William had entered the store, David watched as Stuckey came out of nowhere and walked into the apartments. William came out of the store about twenty minutes later with a young man helping him carry supplies. David knew this boy was eighteen and Camp's nephew, Andrew Anderson.

They went into the apartments and David frowned as Stuckey came out with something inside his coat, but he looked so sneaky. Obviously Stuckey didn't want William to know he had gone in his apartment, but why?

David called Hal on his cell phone. "It's David. I know you're watching my client as usual, aren't you?"

"Maybe I am. Is it against the law to sit in my car and just enjoy this beautiful day?" Hal asked evasively.

"Bullshit. If you're wondering what he's doing, he's doing repairs on his van. He called me late last night and told me to tell you what he's doing so you can stop watching him," David said.

"He knew?" Hal questioned.

"He's known all along. Next time, don't park in a car with police plates."

"How's he fixing his van?" Hal asked suspiciously.

David gladly explained. "The apartments have lowered parking due to the small streets. Are you going to persist in this spy game?"

"I have my orders," Hal said simply as if it were obvious to anyone why he would be out on the street this early in the morning.

David hung up and knew Hal would most likely try to find out about what William was really doing inside of the parking garage. David decided to call Ramsey and make him order Hal to leave.

William's strange behavior had gotten to David as well, but David figured things would be known sooner or later.

Ramsey sounded confused. "He built what?"

"A skylight," Hal said. He had come over four hours after his last phone call to her father this morning.

Abigail's neck was starting to hurt from pressing it up against the wall so much the whole day. Right after Hal's second call that morning, David had called and argued with her father about Hal "spying" on William Stone.

Hal continued explaining what he had done. "I climbed on top of the van and looked inside while no one was around. He designed a bed in the back and added on a partition for more room. It's really state of the art." He clearly sounded impressed.

"Why?" Ramsey asked, still confused.

"I don't know. He even added track lighting and..." he paused. "He made some device. A special floor underneath the van that came out. I don't know how, but it's really weird. It's like a compact RV in a fifteen passenger van."

Ramsey was drumming the desk uncomfortably. Her father had been on edge since the other day when he had taken out of the restraining order and told Abigail to look out for suspicious persons hanging out around the house. "Something's up. I can feel it in my bones."

"Maybe it's a hobby," Hal suggested. "In jail, I heard he redesigned a lot of cars, van, and RV's for the guards."

"What else did he do in jail?"

"Well his main interest was automobiles, which was why the warden thought him to be strange to study International business with psychology as his minor. He also dabbled in electronics as well. Not to change the subject, but while I was digging around Stone's past, I also found out about when Edward was found in that closet. You want to know why he was put in that closet?"

"Why?" Ramsey questioned.

"Because Javier got in contact with a Roberto Dalton Bellini the first. Do you know who that is?" Hal asked impressed.

"Who?"

"About the richest man in the east, besides Donald Trump, in real estate. He started Bellini Real Estate when he came to America a very long time ago and changed his name to Bellini because Bellinodos was too difficult for a lot of people to get with. Bellinodos is the name of the second largest wine distributor in Italy to be inherited by Roberto's great grandson, Bryan Bellini."

"What does this have to do with Stone and Edward in a closet?"

"William's the only other stockholder in Bellinodos."

"How did he do this?" Ramsey asked incredulously.

"William Stone's great grandmother is Yexsenia Bellinodos. Her father and Stone's great grandfather are cousins and was also part owner of the Bellinodos Winery. As a wedding gift, his great grandfather gave it to his daughter, Yexsenia who gave it to her oldest child, William Chavez, who in turn gave it to his son, Yared, when Stone's father was eight. Yared's father died that year and the woman who had guardianship of Yared abused him as did her boyfriends. Yared ran away at seventeen and after that the Bellinodos family lost track of the stock and the bloodline after that. I found all this from speaking with Antonio Bellinodos, the first from Italy, who is almost about as old as a damn century. He said Yared shows up in New York one day and wants to turn the stock back over to the Bellinodos family. He wanted nothing

to do with it anymore. Yared knew then that he was fucked up in the head and didn't want any bloodline of his getting their hands on it even though he had already transferred the stock over to Javier. Yared sent his son to pick up the stock from the bank boxes and meet Yared at the office, but Javier never showed up. Edward could never have told Yared where Javier was, because Edward never that knew Javier ran away.”

Ramsey questioned, “How does Antonio Bellinodos know about this when he's all the way in Italy?”

“You forget Javier is still alive. He is incarcerated for three life terms, but still alive and writing letters to his great grandfather's best friend, who happens to be Marie's cousin, in Italy.” He continued, “I also found out that Marie and Harrison were never legally married. She was still married to Javier.”

“I thought they never married.”

“Marie was a smart girl in some cases. She got Javier drunk one night, after she found out that he had knocked her up. He told her about stealing the stock, taking out life insurance, and getting money from it. He said he wanted to make a better life for himself and to. To go on the straight and narrow, but Marie knew he wouldn't. She kept him drunk long enough to say ‘I do’ so she could get her hands on the money. More for security than anything else, which is why she never told anyone about the money or even made an attempt to use it, unless it was an emergency situation,” Hal explained.

“She kept it all those years?”

“Yes and now William’s got it. Everybody knows the story of Edward dying, but little is said about where Edward went after dinner. He went to see Gerald Holt, Javier's private lawyer, to see about getting his hands on the money from that stock. There's a clause in Yexsenia's father's will that says the oldest Chavez son or his family get the stock. If in an event the oldest son dies without an heir, the stock can only be given back to the youngest living Bellinodos son. Edward would have only gotten the money, but no more dividends from the stock.”

“Who would have gotten it?”

“Well, it's really complicated, but the stock would have eventually returned to Bryan Bellini and he would be sole owner of the company.”

“But the attempt on William's life failed.”

Hal agreed to this, “Yes and William still has the stock and the dividends are still racking up in his favor.”

“And William is not a bastard,” Ramsey said disappointedly. “He's a wealthy legitimate psycho which is even worse.”

“He was conceived in wedlock if that's any help,” Hal said trying to make him feel better. “But we did get off the subject.”

Ramsey asked, clearing his throat, "So you don't know why he did that to his van?"

"No, boss."

"I told you not to call me that." There was a small pause, no doubt her father was deep in thought over everything Hal said to him. "Find out and keep watching him. Got it?"

"Yes sir," Hal answered and left the room.

Abigail moved away from the wall to give her neck a rest. To know William was wealthy greatly increased her opinion of him. Why would he want to throw all of that away to kill someone? He could afford maybe the best damn psychiatrist in the world. On top of that, everyone knew he loved his business and business was going extremely well for him, despite people like Ramsey McPherson, who went out of their way not to go to William Stone's business. She wondered had her father's opinion changed of William, likely not! There could never be the possibility of Stone and her father actually coming to an agreement on anything - EVER!

Chapter 11

"Have you told him yet?" Abigail whispered to her mother while Ramsey was still in his study on the phone with Hal. If he wasn't doing that these days, he was arguing with David on the guilt that lay in William Stone's lap and divided the small town of Davenport.

Marilyn whispered, "Hush and no. So just be quiet, Abigail. I told you I wouldn't tell until I'm sure."

The doorbell rang and Abigail went to get the front door. Her father had made a peephole for her to see through the door, so she would be able to answer the door.

She opened the door to David and smiled warmly up at him. "Hi, Uncle David."

He hugged her tightly lifting her up slightly in his strong arms. "How's my princess?"

She blushed. "I'm not a little girl anymore, David." She kissed his cheek, after he placed her back in her chair.

"But you'll always be my princess, Abigail," he said dearly.

"And she'll always be my sweetheart," Ramsey said, coming up to them out of his office.

Abigail wondered if she should go to her room to listen. David knew it was after dinner and it was family night. This was the precious time the family spent together, so there had to be a good reason as to why he was here.

“What's going on David? Why is Hal asking me if I spoke with you?” Ramsey questioned.

They proceeded to the living room. “Well, I told him something that not even he knew about, but I'll give him credit since it happened two hours ago.”

“My veritable font informant doesn't know something?” Ramsey teased, after inviting David to sit down. Marilyn was getting coffee for the both of them. Abigail placed herself by the doorway, not getting in their way while they spoke, but stayed within earshot so she could get input and output of this very interesting conversation.

In her most calm tone, she inquired of David, “Does it have to do with William Stone?”

David raised a brow, a little surprised at the interest in Abigail's eyes, although she was keeping a calm tone. “Sort of. Do you find this all interesting, Abigail?”

She gave him her best nonchalant attitude, but she heard her father snort, knowing he was still remembering her conversation with him not too long ago. “A little,” she lied. In truth, everything around this case had been exciting. This had been the most interesting thing that had happened in Davenport in a long time. It was better than any soap opera.

“What do you mean sort of?” Ramsey questioned, getting a little curious as to what David knew and what Hal didn't know.

“Harrison Douglas committed suicide two hours ago. Shot himself in the mouth with his own service pistol,” David announced.

“Why would he shoot himself?” Marilyn asked, coming into the room.

David directed his answer to Ramsey. “The investigation you had Newport police start on Harrison as a suspect to the frame up angle on Stone turned up something. In short, a bird that felt the pressure decided to sing instead of being caught in the nest. Harrison never made a big thing about losing the money to William, because he had two million in a Swiss bank account.”

“You're serious?” Ramsey asked, very surprised.

“As a heart attack. It seems old Harrison had been in the drug scene, by taking drugs gotten in bust and putting them back on the street. The birdie was his ex-girlfriend, who helped him get into a lot of the evidence rooms,” David explained.

“Why did she leave him?” Abigail asked, which she knew Ramsey wanted to know as well.

David answered, “She said two million wasn't worth the beatings he delivered. He's had a record of excessive force and he was denied six promotions due to his violent nature. Where does this leave you, Ram?”

“Well, he can rest assured he's not counted as a suspect for these murders,” Ramsey said, caustically.

“Does William know of Harrison's suicide?” Abigail inquired.

Ramsey frowned in a disapproving way, as if Abigail had asked about birth control or permission to have sex. “You'll refer to him as Mr. Stone, Abigail,” he ordered.

David had also frowned at Abigail with Ramsey. “I was on my way to give him the news, but I'm sure he's found out about it already.”

“I'm kind of tired,” Abigail lied to find an excuse for leaving. “I'm going to bed early tonight.”

“Do you need any help?” Marilyn asked worriedly.

“No Mom. I'll be fine. I'm a big girl.” Abigail rolled in her room and closed the door slightly, but pressed her ear against it to hear what they were saying knowing they were all waiting for her to leave.

Marilyn was quite bothered and said, “I'm wondering if all this talk about suicide, murder, and just these deaths in general makes Abigail depressed, Ramsey. I've never liked when you've brought work home and lately that's all anyone in this household ever talks about is the Lowry Park murders. I'd appreciate if the two of you didn't discuss that man in front of her. Or anything that has to do with William Stone. I think it upsets her and it upsets me when she's upset.”

David said, “I think she's just curious and wants to know a lot about him. I mean there's a study saying a lot of women think he's quite handsome. Has anyone thought of that possibility?”

“Don't even think like that, David,” Ramsey growled.

“Just when she's almost returning to normal, this has to happen,” Marilyn huffed.

“We'll keep it quiet around here, Mary,” Ramsey promised, kissing his wife.

David agreed, but added, “Although I think we should look at it all positively. This is the first thing she's bothered to pay attention to in a while, other than her studies.”

Marilyn huffed some more and left.

“I heard you were getting a security system,” David said.

Ramsey answered, “Mary's been a little paranoid about our safety. I'll confess and say I'm a little uptight, especially after Stone threatened me like that. I'm not scared of the man, but I don't doubt he'll try to get me where it would hurt.” He glanced towards Abigail's room then back at David with his dark brow furrowed. “I thought it was a good idea for her sake.”

Abigail couldn't tell if her father meant her or her mother, but she continued to listen.

“And how is Abigail feeling about everything going on around here?” David asked.

“Surprisingly the threat didn't bother her. She just gave me an 'I-told-you-so' look,” her father answered.

“Why?”

Ramsey sighed tiredly. “She said a couple of days ago that if I kept pushing him, he'd make threats. She was right, but I never told her this. It just bothers me the way she seems to know him so well and what he'll do. I especially didn't like her being so concerned about whether he knows about Harrison's death or not.”

“Do you actually think he would harm her?” David questioned.

Her father's voice became very deep and brooding. “I think he would do anything to hurt me. He must have felt what she means to me. I wanted to kill him with my bare hands. She's all I have David and I love her. If he ever puts his hands on her I would kill him.”

Abigail closed the door as quietly as possible, wondering what threats had William Stone really made. Her father only said he'd made derogatory statements and threats toward the McPherson family. Would William hurt her to get to her father? The thought sent chills through her body.

Her thoughts then turned to Harrison Douglas' suicide and how William would feel about it. She snuck in her father's study when no one was around a while ago and read reports from the prison psychiatrist, which said Harrison had beaten William severely. She also had to wonder if Harrison was the real killer would this mean no more murders in Davenport?

She could only wait and see what the future held, but her belief in William's innocence held firm. It wasn't the hype about his good looks; although she had to agree they were evident from what the cameras showed on television as he was leaving or going in the police precincts or courtrooms; nor was it about him being so dangerous women were attracted to him for that. Abigail firmly believed in William because her gut and her heart were a part of the decision and when they worked together she knew there was nothing to prove she was wrong. Her heart and gut instincts never lied to her.

Now she just wished her gut and heart were in to her getting out of this chair and taking her over to her bed. The day had been very tiring and she still had so much to do. Just as she pushed herself away from the door, she heard the doorbell ring again and curiosity had her rolling back to her door and cracking it a bit to hear what was going on. Who else would be calling on them this late at night that a phone call couldn't solve?

Marilyn answered the door. “Mother McPherson? What are you doing-”

“Where's my son?” Rebecca McPherson cut her daughter-in-law off while barging in the front door with half of her wardrobe in luggage. She met up with David and Ramsey, who were coming out of the living room. “Ramsey!” she cried and hugged her son. “I heard the news. I can't believe how time repeats itself and now the threats. I felt it in my old bones to come and see about you and Abigail. How's my baby? Is she still up?”

Ramsey was just as shocked as his wife. “Mother, what are you doing here?”

“To see Abigail, to be honest,” Rebecca answered. “Something told me she would need me.”

“Mother, she is fine,” Ramsey insisted.

Rebecca's attention was drawn to David. “You look familiar.”

Ramsey decided to introduce this close friend of the family to his mother. “You remember him, Mother. He went to school with us. He was at our wedding. This is David Reichard-”

“Dear Lord!” she shrieked hysterically at her son. “You brought that devil's lawyer into the same house as my baby?” She turned to Marilyn. “What kind of mother are you to let him come near my precious granddaughter?!”

Marilyn defended herself standing akimbo. “David's been a friend of the family for years, Mother McPherson.”

“Your friend, Marilyn? I should have known.” She turned to David. “Get out, sir. You are unwanted here, because of the devil's connection you have. He's here through you and I won't have any of him near my baby. Get out and never come back.”

Ramsey protested, “Mother, David is my friend.”

David saw the conflict about to explode and as amusing as it all seemed he thought it best to get out while this woman was still acting civilized. “I should be going anyway. It's late. Good night, Mrs. McPherson.”

“And don't come back!” Rebecca hissed.

Marilyn huffed angrily and excused herself to the kitchen.

Abigail knew Rebecca had a way of upsetting everyone and everything with her dominant presence. That was where Ramsey got his bullying from.

“Mother, why are you here? I thought you were traveling the islands?” Ramsey questioned.

“I was until I heard about the murders. I've seen evil before Ramsey and that man is the king of it. You know my dreams I have. I saw danger in them. I saw him hurting my poor Abigail. Can I go see her?”

“She's fine and she's asleep. You can see her in the morning. Is this all of your things?” he asked.

Rebecca answered very disappointed in not being able to see Abigail, “No the rest of them are on the porch. Will you go get them?”

He said, “I’ll take them to your room. You must be tired.”

“A little, but do hurry, before someone swipes my things Ram. I’d much rather see Abigail to put my mind at ease,” she insisted.

“We usually respect our daughter’s privacy when she has her door closed. Please Mother, wait until morning,” he urged.

“All right,” she conceded and waited for him to take some bags up the stairs. She turned and looked towards the kitchen and then started towards Abigail’s door, but instantly stopped when she heard a throat clear behind her.

“Didn’t Ramsey ask you to wait until morning?” Marilyn said from the kitchen door.

Rebecca’s mystical, brown eyes narrowed to slits at her daughter-in-law, “You wouldn’t understand that motherly sense I get about Abigail.”

“I understand my daughter values her privacy a lot and we respect her door being closed. If you don’t respect anything in this house, respect your granddaughter’s wishes, Mother McPherson.” She walked up to Rebecca, not at all intimidated.

Abigail had the best view from her little slit in the door as her mother spoke almost in a whisper probably thinking Abigail was asleep.

Marilyn continued in a very upset hiss. “You’ve got three months before your gut instincts need to take you somewhere else, Becky.” With that she walked away.

Rebecca looked at Abigail’s door one more time, but then heard Ramsey coming down the stairs and pretended to be fixing her hair in the hallway’s mirror.

Abigail waited until Rebecca followed Ramsey upstairs before she closed the door, wondering what kind of feeling did Rebecca have?

Abigail felt a hand on her shoulder and she immediately came awake, her heart racing. When she realized it was her grandmother, she calmed herself. Rebecca hugged her, smelling like peppermint and denture cream.

“Do you know you talk in your sleep, child?” Rebecca asked sitting on the bed.

She shrugged with a slight flush as if she had been caught doing something embarrassing. “Mom has told me I do - Why? Was I saying something interesting?”

Rebecca turned the bedside lamp on low. "Only something about giving your ball back. What were you dreaming about?"

She couldn't remember so she changed the subject. "Why are you here?"

"To see you. You remember how I used to have dreams and they would come true?" Rebecca said.

"Grandmother, my father said your dreams are just natural gut feelings."

"Well, my gut is telling me you're in great danger by that man."

"What man?" Abigail asked, honestly confused.

"The devil that slaughtered those people."

She immediately protested, "He didn't kill anyone, Grandmother. He is being framed--"

"Did that David put these thoughts in your head?" She waved it away as if she could just control Abigail's thoughts, opinions, and feelings with just a brush of her hand. "No worry, he won't be coming back."

"Grandmother, I can think on my own. I'm not a little girl anymore," Abigail insisted.

"You can stop those silly thoughts, young lady. Now listen to me, I know what I say is true, because I was your age a long time ago. He's going to hurt you and you'll be afraid. Be very afraid."

"No," Abigail said firmly. "He won't hurt me, and I won't fear him."

"You're too big for your britches, Abigail. You'll be sorry you didn't listen to me." She left the room in a huff.

Turning off the lamp Rebecca had turned on, she closed her eyes and let her mind drift back to the dream she had been having before her grandmother had awakened her.

She was ordering Robby to give her the ball and when he didn't, she kicked him in the leg. He threw the ball in the street and she ran out to it. Just as she picked it up, ignoring the sound of a car coming at her, her eyes moved up to see him watching her from afar, but staring intently and feeling quite near in spirit. Why was he looking like that? Why did she want to run to him?

Angela jerked her head and ordered her to run. The dream was changing. She knew she would die and she screamed for help. Why didn't he help her?

She could feel the hotness of the car on her neck and the back of her arms. Her heart was racing and her body hurt. No one could out race a car. She looked behind her toward Angela and saw the car crushing Angela underneath its rubber monsters. She tripped, but Robby yanked her up, they ran a short distance and she tripped again with a shove from Robby. The pain!

Abigail had a difficult sleep, yet as exhausted as she was, her eyelids closed to almost instant dreamland.

Marilyn had heard stirring downstairs and came to check on her daughter. Abigail was writhing around in bed frantically and she sat on the edge to watch her daughter, concerned about her mental state.

Abigail groaned, "It hurts." She sounded like a little girl. "It hurts! My legs hurt!" she cried. "Why won't you help me?"

Marilyn gently and softly questioned just enough to intrude on Abigail's dream, but not awaken her, "Who are you speaking to?" she asked.

"The boy in the black jogging suit. The boy who cares for me," Abigail answered, still in the little girl's tone.

"Robby?" Marilyn guessed. "Is it Robby?"

She shook her head. "Robby and Angela hate me. They never cared, but he did. He did the moment he first set eyes on me, Momma. He told me something. He made me promise."

"Promise what, Abigail?"

Abigail did not speak and Marilyn feared it would be like the other times. They would get close and then Abigail would go away. Go back to her deep sleep.

Suddenly, Abigail began to cry.

"What Abby?" She was almost tempted to shake her daughter awake.

"He won't help me," she whined.

"Why?"

"Because I forgot his promise. He'll hurt me, Momma." She sounded very terrified.

Marilyn frowned. It was a confusing breakthrough, because Abigail never knew who spoke to her and she had never mentioned any promise before.

Abigail stopped crying just as suddenly as she had started. "I saw the man who killed me," she spoke out of the blue.

Marilyn turned on the lamp to see if Abigail was awake. She wasn't. She was amazingly still asleep. Quickly, her mother turned it off and asked, "Who was he?"

"I don't know him, but...he looked like what Robby would look like if he grew up. With Angela's eyes. He had Angie's eyes. Why did Angie have green eyes? Your eyes are brown, Momma. She said it was

because she was special. Robby and Angela were special. Robby and Angela were special, but not Abigail.” Her voice was still sounding like a little girl’s voice.

Suddenly Abigail gasped. “He’s near.”

Marilyn’s heartbeat quickened. “Who?”

“Him.” She clutched the cover. “He’s watching us.”

“Abigail,” Marilyn said worriedly. It was time to wake her daughter, but Abigail closed her eyes tight and shook her head. It was as if she wanted this.

Abigail warned. “He’s coming to hurt me, Momma because I forgot.”

“I won’t let him hurt you baby,” Marilyn promised. “Daddy and I will protect you.”

Abigail cried harder. “You can’t stop him. No one can.”

“Who then? Who’ll stop him?”

She stopped crying and a calming, now grown up Abigail tone came into play. “Only me.”

“Why Abigail?” Marilyn questioned.

“Because he cares, Momma. He cares for me and he doesn’t know it yet.”

“If he cares, why is he coming to hurt you?”

In a forlorn voice, Abigail answered, “Because I can’t remember the promise.”

“Will that stop him? If you remember, will that stop him?” she asked desperately.

Abigail nodded. “He’s watching us, Momma. Be careful.” She was drifting away.

Marilyn wished she could get more, but she knew Abigail’s subconscious worked mysteriously. Would her daughter ever remember all of it? The day leading up to the accident seemed to have been erased from her mind, but not subconscious so deep, not even hypnosis had been able to unlock the mystery.

Quietly leaving the room, Marilyn sat in the kitchen drinking warm milk to calm her nerves and racing heart. Ramsey joined her after a while, concerned about his wife.

“Is it Rebecca?”

She smirked. “For once it is not.” She took a deep breath. “She’s remembering, Ram. Something is firing her memory. I think it’s Stone.”

He frowned, not understanding her. “Why?”

“I think deep down inside she’s scared of him. Terrified, just like she was terrified that day.”

He didn't need to ask what day that was. It was the day that changed everyone - not just Abigail or Robby or Angela. Nor did it concern the loss of the children. No, that day changed everyone more than anyone would ever know. "Do you think we should openly talk about it?"

Marilyn shook her head. "Not yet. She talked tonight."

"About what? Was it the same thing?" Ramsey questioned.

She frowned this time. "No. It was something more. She made a promise to that stranger. I remember Robby said he whispered something in her ear."

"That strange boy that took the ball? I remember Angela speaking of him too. She said that he was a boy at her school that bullied everyone," Ramsey recalled.

"He made her promise something. I'm not sure what, but he made her keep it a secret." Marilyn knew that frightened Ramsey. She knew Abigail would never keep a secret from her father, but somehow this stranger had convinced her not to tell anyone. It was as if this stranger had a power over their daughter that Ramsey's love could not overcome. This stranger was also a key to Abigail's memory.

"What could he have done to our daughter?" Ramsey asked confused.

Marilyn could only shrug. The day before the accident was unclear to both of them. "She said he cared. He wouldn't hurt her because he cared; yet he was still coming to get her, just because she couldn't remember their promise. It was very important to her to remember the promise, Ramsey and I think that is a key to her memory and her state of mind."

Ramsey frowned confused. "But their meeting was so brief, Mary. How could a ten year old know how a boy feels so fast?"

"You forget, Abigail was special. She knew things about us almost even before we knew them. She was insightful and very observant."

He remembered and she watched her husband as a warm smile crossed his face as he thought of those days gone past.

"She was terrified of him though, Ram. I mean she's terrified now, in the present. She kept saying how close he was and how he was coming to hurt her because she couldn't remember what she promised."

"No one will hurt her," Ramsey swore fiercely. "I'll make sure of that. Stone nor this stranger will ever hurt her."

"I tried to reassure her, but she said no one could stop this stranger. No one except her and she will never be able to until she remembers." She gasped. "This boy could actually be the one to give our daughter peace. Oh Ramsey, what are we going to do? That was so long ago. How will we ever be able to find him?"

He was confused too. She could see it in his eyes. “Let us hope that her memory returns by itself without the stranger and she'll be all right. Let's pray that she won't return to that girl we knew in Detroit.”

Marilyn's heart thumped hard. She could still remember her half, lifeless daughter staring at the wall in that cold large wheelchair. Five months of recovery, she had turned so lifeless and distant. “There's more Ramsey. She spoke in dream sequence and she said that she saw the man who killed her. Professionally speaking, saying 'killed me' is her subconscious talking. Our old Abigail is still there. A frightened ten year old who has yet to catch up to the woman she is now.”

“Will remembering bring her back?” he asked hopefully.

“It seems, since this Stone trial, she has had a slight recovery, amazingly through the horror of all of it, but it's bringing things that hurt. That's why I strongly feel it's doing a great deal of harm to her subconscious,” Marilyn said.

He nodded in understanding, “But I have to wonder,” he asked rhetorically, “Is it your psychology know-how speaking or the over-protective mother?”

She flushed slightly, because she knew he was trying to say her mother instincts were coming before her professional opinion.

“I'll keep my work in the study,” he promised and was about to get up, but she held his arm to hold him down.

“Ram, there's one more thing,” she said gravely.

He frowned, concerned about the worried expression he saw on her face. “What is it Mary?” he asked tenderly.

“You know I've been feeling rather tired in these last few weeks.”

He nodded, holding her hand a little tighter.

“Well, I went to see a doctor. I thought it was early menopause or I was just getting old.”

“Honey, thirty-nine is not old,” he insisted.

Marilyn smiled lovingly at him. “I guess not, since that's not what I'm going through. It's much more serious.”

She could just imagine his frantic thoughts. High-blood pressure? Cancer? Dear Lord, not his wife...not when he needed her dearly right now in his life. He gripped her hands tighter. “Honey, whatever it is, I'll love you and do all I can to help you.”

“I hope so, since it was you who made it happen,” she accused tenderly.

“What?” he cried almost hysterically.

She put a finger over his lips. “You want to wake up the whole household just because I’m pregnant?”

It took several seconds for it to register, then his face beamed with joy. “Oh love, you’re serious.”

She nodded, her eyes filling with tears, seeing the unconditional love he had in his eyes for her.

He hugged her passionately, dropping to his knees and laying his head on her full breasts. “You’ve made me the happiest man alive, Mrs. McPherson,” he whispered huskily, looking up into her tear streaking face. “Why are you crying?” he asked concerned.

“Because I can’t believe how happy you are,” she sobbed joyfully.

He chuckled as their lips met. Her robe had parted and he saw his wife’s loving body. It was amazing after all these years she still had the power to make his body respond. They had been through a lot and in the end their love had endured it all.

Ramsey laid his wife down on the kitchen floor and began to make love to her, not caring where they were. Hours later he took her up to their room and made love to her throughout the night.

Chapter 12

Abigail pushed herself into the kitchen the next morning, about a few seconds behind Rebecca, who looked stunned at several articles of clothing on the kitchen floor. Rebecca looked rather disgusted, but not Abigail. It made her feel rather good inside to know her parents still enjoyed having sex with one another.

Rebecca picked up the clothes and put them in the laundry room next to the kitchen, then stiffly asked Abigail what she wanted for breakfast. When Ramsey came down he received a hard glare from his mother.

“What?” he asked innocently.

“Don’t what me, Ramsey,” she snapped. “Coming downstairs to find that wife of yours has corrupted every moral I’ve enforced in you is not something a mother likes to know.”

“This wife of mine did not corrupt me. If anything it was Dad-”

She cut him off angrily. “Don’t speak of that pervert in my presence.”

“Mom-” he pleaded.

She held up a hand to stop his words. “Ramsey, I raised you to be a saint and all she’s ever done is lead you on a wicked path. I told you to leave her a long time ago-”

“Enough!” he sneered. “How dare you come in my home and tell me how to live my life, Mother? I’m a grown man and if you can’t respect my wife and my home, then you disrespect me and you can let the door hit you where the Lord split you on your way out. Do I make myself clear, Rebecca?”

Abigail bit her lip to suffice a grin. It was about time someone told Rebecca what to do, instead of the other way around.

Rebecca, stiff as a board, reluctantly nodded. “Would you like eggs and bacon?”

Ramsey’s tone was surprisingly moderate as if nothing had just transpired between them. “Just a cup of coffee. I have to get Abigail to therapy.”

Marilyn entered tiredly, but glowing with her robe on. “Good morning, Rebecca. Thanks for cooking breakfast. I was kept up late last night.” She gave Abigail a secret wink and her husband a well-satisfied smile. “How are you this morning, Abby?”

“It’s turning out to be an interesting morning, Mom.” She noticed the glow on her mother’s face and wondered when she fell in love would her face do the same? Would people see it so clearly? She hoped so, because her mother looked so happy.

Rebecca snorted, very unladylike. She was still disgusted at what she had come down to the kitchen to see.

Marilyn seemed to glide around the kitchen as she floated over to kiss Abigail on the cheek and then kissed her husband soundly. “Morning love,” she said to her husband.

“You told him!” Abigail cried delightedly.

“Told what?” Rebecca inquired of Abigail.

They all looked at each other, unsure of how to tell Rebecca. Ramsey cleared his throat. “I guess I should be the one to announce my wife is pregnant.” He put his arm around Marilyn’s waist and held her close.

Rebecca’s eyes narrowed to slits, but she didn’t say a word.

“Isn’t that great Grandmother?” Abigail said excitedly.

Rebecca only pursed her lips together and turned back to the stove.

Abigail couldn’t understand why Rebecca did this, but by the way her parents looked at each other, she knew they understood. She hoped one day she would understand. Yet, she didn’t know when her parents would ever open up to her or when they would actually start to treat her like an adult.

“Hurry up, Abigail, so you won’t be late to see Ella,” Marilyn ordered.

“You still let her see that woman?” Rebecca faced them.

“Ella is a certified physical therapist, Rebecca. She knew physical therapy before OB and GYN”

“Don't speak those professional terms with me. All I know is that she is not the best and my granddaughter deserves the best. Don't you think your daughter deserves the best, Ramsey?”

Before her father could respond, Abigail intervened. “I like Dr. Ella, Grandmother.”

Rebecca patted her on the head as if she were just a puppy and tried placating Abigail. “You'll like Dr. Hanes too which is who I intend to call this afternoon so you can start seeing him-”

“Mother,” Ramsey sneered in a warning tone. “I know what is best for my daughter and so does Marilyn. We chose Ella together-”

“When are you going to listen to me and not that woman you call a wife-”

Ramsey bolted out of his chair. “Dammit. I've told you to respect her-”

“Respect her?” Rebecca snorted disgustedly. “How can I respect a married woman who has another's-”

“Enough!” Abigail screamed sick and tired of the arguments. Her mother had turned a sickly pale. “I don't like it when you all shout!”

“Abigail,” Rebecca tried to soothe her and hold her, but Abigail pushed her hands away. “Abby, no one's shouting.”

She covered her ears. “Just be quiet, all of you. It doesn't matter to you what my parents decide to you, Rebecca. I like Ella and I'll stay with Ella. If anything, I know my best interest more than any of you. I'm not a child, I'm twenty years old and while everyone's handing out respect, hand some this way, because all this yelling only tells me I get none.” She pushed herself out of the room, then out of the house. She would wait outside for her father to take her to Dr. Ella.

For a few moments, everyone was quiet after those startling words by Abigail and her rushed exit.

“See what you did,” Rebecca accused Marilyn.

“She did?” Ramsey bellowed. “We didn't do a damn thing.”

Marilyn touched his arm lightly and he calmed himself and guided his wife out of the room and to the door. “Are you all right?” he asked concerned.

“She almost said something, Ram. What if she does before we do?” Marilyn asked on the brink of hysterics.

He held her close feeling her shaking. “Don't worry,” Ramsey assured her.

“I'm not worried. I was going to tell Abigail soon, but then that day and our lives...” She gathered strength and took a deep breath. “Well, I'll tell her, but I don't need your mother spilling it out.”

"I'll talk to her, okay," he promised.

Marilyn became fiercely upset and hissed. "No Ramsey, you'll do more than talk to her, you'll give her an ultimatum or you'll be given one. I don't need the stress she puts me through, do I make myself clear?"

He felt like a child thoroughly reprimanded. "Perfectly clear." He warmly kissed her cheek. "Lunch together at Peachy's."

"Eleven-thirty," she confirmed.

"I love you."

"You know I love you too, Ramsey." She kissed his neck. "Bye. Have a good day."

Ramsey left the house and went to his car where Abigail sat quietly in the passenger seat. She had obviously grabbed his keys he always kept them on the table by the doorway. Her chair was still outside of the passenger door. He placed it in the back of his black Volvo and sat behind the wheel. "I'm sorry," he apologized.

She placed her hand over his, which rested on the steering wheel. "Don't be sorry, Dad. I know Rebecca makes you like that. She makes everybody like that."

He kissed her forehead and began to drive.

Abigail's eyes strayed out of her window and a glare from the side mirror caught her eye. She saw a van - nothing out of the ordinary this time of day and traffic-wise. It was a large blue van with gates inside on the side windows and the windshield tinted slightly so she couldn't see inside. She wondered if she should bring it to her father's attention?

"Your mother told me you were looking at staying at the university up until your master's," he mentioned.

She bit her lip. "I was?" Reluctantly, her eyes moved to her father. Ramsey was a good-looking man to be forty-one. Dark brown, healthy hair just like hers, but a bit darker and not with the reddish hue like her own, which she had gotten from her mother, making it a fiery combination. His look was hard, but very handsome and she hoped that her husband would be just as good looking and tall...yes very tall. Ramsey was almost six feet two, muscular build with broad shoulders. Not lanky at all, which she noticed most tall men were.

"But I've been considering something else," Abigail added.

"Like what?" Ramsey asked.

She answered, "Like Wayne State. It has an excellent architectural exchange program with a sister program in England and during the summer I could stay there if I'm accepted into their master's program."

It was a good thing he was at a red light because he would have slammed on his brakes. "Detroit? Honey, I don't think that's a good idea."

"Why not? Give me one good reason why?" she argued calmly.

"It's not close to home," Ramsey stated. Before she could start to protest, he continued, "I know it's not a good reason, but we would miss you."

She had counted on this reason being said when she decided to approach her parents with this subject. "I know that, but it's a good school and a good opportunity--"

"Abigail--"

"Wait, Dad, let me finish. Every once in a while the young bird has to leave the nest, right?" She didn't wait for him to answer. "And parents should encourage the bird to leave. Yes I have a handicap, but it's a part of me and I'm coping. I'll be fine."

"But not when the bird isn't ready."

"When will this bird be ready? When I'm forty with no friends and an old maid? Daddy, I may be stuck in a wheelchair, but it doesn't mean you have to let me be stuck in that house. Not only is Wayne State a good school for me, but it's close to the therapy center. I know I wasn't much good to them when I first went, but now that I want it, I'll do much better than what Davenport has to offer."

"If it's better therapy, I'll fly the best in the world to you, Abigail--"

"It's not that. It's more about me growing up, Daddy. I have to grow and I can't do it surrounded by my parents." She should have said guarded, but she knew Ramsey would just get defensive.

He stopped in front of Dr. Ella Foster's office who had been Abigail's doctor and physical therapist for the longest. Abigail looked behind them, but didn't see the blue van anymore.

Ramsey said tenderly, "I understand and to be honest, honey if you weren't in the chair I'd jump for joy, but...the years you were away were long and when you came home you weren't my little Abigail anymore. You were...different and now that my sweetheart is coming back, I'm just getting used to her being there and being around me. I know you're all grown up, but it's something I never thought would happen."

"But it did, Dad." She touched his hand again and he squeezed her palm compassionately.

"I know and I know I can't hold on to your forever." He hugged her. "Sweetheart, you have my blessing."

She returned the hug wholeheartedly. She loved her father deeply. "Thank you Daddy."

Moving away slightly, he frowned. "Now, all you have to do is convince your mother."

"Aren't you going to help?" she asked.

"As if I could. That woman's more stubborn than a mule when it concerns you."

"Almost like Rebecca is to you," she said getting a dig in for today's events.

He chuckled, rolling his eyes heavenwards. "I guess, sweetheart."

When her father picked her up at twelve-thirty, Abigail noticed no blue van following them. "So how was your day?" she asked, when she was settled in the car and Ramsey began to drive home.

He didn't look happy. He was frowning deeply and it only made him look meaner, but Abigail knew it wasn't at her. "He had an alibi."

Her heart raced fully, knowing who her father was talking about. "William...I mean Mr. Stone?" she asked, remembering what he'd ordered last night. "What was it?"

"He was at a woman's house. Or more like a prostitute's home. She's a regular of his."

Abigail blushed and stated obviously, "Well, he is a man, Dad."

"He's a killer," Ramsey corrected in frustration. "And one day he'll make a mistake and I'll be there to correct it." He stopped in front of the house, but didn't pull in the driveway. "I intend to put him in jail so long he won't know what color grass is."

"Some jails do have grass."

He shot her a look that clearly told her levity was not appreciated at this point and time. She kept her mouth closed until she was out of the car and he had helped her in her chair. "Daddy, I believe you. One day the killer will make a mistake and you will be there to correct it. You'll put him in jail."

"But you don't think it's Stone?"

"No it isn't," she said firmly, closing the door. Ramsey stood in her way, but casually leaned against the car to show this conversation was far from over. "Abigail, does my talking about my cases bother you?"

She frowned, wondering why he was asking her when her mother had already made the decision to not discuss Stone in front of her. "What makes you think it bothers me?"

Ramsey shrugged. "To be honest your mother told me you had another nightmare last night and it bothered her tremendously."

As always, Abigail never remembered these nightmares, but she had remembered her mother trying to convince her she had them a while back. “What was it about?”

“She said something about a promise you made to a man.”

The hair rose on the back of her neck and she had this queer sensation she knew what he was talking about; yet nothing came to mind. Abigail always believed her consciousness was holding back memories for some strange reason and this was one of those times that her inner conscious had a memory locked away that she couldn't reach. “No, it doesn't bother me. Matter of fact I find myself very curious about this particular case. It's all a mystery, because even though it's his father's style of killing, it's not the son who's really doing the killing?”

She knew this thought had crossed Ramsey's mind as well. He knelt down to her eye level. “You would tell me if it bothers you?”

“Of course, but we won't banter about the Stone case as much in front of Mom. She worries too much.”

Ramsey agreed, smiling mischievously, but his expression turned serious quickly. “I still don't understand why you can't see how dangerous Stone really is. I want you to be careful Abigail. He's made several threats to our family. He could hurt you because he hates me so much. Promise you won't keep secrets from me.”

This shouldn't even have been asked. Why on earth would she keep secrets? Why would he think she would? “No Dad. I won't. I'll let you know if I'm ever hurt.”

His eyes told her he wanted more than that, but that was all she was willing to offer him at this time.

Chapter 13

David knocked at the loft's door for the second time, wondering if his appointment time was correct. William was never late for anything once he had it in his mind to do things. With that thought, he wondered if those threats William had made the other day were real or was William just trying to tick Ramsey off as Ramsey had done to him. Ramsey could sure dish the crap out, but couldn't take anything if it was thrown back at him and William could throw crap back just enough to piss Ramsey off.

The door opened and William filled the doorway. He looked down the hall to see if there was anyone accompanying David. Of late it was hard to believe anyone coming to his door alone in a suit, unless twenty cops behind them followed them ready to take him in.

After letting David in, they sat in the front of his loft. Amazingly the loft was well kept and decorated in good taste. All the furniture had been specially designed with William's large frame in mind and was quite comfortable.

"I need to discuss the Parson's murder in depth with you. I don't think the details were all revealed to you," David said, getting out the files.

"I don't need to know about something I didn't do," William sneered, after taking a swig out of the bottlenose beer bottle he had been sipping on for the past two hours.

He opened a folder and began to relay the details. William was quiet until he finished.

"Raped?" he asked in a calm deep voice that always made David cringe. "My hair in his pubic area? Ramsey really knows how to write them, doesn't he?"

"Ramsey is not trying to frame you," David refuted.

"Bullshit, he's the only one who hates my fucking guts."

"Obviously there has to be someone else, William."

William leaned in close to David, scooping him up and down with those mystical eyes. "Do you think it's me, Reichard?"

"I've told you repeatedly, I never ask my clients that. All I want is the facts, William. The truth."

"Lying is not my forte', Reichard." William stretched his long powerful legs. It reminded David of a tiger or more like a panther, due to William's darkness that contrasted with his bright eye color against his deep Hispanic skin. "So what are the charges?"

"Murder - first degree."

"I suspected that one," William said matter-of-factly.

David continued, "McPherson could try serious rape charges, but dead men don't speak so it'll end up in the a lot of forensic doctors deciding the case. Of course mine is better than the states, so I know I'll win this with ease. Yet proving you weren't at the scene is going to be a little hard, when you won't give me an alibi.'"

"If you want to know the truth, Reichard. I was with Jenny. She came over to my shop after I'd been working there all day with Stuckey rebuilding a 1971 Corvette. Stuckey stayed around until ten and then shot out of there like fire was on his ass. Jenny and I were fucking half the night. I had a lot on my mind." He paused thoughtfully. "The kid came over about ten the next morning, but Jenny stayed until about six that morning."

"What kid?" David inquired.

“Andrew Anderson, Camp’s nephew we usually just call him 'the kid.' He helped me out the rest of the day, cause I couldn't find hide nor hair of Stuckey. We worked there all day and I made him call his uncle so no one would get worried about him. He slept on my couch. We slept until the fucking pigs knocked down my door and started in on the kid as to where I was. Scared him to death.”

“The kid will testify?”

“Sure and so will everyone else I've mentioned. I hope they do try my ass so I can see the look on Ramsey's face when they say I'm not guilty. Maybe then I'll rip off his head and shit down his throat just for the hell of it.” A gleam appeared in William's eyes.

“I'm your lawyer William, but he's my friend and I'm very close to his family,” David said, trying to keep the anger out of his tone, but the heightened look to his skin clearly showed his upset.

William looked nonchalant as he said, “Maybe then you can tell me about that little girl of his.”

“Abigail's not a little girl anymore and you leave her alone,” David warned.

A strange look came on William's face, David could not discern. It made David very uncomfortable talking about Abigail with William. David decided to change the subject. “I had the police drop the assault charges because I threatened to counter sue for brutality.” David saw the stitches over William's left eye and the long one on the side of his face. There were still places where it was swollen and fresh scars everywhere, but William didn't look as if he was in the slightest pain. “If there's no more trouble, then you can stay out until the trial, but Ramsey has a personal protection order against you. You aren't allowed within twenty feet of his property or within fifty feet of any family member of his.” He set a copy of the restraining order on the coffee table between them for William. “Is that clear?”

“What about McPherson? Is there an injunction against him?”

“No.”

William smirked. “He's a brave man, isn't he? Just as long as that fucking prosecutor can keep his distance from me I'm good to go. Is that it, Reichard?”

“Are you going to answer some of my personal questions, Stone?” David asked.

“What I know about that asshole is none of anyone's business. He wants to know how, he can come ask me himself.”

“Will you be spreading any of what you know around? I agree Ramsey can act like a fucking asshole, but Marilyn and Abigail mean a great deal to me and to hurt them with the knowledge you possess, it wouldn't be smart, defense wise.”

William only raised a brow at his lawyer's threat. “Figure it out, lawyer. You're good at that and while you're at it, find out who the fuck is doing this shit.”

“I thought you already knew.”

“If I knew they'd be dead,” William sneered.

David didn't like that look in William's eyes. Quickly he gathered his things and left, leaving William to his thoughts. He would start working on William's past right away. He needed to find the truth out before Ramsey found a way to charge William with the murder. Ramsey had already requested the grand jury to look over the evidence and it would only be a matter of time before Ramsey got his way and was given permission to try William for murder.

When the lawyer was gone, William was left to his own thoughts. He had a lot of time to think about ways to get Ramsey McPherson back for all his bullshit. He had not really meant that threat about his wife and his daughter, but his curiosity about the past had always bothered him. While in jail he'd given up on the idea of seeing Abigail McPherson. If she was alive she wouldn't remember anything. She was too young and so many traumatic things had happened. She probably hated him just as much as her father hated him; although claiming her would be all the sweeter. To hear her words of wanton in his ear would be the greatest revenge he could imagine against Ramsey. Take his sweet daughter's heart then destroy her until she was nothing but a withering piece of flesh, not good enough to wipe his ass with. That would get Ramsey's goat. That would suffice William's need for revenge against Ramsey. That would be William's way of having Abigail, when he knew she could never love the monster everyone thought he was.

Now all he had to do was come up with a plan to get to her. She was well protected by Ramsey, but getting to people had always been an expertise of William's. He'd get to her.

Chapter 14

For Marilyn the day had been chaotic. Early that morning, Ramsey had been too caught up for Marilyn to speak with him and then she had to go to the doctor. Ester stayed at the house due to the fact that the locksmith was supposed to come and fix the lock on Abigail's balcony doors, then the security people would be there to install the new security system.

Abigail went with her mother to the doctor, needing the fresh air. On the way back home, she asked her mother, “Was he really glad about the baby?”

“Yes, but your father's under so much strain with this case. I can't expect him to turn cartwheels about this. Damn this case and damn that killer Stone.”

Her daughter immediately went on the defensive. "He's not a killer Mom. Daddy's just making a mountain out of a mole..." her voice trailed off as her eyes went to the passenger side mirror of the station wagon they drove in. The rusted blue van pulled off a side street and drove two cars behind them. She could see more clearly that there were bars inside on the side windows of the van, on the driver and passenger side, but that was all the windows she could see. The van was definitely customized and she wondered if it was a coincidence that this van was behind them again.

"Abigail, what's wrong?" her mother questioned.

Abigail couldn't see the driver, but just the fact that the van could have been following them all day gave Abigail a weird prickly sensation on the back of her neck. "Nothing," she lied, then continued what she was saying previously looking at her mother. "Daddy's making too much out of nothing when it comes to this case." Suddenly, that strange sensation went away. When Abigail looked for the van it was gone. She shuddered to herself.

"How do you feel about the baby?" Marilyn inquired.

Abigail smiled sincerely and said warmly. "It makes me feel safe knowing the two of you still love each other, after all we've been through."

Marilyn pulled up in the driveway and Abigail read the small white van sign that was parked in front of their home. ANDERSON AND SON SECURITY & LOCKMASTER.

Ester opened the door just as Abigail got up the ramp to the porch. "I knew I heard your car, Mrs. McPherson," she said, after she greeted Abigail.

"Miss me?" Abigail teased.

"Like the chicken pox, girl, now get in there and change while I talk with your mother." Ester had a smart comment for anything and everything. She and Abigail spent hours playfully verbally bashing each other. "And don't bother the locksmith while he's working in your room."

"What is it Ester?" Marilyn asked, as Abigail made her way into the house.

"As you can see the security people are here, but I thought there would be a separate company for the locksmith..." Ester's voice trailed off in Abigail's ears as she quietly opened the door to her room.

A scruffy young guy with beady eyes and ratty, dirty, bleached-blond hair was standing by the balcony doors. This was odd for an African-American, but his skin was like a lighter shade of brown and if he cleaned up a bit, he would be rather attractive. She had never met this man, yet he looked almost familiar. "Am I in your way?"

He stared at her hard for a brief moment and Abigail almost thought she saw hatred in his eyes, before he shielded his expression and shook his head. "I'm finished." He gathered his tools and hurried out,

sweating profusely, despite the fact that the house was air-conditioned. He rushed out of the room, but then stopped suddenly past the doorway and Abigail almost bumped into his legs as she followed him out.

Ramsey stood in front of the man. "Who are you?" he demanded.

The man seemed terrified. "The locksmith, sir. Came to fix your doors."

Ramsey relaxed. "Oh, yes." Ramsey pulled out his check to pay him as he apologized.

"It's already paid for sir, the department sent me over."

Abigail wanted to see a bill or receipt, but she didn't pressure the point since her father nodded with a curt smile. "Have a good day," the man said and left.

Ester and Marilyn came into the hallway. Marilyn gave her husband a warm hug and kiss. "We have a problem love."

Ramsey only groaned. "Do I need to be a part of it?"

"It concerns your mother." Marilyn nodded at Ester.

The nursemaid quickly spoke up. "I think it would be best for me to move to my son's place downtown until Mrs. McPherson is on her way, sir. We clashed too much last time she was here and I think the best decision would be if I took a nice long vacation."

"But Ester, you're so invaluable to us," Ramsey said in a dreaded tone.

"We still don't understand why she's here disrupting our lives Ramsey," Marilyn said.

"Maybe Grandmother really has that special sixth sense and can predict that something's going to happen," Abigail blurted out.

Ester snorted, "That's the only sense Becky has in my opinion because the other five left her a long time ago."

"Now, Ester, it's not fair to speak of Rebecca badly to her son's face," Marilyn reprimanded, giggling just as much as Abigail.

Ramsey was trying not to find anything funny, but anyone could tell he was just as amused as the rest. "How about a paid vacation, Ester. A couple of months should be fine? Rebecca's sense usually last about that long, and if it's longer, I'm sure we can make some arrangement."

"You're much too generous, Mr. McPherson," Ester said graciously.

"That's because you are invaluable to us, Ester." Ramsey gave the nurse a reassuring warm smile before he left the ladies to their bantering.

Abigail wondered if her father knew she had seen his troubling expression as he walked away going into his office. She excused herself and closed herself up in her room knowing her father was probably going to do a little phone time that she just didn't want to miss.

Abigail knew her father's thoughts were on his mother and her "feelings." He probably wondered seriously why Rebecca McPherson would come, if there wasn't anything terrible going to happen. Abigail remembered Ramsey saying once to her mother, when he thought his daughter was not paying attention, "When I was young I never took Rebecca's weird "feelings" seriously, but as I got older, I had a feeling my mother always knew when something bad would happen to me, before it occurred."

Now it seemed Rebecca had a power to reach Abigail because she had specifically stated she was only there for "her granddaughter."

Her mother went into the study. "What's on your mind, Ram?" she asked concerned, coming close to the desk.

"I was thinking about my mother's intuition," he answered, sounding deeply troubled.

"There's nothing to think about Ramsey. Rebecca is trying to find a way to make things difficult around here."

"Love, I think you just speak from the frustration she causes, but you and I both know she has always had a link to bad things happening, even before it happens, especially when it has occurred to Abigail or myself."

Marilyn sighed in disappointment. "You are right, Ramsey."

"I was also thinking about the day she called me, the night before the accident. Do you remember that day?" he asked his wife.

Marilyn sounded confused and hurt. "I try not to remember the last night I remember Angela and Robby alive."

"I didn't mean to bring up bad memories, Mary. You know that," he said sincerely. "Rebecca called me that night and told me someone was going to change Abigail's life forever. I thought she was just babbling about nothing until the next day when I came home and stood on the porch staring at that large, tall, dark, undiscernable stranger. I was too far away to even see the details of his face, Mary, but I remembered shuddering to myself as I heard my mother's words ringing in my head.

"The one we spoke about the other night?" Marilyn asked.

"Yes and I now really have to wonder is my mother's coming related to the stranger actually coming back into Abby's life to finish what he started a long time ago, like Abigail's dreams are saying now?"

"I wish I could answer that Ramsey, but I wonder the same thing too," Marilyn said.

After a long pause and some movement, Ramsey said, "I want to believe the hardships of this family life are calming down for us. I have a wonderful wife, a good daughter and a baby on the way."

"Maybe when you straighten out this mess with Stone things will calm down," Marilyn suggested.

He sighed longingly. "I'm so happy, but I will be even happier when Stone is well behind bars."

There was another long pause, then Marilyn said, "I think I hear someone pulling into the driveway."

Abigail had heard it as well and wondered if she should come out of her room. She pushed away from the closet, and came out of her room just as Marilyn was opening the door to David.

* * *

David greeted Marilyn and Abigail accordingly, chatting for a few minutes before mentioning the anniversary dinner planned for tomorrow night at the house. He would be attending with Dr. Ella Foster - who he was presently trying to court.

"I want to personally congratulate the stud for making it this far, but if you ever change your mind beautiful, I'm always here," David teased with Marilyn.

Marilyn laughed at his ribbing. "You know I could never leave my husband."

He dipped to kiss Abigail's cheek. "Then I'll just have to steal my angel from the both of you."

Abigail blushed, knowing he was referring to her.

"Ram's ensconced in the office. Just knock before you go in. Abby and I have some canning to do."

"Mom, I really need to study for the final," Abigail lied. Whatever David had to say, it seemed real juicy and she didn't want to miss one word of it. "Can I join you in an hour?"

Marilyn gave her daughter a curious look, but then nodded. "I'll be in the kitchen."

Abigail quickly went into her room, locking her door behind her and moved into her spot just as she heard David asking her father through the wall, "Daydreaming old man?"

Ramsey greeted David briefly. "What's this all about?"

David closed the study door behind him. "Jennifer Calhoun made a police report the next day after the Parson death."

"What does that have to do with Stone?"

"Everything when she says the only reason someone broke in was to riffle through the garbage next to her bed to steal the used condom."

“How do I know she didn't make it up?”

“Here's the file on the report. Hal was present with me as we fingerprinted the can. There are prints of a Marshall Allen from Albany, New York.”

“Who is that?” Ramsey questioned.

“I knew you'd ask, please have a seat.” After a few moments, David said, “Marshall Allen was born and raised by an aunt. His mother, Cleo Allen, abandoned her son at the hospital right after he was born to come to Davenport with her new husband.”

“Is this supposed to have some significance?” Ramsey's tone of voice was too irate.

“Yes, Cleo Allen was Enid Stone's mother and Edward Stone's new wife until her mysterious death. Why the hell would his prints be in Jennifer's apartment?” David asked.

Abigail could just imagine her father giving David his most nonchalant expression.

“Why the hell would I care?” Ramsey shot back.

“Because this is proof someone is trying to frame William. You knew we suspected this from the start,” David said.

“I knew this was what you'd try to make everyone believe, but I didn't believe you'd use that baby excuse to get out of a murder rap.”

David sighed in exasperation. “But it's the truth, Ram. Look at that report. Her home was broken into, rifled through, and the only thing taken was a used condom? Don't you find that odd? She had twelve hundred in jewelry, seven hundred dollars stashed in the cookie jar, and two furs, not including the expensive electronics and so forth.”

Abruptly, a pager went off. She could hear David using his cell phone and the door to her father's study opening. She decided to quickly roll herself to the kitchen and pretend to start helping her mother can the tomatoes grown fresh from the garden her mother tended in the back.

Ramsey was grabbing something to drink when David ended his call and came into the kitchen. “I've got to get out of here. There's a disturbance at Stone's shop.”

“What happened?” Ramsey asked eager to know forgetting his wife's recent orders.

“Parson's father attacked Stone while he was at work. Stone used self-defense and your boys are trying to get him locked up again.”

“Did he get hurt?” Abigail burst out.

At that time Rebecca entered the kitchen giving David a hated look. David ignored this and answered Abigail's question.

“A knife wound in the thigh, but he broke two of the guy's ribs.”

Ramsey only snorted with an 'I-told-you-so' look in his eyes. Marilyn cleared her throat in a warning and David excused himself immediately.

Chapter 15

David entered his empty apartment and rested in the nearest comfortable chair. He was exhausted. The Stone case was consuming his life, but Stone paid well. He paid damn well, as long as David did well. He was a generous man, but this still didn't excuse his temper, which had clearly erupted today, but David had gotten Stone freed in time for dinner. During all this time, David had received a call from the doctor who'd treated Stone at the hospital today. The doctor stated that William stopped the bleeding on his own and gave himself his own stitches.

His thoughts turned to Tampa and Lowell Crane. Would his death have been by William's hand? William wouldn't tell him even if it were true. The boy was tighter than Fort Knox when it came to getting information about the past, present, or the future. William prided himself on being a private man and didn't want anyone close to him.

Who would be trying to frame William?

His first suspect was Lydia Stone who still lived in the house in Davenport. She gladly gave him the time of day just that morning before he was called to the lab for the prints on the can.

“Ms. Stone-”

“Please call me Lydia,” she insisted.

“Only if you call me David.”

She smiled in agreement. She was a beautiful, Italian decent-woman in her early forties and he had to wonder about if all that amnesia gossip was really true. Lydia looked very intelligent and it was hard to believe she was married to Edward Stone. “Lydia, where were you on the night of the your husband's murder?”

“I'd gone to clear something up with my doctor and get some items before coming here to pack and leave Edward for good,” she stated honestly.

David had known this from her police statement. He was just testing her. “Why were you going to leave Edward?”

“He was sleeping with his stepdaughter. Aren't you aware of this?” she asked a bit perturbed.

"Vaguely," he lied.

She seemed to read him like a book and became agitated, "What are you getting at David Reichard?"

"I want to know if you have a motive to hurt William," he said blatantly.

She gasped as if he had slapped her. "William's like a son to me, David Reichard. I would never hurt him. He's all I have, except for Dakota."

"Dakota is Enid's son?" David guessed.

She answered with sarcasm, as if it were obvious, "Yes, he's taking a nap now, but maybe you can come by again to see if he has a reason to frame cousin for murder."

David let her be. Lydia seemed too honest and loving to hurt anyone, especially William. The lawyer was pointing the finger at anyone who had some kind of animosity for William, his family, and even his business. This list was pages long and he didn't know where to start after Lydia. He finally decided to start in Tampa. This would be where things had seemed to go wrong for William and if the young man wasn't willing to give up any information about his past, then David would dig until he found his own way to get information from others. It would be long and arduous, but he would accomplish it if only to hit William with a large bill for his stubbornness and to show Ramsey McPherson for once he was wrong.

Ramsey decided to tuck Abigail in bed. Something he hadn't done in a long time and she seemed wary of his attentiveness. He seemed rather impressed at how his daughter had adjusted to doing things by herself, without the help of her legs and noted she would do well on her own without her parents around. She beamed in pride.

"You wouldn't happen to want to change environments because of the baby would you? You won't be the only child anymore," he questioned. "It hasn't been that way for a long time."

She shook her head honestly. "The baby means change, but it's change for the better."

"You really believe this Abigail?" he asked.

She shrugged softly. "I hope so."

He gave her a long, thoughtful, concerned look before he said, "If Rebecca bothers you too much while she's here, let me know."

She nodded again. "I can handle, Grandmother. Goodnight, Dad."

"Goodnight, sweetheart." He kissed her cheek and left.

As soon as he was gone, Rebecca came in without knocking. "Were you asleep?"

Tiredly looking over her shoulder at the door where her grandmother stood, she said, “No, Grandmother.”

Rebecca's skinny, pastel, bed robe-clad body sat on the edge of the bed beside Abigail. “You think I'm crazy, Abigail?”

“A little weird, but not too loony,” she said honestly.

“So if I say danger looms over you would you believe me?”

“Does it?” Abigail questioned.

“I can't be sure, but as I touch you,” she said as she cupped Abigail's cheek and leaned close. “I can feel something bad. Can't you feel it?”

Abigail thought she had better not say the only thing she felt was her grandmother's cold hands. “Not really. Or not now, Grandmother.”

“But do you ever have a feeling deep in your gut that tells you something isn't right?” Rebecca asked.

Abigail remembered the blue van and just the thought of the vehicle following them all day made her shiver. “Do you really think I have a strong intuition about things, Grandma?”

“It's been passed down by my family line for generations.” Rebecca took Abigail's hand in her own. “My great, great, great-grandmother came from Jamaica and was a priestess there. It's what the white folks back then would called a witch because she could touch a person or look at a person to instantly know what they were all about and what secrets they kept. I think you have it, you just don't know how to use it yet.”

She decided to placate her eccentric grandmother. “How would I use it?”

“Free your mind. Let those sensations fill you and take you with them. Don't hold back anything. It's just like sex.”

Abigail blushed, “Grandmother?!”

“But it's true. Surely Mare didn't have you thinking only men get the pleasure.”

“No, but I never thought-” She was too embarrassed.

“Women can have much more pleasure in sex than a man could ever dream of Abigail. I'm not so prudish as your father thinks I am. I was young once and you still are, so enough of this grown-up talk. Get some sleep, baby.”

Rebecca turned off Abigail's light and left her granddaughter to ponder her own thoughts of love and sex.

It wasn't that Abigail didn't think that women didn't enjoy sex, she just figured she would never be able to experience those sensations on a physical side.

Chapter 16

The gathering at the McPherson's house was wonderful. Marilyn and Ramsey were having a great time, but it was an older crowd and a lot of them only sympathized with Abigail about her condition.

She socialized, but it became a little depressing when she felt awkward in the crowd. Making her way to the quietness of her father's study, she saw two files on the center of his desk. Opening up the first file she discovered it was the file on a young man named Marshall Allen. There was nothing new to note in it; except she learned that he was born five years before her and would be about twenty-six now,, yet he'd taken on several alias names and the police had lost track of him. He had a heavy cocaine habit. He stood five-feet-eleven, red, brownish hair and black eyes. There was no photo available for him though, but the fingerprint card was in there. This was not significant to Abigail.

The other file contained a report from a psychological expert, Dr. Emery Dunn.

Highlighted in the notes, Dr. Dunn wrote: "From my interview and research on Mr. Javier Chavez, I find that, if released he would no doubt kill again. While in his cell he seems the 'norm,' except he speaks to himself as if speaking to his son, William, which I find odd. Yet, outside this cell, I see a violent man who cannot be controlled. I pity his sons or any other offspring that beget from this man because this is a true case of inherited insanity."

There were other reports, but Abigail was stuck on this one. She knew Emery Dunn was a nationally known mental psychologist who had dealt with many psychotics all over the nation so how could a man who was so intelligent make a grammar mistake. He wrote, "I pity his sons," when everyone knew Javier Chavez only had one son, William Castro-Chavez Stone.

"Angel," David said softly from the doorway. She closed the file and faced him, smiling her most dazzling, warm smile.

David sighed. "Anyone tell you how beautiful you are, Abigail?"

Her sierra eyes danced in appreciation and her arms beckoned him to her.

"What's a beautiful girl like you doing away from the festivities and all alone?" David asked.

"Certainly not hiding, since no one's looking for me or even at me out there," she teased.

"I was." He knelt down and took her hand in his. "Unfortunately, it's only to say good-bye and goodnight."

She thanked him.

"You are a beautiful young lady, Abigail, don't you ever forget that - inside and outside. If I were twenty years younger you can bet your ass your father would be beating me away with a broomstick."

"I'm crippled," she pointed out. "That's all other guys seem to see is this wheelchair, David."

"I wouldn't give up all hope, Angel. You're beautiful, intelligent, and fun to be with," he noted. "More importantly, you're still young. In the long run they'll see that, instead of this clumsy wheelchair."

"I know. I just wish it didn't take so long to see me." She decided to change the subject. "Is he really crazy, David?"

David shrugged. "It's a matter of opinion. He has his idiosyncrasies like other people."

"But do you think he's crazy?" She wanted to hear it from him.

He wanted to rise, but she kept the pressure on his hands. "Sometimes I do. Sometimes I think he's so crazy it's underneath the surface and he just doesn't know it and what makes him so dangerous is that he's a very intelligent man. He's successful in his business, he has real-life, normal goals, just like all of us, but mentally he's in a class by himself. His temper doesn't make things any better either."

"Do you think he's guilty?" she persisted to ask.

After a brief hesitation, he finally conceded and answered her question. "I wouldn't represent anyone if I thought that, Abigail. I know I told your father I would defend him just to piss Ramsey off, but I'm not in this for the money or revenge. I truly and honestly think William is being prejudiced against because of his past and mainly his family."

"I don't think he's guilty if it's any encouragement to you," she agreed with him. "Someone's trying to frame him."

"I'm looking into all the possibilities, Abigail, but nothing is coming to the surface fast enough to prove he's without a doubt innocent. Ramsey's gone to request a grand jury on the matter and if he gets his way, William could be tried for murder."

There was a knock at the door, and Dr. Ella Foster came in. She was a beautiful woman, slim and tall, with short black hair always curled real tight and layered as if she'd just stepped out of the beauty salon. Ella had the sweetest voice, as if she was singing whenever she spoke and had been featured on the cover of Ebony as the most beautiful and successful doctor of that year.

"I'm sorry was I interrupting? Hello, Abigail," Ella asked.

David stood up. "No love, you weren't interrupting."

"Are you ready to go?" She moved to him and kissed his cheek then kissed Abigail's forehead.

He nodded and kissed Abigail on her cheek. "Goodnight, Angel."

Abigail said goodnight to both of them, then watched them leave together. David slipped an arm around Ella's waist as they were leaving.

The next day at therapy, Abigail became inquisitive about Ella's relationship with David. "So you like him a lot?"

"Who?" Ella asked evasively as she examined Abigail's legs.

"You know who." Abigail was lying on the examination table on her back. "He's a nice guy and very single. Never been married."

"Is that so?"

Abigail looked at Ella who looked very amused. "Do you like him a lot?" she repeated her question.

"A little."

"Have you had sex yet?"

Ella looked completely in shock that Abigail would ask her that type of question. "Abigail McPherson you ought to be ashamed of yourself."

"Why? Sex isn't bad. My parents do it all the time."

"They're married," Ella stated.

"True, but that doesn't stop most people," Abigail said teasingly.

"Have you been...?" the doctor left the question hanging.

"No." She sat up with a very disappointed look on her face. "If I did would I feel anything?"

"Before I answer that I have to ask you if you've felt cramps or discomfort in your pelvic when your period comes on?"

Abigail shrugged, not thinking much of the question. "A little discomfort a few days before it happens."

"When did that start?" Ella asked, frowning.

"About a year ago, when my mother said my nightmares started," Abigail said matter-of-factly.

"Do you have a lot of nightmares around the time of your period?"

“No they come and go...my nightmares.” She paused to gather her courage. “If I tell you something, can you promise you'll keep it to yourself. I know you and my mother discuss my condition all the time.”

“After you turned eighteen Abigail, I only say you're doing well. We agreed, even though we are good friends, I must still keep patient confidentiality with you. What is it you have to tell me?” Ella questioned.

Abigail paused slightly before admitting, “I've been having leg spasms, recently.”

This concerned Dr. Ella. “How recently?”

“Well, the first was two weeks ago. I thought it was my imagination, but the second came last night. I awoke and I felt this creepy sensation as if I were being watched and I felt the muscle in my right calf tighten so hard it felt like...a frog.” She had to force herself to remember the term since she hadn't had one in what seemed like decades. “Then it disappeared as mysteriously as it arrived and I went back to sleep. The other one was even less brief and dramatic in the back of my left knee. I barely didn't feel it.”

Dr. Ella pondered this and felt the right calf's firm muscle in Abigail's leg. “Of course this information was given to me for a specific reason?”

Abigail smiled mischievously. Dr. Ella knew her very well. “I would like you to prescribe me some birth control.”

The doctor stopped what she was doing and looked up at Abigail with her slanted, dark brown eyes filled with inquiry and shock. “Birth control?” Ella questioned to make sure she heard correctly.

Abigail nodded seriously.

“Abby, I don't think you should-”

“I'll be careful,” Abigail said cutting her off knowing Ella would adamantly protest her request. “I know the precautions and responsibilities of sex. I'm not a child. I feel, just in case. One never knows.”

“And your parent's won't know?” Ella presumed.

“Please, Ella,” she beseeched. “This means a lot to me. You said you didn't give my mother any information. I'm twenty and very able to make my mind up about a lot of things, especially this. Just because I'm in this chair it doesn't mean I have to stop living.”

Ella gave her a hard look. Abigail could see Ella's friendship and doctoring battling with each other.

When Ramsey picked her up from therapy Abigail was thrilled to see her father. Ramsey had a few private words with Ella, but they were soon on their way. Abigail wasn't worried that Ella would tell what

they had discussed, because she knew the doctor would stick to her oath of keeping her patient's information private. Ella took her job very seriously and Abigail was glad of that.

“What did she say?” Abigail inquired a bit nervously as her father drove away from the medical center.

“She said she's going to run a few more tests on you to see if your nerves in your lower spine have made any changes, so we might have to bring you a couple of days more next week to prepare for even more tests. She believes the nerves may have done their own repairing. She wants you to go to the hospital tomorrow for some test she's ordered.” He patted her thigh reassuringly. “I guess you could say your body hasn't given up all hope, sweetheart.”

“That's all she said?” Abigail insisted.

“Yes, why? Is there more I should know?” he asked suspiciously.

“Just wondering.” She changed the subject. “How was your day?”

“The normal. Same shit, different day,” Ramsey snorted.

She chuckled. “How's Mr. Stone?” She wanted to say William, but it felt too intimate to refer to him by his first name in front of her father.

He smirked. “Seems the media found a way to irk the shit out of him. They started referring to him as Billy the Killer. The grand jury approved the decision to try him for murder.”

Her heart skipped a beat. “That's terrible.”

“Abby, his hair was found on the victim's body,” Ramsey said incredulously.

“I know all the facts just as you know them, Dad, but you have to wonder how the hair on his head got down in the victim's groin area.”

For the first time in her life, Abigail saw her father blush. “Abby, it's possible.”

She couldn't comprehend, but let the subject go when her eyes lit on the blue van about three cars away in the passenger's rear view window. She wondered if her father saw it and then she wondered why was the van always following them or was the van just following her since she was with her mother last time she had seen the vehicle.

Ramsey spoke, “Tomorrow night your mother and I will be going to the policeman's ball.”

“Mom always loved those. I'm glad you've decided to go.”

He smiled remembering old days. “Me too.”

The van furthered its distance, but Abigail still saw it was following them as they made several turns. The creepy feeling was getting worse inside her as she felt this overwhelming urge to tell her father not to go to the ball, but she stayed quiet. The van stopped following them about three blocks from their home.

As soon as they arrived at the house, she went straight to her room and put the compact that Dr. Ella had given her in the bottom of her drawer.

For some reason or another, she always felt safe in her room. It was like a sanctuary where she lived in a world by herself and for herself. Everything was easily accessible to her and she had no worries.

That night at dinner, Rebecca joined the family saying she would “tolerate” Marilyn's cooking to sit down with her son and granddaughter. Ramsey gave his mother a cautious look.

“Your mother tells me you go to therapy at least three times a week,” Rebecca said to Abigail.

“Yes, Grandmother,” Abigail replied quietly.

“And you haven't walked yet?” she asked sarcastically.

“I don't intend to,” Abigail shot back smartly.

“Nonsense. You will walk,” her grandmother said assuredly.

“Rebecca, we've been honest with Abigail about her condition,” Marilyn said, “Even the doctors said the same thing. How on earth will she walk?”

“What doctors? Not that Dr. Foster?” Rebecca snorted.

Abigail defended her doctor. “Dr. Foster has been the most positive about my condition. World-class doctors have said I won't be able to walk due to the damage of my spine. Dad flew me to Germany and England,” Abigail proudly informed her obstinate grandmother proudly.

“Your father should have taken you to Dr. Potts in New York. He would have given you a lollipop,” Rebecca said, as if that would cure all things.

“A lollipop wouldn't cure her problems,” Marilyn sneered. “She is not a baby anymore Rebecca.”

“How would you know? How could you hurt my baby by telling her she can't walk?”

In unison, Marilyn and Abigail cried:

“Because I can't!”

“Because she can't!”

The kitchen went deadly silent until Rebecca sniped, “Fat lot you know, Marilyn. My baby will walk sooner than you think.” Rebecca turned to her son. “Now I want to fly Abigail off to New York tomorrow.”

Ramsey said simply, “She can't just go flying off anywhere, Mother. She has school work to do.”

“Ha! Your wife not only deprives my baby of the hope to walk, she also deprives her of other people her age. Whoever heard of getting a college degree at home?” Rebecca complained.

“It wasn't all my mother's idea to do this. I agreed with the decision,” Abigail defended her mother.

Rebecca still addressed her son as if Abigail nor Marilyn had said a word. “I think after you bring her from New York, you should see about getting her in a real school.”

“No!” Abigail exclaimed. “I'm not going to New York and I'm not going to school. I'm perfectly happy just like I am.” She rolled out of the kitchen and slammed the door of her bedroom.

“Nice going, Marilyn. You've brainwashed her into thinking she can just accept what's not right,” Rebecca said stubbornly.

Marilyn didn't say a word, but shot Ramsey a warning look as she stood up and followed Abigail into her room, leaving the bedroom door opened after she entered. Abigail had hoisted herself on her bed and was looking mildly upset. Marilyn only sat beside her daughter and put a finger on her lips to tell her to be quiet because she too wanted to hear what Ramsey was going to say to Rebecca.

“Mother, I've put up with a lot from you.” Ramsey's tone was moderate. “But one thing I cannot put up with is you interrupting my family's life with your dominance and bullheadedness.”

“How dare you speak to me-”

“Shut up, Rebecca,” he ordered. “This is an immediate family situation. Now we've let you stay here because we love you, but the fact that Abigail cannot walk is none of your business. I'm the head of this household and I will go to any lengths to make sure my daughter is happy and if she's happy the way she is, no one will say differently. Am I making myself clear?”

Rebecca sounded remorseful, “I'll keep my nose to myself, but if it concerns any danger I will step in.”

Ramsey went to Abigail's room to check on his daughter. He sat at the end of the bed from Abigail. “You two all right?”

“Fine, now that you're here,” Marilyn teased. “Is she going to stop?”

He shrugged. “For a while. You know how she is, but she's my stubborn mother. Thank you two for being so patient with this whole matter.”

“Thank you for understanding Dad.” Abigail kissed his cheek. “I love you both.”

“You'd better,” he growled playfully.

Abigail truly did love her family and she was so lucky to have two very understanding parents.

When she awoke in the middle of the night, she felt the overwhelming urge to scream, but she didn't. Looking at her bedside clock, she saw it was two in the morning. It had been two the last time she awoke with her leg spasms the other night, but her legs tonight lay motionless. The room was pitch black due to the overcast outside. She knew it was going to rain come morning. She could smell it in the air.

The creeping feeling consumed her suddenly and she laid down and closed her eyes as she heard footsteps come by her door. Her door opened after a few minutes and the creeping feeling became worse, yet she forced herself to be still and breathe evenly with her eyes closed.

The door closed as a noise was heard upstairs and Abigail heard someone scatter away in an unknown direction.

She watched the digital clock until she fell asleep at 4:08 am.

It started raining about nine that morning. Abigail studied the morning away. She loved when it rained because it always relaxed her.

Before Ramsey came back to the house to take her to her appointment at the hospital, Rebecca entered her room uninvited. Abigail always felt violated when anyone came in like that.

“You know since you don't go to school, you should go out more and meet people your age,” Rebecca suggested.

“I do go out. I take walks, but it's too dreary to take walks, Grandmother. I have functions at church and I even go to a bookclub at the local bookstore every other month.”

“I meant dates,” her grandmother said obviously.

She replied sarcastically, because she felt Rebecca was being nosey again. “No guy will put up with a cripple.”

Rebecca refuted stubbornly, “Abigail, you're not a cripple.”

“Oh really? I just like to sit around all day and not move my legs, is that it?” Her dry sarcasm was not appreciated by Rebecca.

“Why don't we go out to the movies tonight?”

“I'm not interested.”

“But there's a lovely Disney movie out. I hear it would be wonderful.”

Abigail rolled her eyes heavenwards. Would Rebecca ever get out of treating her like a baby? She was worse than her parents. “I don't feel like it.”

“Fine, I'll go by myself,” Rebecca pouted and left, to Abigail's relief.

Marilyn softly knocked on the door and then came in. “Dr. Foster canceled your testing. There was too much conflict with the scheduling of the results and David wanted her to come to the ball tonight.”

“Oh, I wish I could go.”

“You could,” Marilyn said.

“I don't have anything to go with metal, Mother.”

Marilyn gave her daughter a look of unamusement. “You have definitely inherited your father's wit, young lady. Maybe you'll change your tune next year.”

“I'll be too busy, hopefully finishing college.”

“Have you selected a specific area of design?”

“I think I will go with interior design.”

“That sounds interesting.”

“I seem to think so myself.”

Chapter 17

Fishing through his old duffel bag, William found the old cigarette pack. He had never smoked a day in his life, but the guard that had taken his belongings when he went to jail had let him keep it. It wasn't the pack that held sentimental value, it was what was inside which William took out and held in his hand. It was his only link to the past and it was what had kept his sanity for these past years. The momento and who it belonged to was his peace and now the time had come to meet with her again.

He wasn't sure if he should carry out his revenge or not. He wasn't sure of a lot of things, but he knew he had to go there and do something. He had gone last night, entering the house like a thief in the night as a test, but he had decided not to carry out his plan until tonight. He had to get his revenge against Ramsey McPherson and the only way to hurt the man was through his family.

“We're here,” said Stuckey, who had been driving William's blue van lately to throw that nosey detective Hal off William's plan. They had parked two blocks from the McPherson's house, just as planned.

Stuckey and William were the same age, but William felt he was more mature than Stuckey, who had hidden issues he never wanted to discuss. William thought he did a hell of a job in the electronics field of cars, but he was so hooked on crack he couldn't see straight. Stuckey's skinny, grimy fingers passed William a silver, copied key. “This is the key to the doors in her room. I oiled the hinges real good so you'll be like the wind.” He reminded William, “Don't forget about the slope in the hallway that creaks.”

“I'm not going in the living room.”

“I know, but just in case you have to go out of the backup exit, like last night.”

William nodded. “All right, I'll wait about five minutes, then deactivate the alarm. Get the hell out of here now and don't worry about me. I figure I can track back in ten on foot.”

“Do you know what you're going to do?” Stuckey asked, handing William a small, electronic gadget similar to an alarm deactivation on a car.

“I have an idea in mind, but I'm still up in the air about the exact details.” That was about all he would tell Stuckey, as he got out and closed the door. Even though he did favor Stuckey because of his age, he didn't trust the young man. If pushed to the limit, William felt Stuckey would sing like a bird. William couldn't afford that, so he kept most of this to himself, even though Stuckey had been overly curious about this whole revenge trip William wanted to plan.

It was pouring rain and he covered up and hurried to his destination into the dark night of Davenport, Ohio.

* * *

“Abby, are you sure you don't want to go see a movie with your Grandmother?” Marilyn asked, coming into the room.

Abigail had already changed into her nightgown to show that she was adamant about not going anywhere with Rebecca. “Positive. I'm tired and I would just rather stay at home.” She looked her at mother and smiled in appreciation.

Marilyn looked radiant in the gold and black, velvet ball gown that clearly brought out the auburn, natural coloring of her hair and vivid beauty. “You look beautiful, Mom.”

“Your father said I haven't looked this lovely since I had you. I don't know if that's a compliment or an insult,” Marilyn said.

Ramsey entered the room and both females smiled at him. He was decked out in an Armani tuxedo that accentuated his lean, yet muscular body. “I look pretty good for an old man, don't I?”

Abigail laughed as Marilyn looped arms with her husband. "You look sexy," Marilyn purred.

"From what I see, we won't be staying long at the ball," he growled huskily to his wife.

Marilyn blushed. "Goodnight, Abigail."

"Tell me all about it tomorrow," Abigail ordered.

"That's a promise, sweetheart." Her father kissed her forehead. "I love you."

"I know Dad. I love you too."

"I know," he teased.

"I'm leaving," Rebecca said at the bedroom doorway.

"Are you sure you don't want to stay home Rebecca? The rain is getting worse," Marilyn asked.

Rebecca stiffened and lifted her chin stubbornly. "I'll be fine."

Marilyn gave her the keys to her station wagon. "Have a good time and no looking at any boys," she cajoled.

Rebecca looked at her son then she smiled a little. She used to always tell her son the same thing before he went out on dates, but she'd say, "no looking at any girls." "Since my son never listened to his mother, then I don't have to listen to you."

Marilyn only laughed, not letting her mother-in-law take away her joy and retorted back, "Bite your tongue, Rebecca. I would have never married this guy if he listened to you." She nudged Ramsey out while Rebecca left out of the house speechless.

Abigail had a feeling Rebecca and Marilyn would never get along.

* * *

William waited until the station wagon pulled out of the driveway before he made his way around the house to the balcony doors. The curtains covering the glass doors were pulled partially closed and he could see that no one was in the room.

Abigail went with her parents to the door to watch them leave. "Have a good night," she wished them.

"Are you sure you'll be all right?" Marilyn asked worriedly.

"I'll page you if anything happens, okay," Abigail assured her mother.

Ramsey had to literally drag his wife out of the house under the umbrella, but that worried look never left Marilyn's face.

Abigail secured both of the locks on the door, then she sighed with relief. Any daughter would be excited to have the house to herself. If Abigail was normal, she could just imagine herself inviting everyone over, but she wasn't normal and she had no close friends - male or female.

She went past her room to her father's study briefly noting that her closet door was open. Closing herself up in the study, she pushed her father's chair away and moved so she was right up to the desk. Opening up his private file drawer with the key Ramsey kept hidden underneath his chair, she found the file marked, "W. Stone." This was a copied file from the police department that her father kept along with other files he was always interested in or working on at home.

Opening the file in front of her, after replacing the key just as she had found it, Abigail found the section on the notes of Dr. Emery Dunn. Dr. Dunn had also investigated William when he went to jail serving time after the deaths of Enid and Edward. She knew about the files, but never had time to read them because someone was always home.

"I found the son just as fascinating as the father. They both have a level of intelligence far more superior than any psychotic I've ever known. Although the son answered my questions like anyone in the 'norm,' I sensed a deep anger inside of him, as if he were forming ways of killing me."

There were other journal notes, all in dated order. She skipped over them because most of them spoke of the in-depth brutality William suffered at the hands of his father. The beatings had been so severe and if William passed out during them, upon awakening Javier found ways to torture his son even worse. According to the doctor's notes, William took those beatings without a word to anyone.

"I find it strange how hostile William has become since he learned that I have been communicating with others about what he tells me. I don't know how he knows I've been doing this, since he's inside prison, but he knew. I think it's his way of talking to me. I've been as evasive as possible with the answers to his questions, but he's found a way to get inside my head and make me say things without my knowledge."

Another journal entry further on in the year went:

"Those eyes haunt me. They're like piercing swords in my chest. Every night I lie awake hearing his vows of revenge for betraying him. I had to do it. It's my job. I just wished those eyes would stop haunting my sleep turning my dreams into nightmares. They're like glowing embers of fire and soon I shall burn. Burn from his hatred and revenge. Burn to my death."

As his journal entries went on, she could see the madness inside of Dr. Dunn coming through to the surface. On one entry he just wrote a song William's mother used to sing to him when he was little.

"...when the bough breaks the cradle will fall," repeatedly written in the journal's notes.

His last entry went:

“The trials and tribulations he suffers don’t hurt him any more. He has control of his past as well as his future, but he can rub the madness he suffered into others. He can push a person to no return. He has no woman in his life, due to a hatred of the opposite sex. He finds their only use sexual and nothing else. He cannot let the madness which consumed his father over take him because he has learned to control the demons that eat away on his soul and foist them onto the unsuspecting. He is like his name he took from his uncle; for he is a rock through and through, but his madness and hatred will forever haunt me. I cannot bear to have those eyes burn through me anymore.”

She closed the journal and saw a newspaper clipping of about one year and a half ago. Dr. Emery Dunn had committed suicide by burning himself up in a closet.

Closing the file, she shivered in fear as the thunder roared and the lightening crackled right outside of the window. The lights flickered dangerously low and she figured she had better let up on her reading. As she put the file away like it had been, she decided that she would start a nice warm fire in the living room's fireplace.

She briefly noted, as she went down the hallway to the front room, the door to her room was now closed, because her mind was a million miles away.

She hadn't wanted to go to the movies due to the trying day she had endured. Marilyn had to do some shopping around and Abigail had been left with her grandmother. Rebecca had been asking Abigail all day long to get things either too high or out of her reach. She was glad for the distraction caused when her father came home after picking up his tuxedo from the dry cleaners. They had started to discuss changing Robby's old room to a nursery since it was the closest to her parents bedroom.

Starting the fire was a good idea because it took the chill out of the air. She noticed Rebecca's knitting things by the fireplace and decided to put them on the stairs on her way to her own room.

Lightening crackled just as she got to the living room doorway. She stopped instantly as the lights flickered a bit, then the electricity went off. Turning to the fireplace for light she looked at the watch on her arm to read ten o'clock at night. Two hours had passed by fast while she was reading. The creepy feeling was upon her and she shrieked when the thunder roared loudly. The storm sounded as if it were right above the home. The knitting dropped from her lap to the floor, right near the wheel on her chair.

So shaken up, as she reached down to get it, she lost her balance and fell from her chair. The wheelchair rolled into the hall, enshrouding in the darkness, but she knew it couldn't go very far because there was a small incline in the hall that had always been there.

Instead of going to get it, she crawled over to the couch to look out of the window, just to see if all the other lights on the street were out.

Just as she was opening the curtains, she heard a familiar squeak and looked at the living room doorway.

Her chair had rolled right back in front of the doorway...on its own?

Her heart raced in fear as she reluctantly looked away from the doorway to look out of the window and she gasped in terror as the lightening crackled, lighting up the pitch black night to reveal the blue van parked right across the street from the house.

Fear gripped her and she dove behind the couch, pulling her legs to her knees praying as hard as she could. She closed her eyes so tight she could see stars, but it was probably better than what she didn't want to see - her own death.

She knew if she saw those eyes she would die!

'He's coming to kill me! He's come to kill us all!' her mind screamed.

A door opened, then closed. Shuffling sounds came next, then footsteps and the laugh of her mother's voice.

"Mom!" Abigail screamed. "Momma, Daddy!"

Arms reached over the couch and lifted her so fast she felt as if she were flying. At first she fought thinking it was him, but then her father's familiar scent filled her nostrils and she clung to her father as if her life depended on it. All the while, she could hear screams and wondered where they came from.

"Abigail!" her father bellowed, shaking her. "Stop screaming!"

Abigail opened her eyes. The lights were on. Her parents were looking down at her and she stared up at them. Her father was still shaking her, even after she stopped screaming.

"I'll page Ella," Marilyn said.

"No!" Abigail rasped, gripping her father more to draw him very close for comfort.

Ramsey continued to hold her in his arms and carried Abigail to her bedroom, consoling her all the way.

"I got scared. The lights went off and the lightening and thunder..." she sobbed in relief. "Oh Daddy, he's going to hurt us, just like you said, all because he hates you."

"Who's going to hurt us?" he asked, confused and very worried.

"Stone. He hates you. He's going to hurt us all to get back at you. Just like all the rest of them who have hurt him. He's killed them all in some kind of way."

Ramsey looked back at Marilyn, who looked rather paled, then he looked at Abigail. "Do you trust me?"

“But-”

He shook her firmly. “Do you trust I’ll protect you Abigail.”

She began to cry harder. “Y-Yes, Daddy. I trust you.”

He held her until her body relaxed in his arms and her crying subsided. “When I say he won’t hurt any of us, you believe me?”

She nodded, but a frightened sob escaped.

“I love you so much, Abigail. You mean the world to me because you represent Marilyn and my love for each other. You are my sweetheart. My one and only sweetheart and you have nothing to fear,” he reassured her.

Abigail knew without a doubt that her father could protect her. She was being silly and childish. Still, the comfort of her father’s arms made her feel so secure and very much loved.

Marilyn knelt down to comfort Abigail. “How do you feel?”

“Much better now that you are here-” A yawn escaped her lips despite her fear.

“You’d better get some sleep. You’ve had a trying day.”

Ramsey laid her in the bed, as Marilyn left out. “Abigail, you know our bedroom is right above yours. All you have to do is hit the wall or call my name if you need anything. I’ll be right there.”

“I know,” Abigail said.

“Even if you need me in the middle of the night, I’ll be there.”

She nodded in understanding. “How was the ball?”

“Excellent, but your mother became so worried, since we’ve never left you alone that she could barely enjoy herself. Ester usually fusses over you, but with her gone, Marilyn couldn’t sit still, especially when the storm worsened.” He kissed her cheek. “Are you going to be okay, sweetheart?”

Again she nodded, feeling a bit ashamed for acting like a child. Before he was even out of the room, Abigail was breathing deeply, signaling she was asleep.

Ramsey joined his wife in the kitchen after closing her door. “She’ll be okay. You know how edgy she gets with storms.”

“Ram, I don’t want you discussing that Stone case around her anymore. Until the trial is over you’ll do all your work at the office,” Marilyn said steadfastly.

“Honey, I don’t think-” he was cut off by his wife.

“That's final, Ramsey. The last thing Abigail needs is to get upset and the same goes for me and the baby.”

Ramsey conceded. “But if she asks, I won't try to avoid it.”

Marilyn sighed tiredly. “Let's go to bed.”

He agreed and led her up the stairs.

* * *

His large body finally relaxed as he heard their movements upstairs. That was close. Too close for comfort. He made his way out of the study, which he had ducked into when the front door opened.

Going back into her room, he saw she was fast asleep and he stood there watching her. Another door opened and he stiffened. There were footsteps in the hall which came right up to Abigail's door. He pressed his back against the wall behind the door as it opened.

An old woman came in and stood over the bed. She kissed Abigail's cheek, then left. Just as William was about to relax, the door opened again and the older woman was pushing Abigail's chair to the foot of the bed.

When she left this time, she kept the door cracked and William could see her putting the fire out in the living room. She straightened up and then finally went upstairs. He listened for sounds and didn't move from his place for another half an hour.

Reaching in his pocket, he pulled out the eight-inch, jagged-edged pocketknife his father had given to him. On the handle in gold it read, CHAVEZ. It was a knife Yared had given to Javier and it had been passed on to William, who usually kept it on his desk at work. After closing the door, he quietly made his way to the bed, his manhood already swelling from her closeness. He mentally focused on the fact that this was his worse enemy's daughter and he remembered what he intended to do with her for revenge.

Ramsey McPherson would be sorry he ever fucked with William Castro-Chavez Stone.

Chapter 18

Abigail felt that creepy sensation fill her, but she had not awakened fully and thought it was a nightmare that she would remember coming to her.

Suddenly she felt a heavy weight on her chest and she couldn't breathe due to something covering her mouth. She twisted her face and tried to free her breathing with her hands; yet her palms came into contact with warm skin that wasn't her own.

She opened her eyes to see nothing except darkness, and that skulking sensation had turned to all-out terror, as she felt a cold metal pressing against her neck. She froze petrified.

When he spoke it was a deep, hissing growl that she swore would make a strong man faint. How she kept her consciousness was a mystery to even her. “Now that I have your attention, you'd better listen good, you spoiled brat. You make one sound - one tiny whisper and I'll slit your throat from ear to ear, then kill anyone who comes through that door. I'll fucking carve that baby out your mother's belly and slice your old man in half.”

His hand lifted from her mouth and she took a deep fulfilling breath. Her mind screamed for calmness, but at the same time, her breathing increased and her body began to shake. She felt a scream building from her gut, wanting to come out of her mouth and wished he would put his hand back over her face because she didn't know if she would be able to control the trepidation spreading through every inch of her heart. Tears filled her eyes as she forced her mouth to stay closed.

His free hand went down to the front of her nightgown and ripped it all the way to her thighs, tearing off her underwear as well. His clothes were a little damp and she could feel a hardness pressed against her stomach from behind his pants. He had raised himself up so that he looked down at her face and his hands were on either side of her head.

“P-Please,” she sobbed in a bare audible whisper.

His hands went to her groin. He had completely focused her out; she could see the glassy look in his face from the diminutive light that streamed from outside. Yet, his hands moved as if he had a horrible ache in his pants and he knew she was the only solution to the painful problem as he pushed her gown remnants out of his way. In one quick motion he had her legs over his shoulder and one finger pushed inside of her. The soft hairs of her public brushed his palm.

“Stop!” she gasped, pressing one hand on his hard rippled stomach and the other covering his own down there. “You can't!”

He closed his eyes trying to block her out. Releasing the knife out of his other hand and allowing it to rest on the pillow by her head, he grabbed both her wrist and raised her arms over her head.

Abigail was fully accessible to ANYTHING he wanted to do, and she could still feel that hardened member pressing right above the entrance to her. “I'm a virgin!” she pleaded in a hiss.

He tried to press deeper inside her and she heard him groan from the tightness and even she could tell his well-endowed shaft would never fit inside of her untouched softness that was dry as a bone.

Looking down at her, her body trembled underneath him in fear. He shrugged her legs off his shoulders and moved to his knees on the bed and began to take off his shirt, but then he stopped and reached down to find her hands.

Abigail gasped as he yanked her by the arms into a sitting position then guided her hands to his shirt.

“Undress me,” he ordered.

She actually blushed. “I c-can't,” she stuttered.

He delivered what wasn't a slap, but a sharp push on her face, but the implication was there and her fear of him came back tenfold. Her fingers shook as they started at the top button, but she was so nervous she couldn't coordinate herself to do it.

“Hurry!” he hissed.

“I-I'm too-”

Another push to her face, but this one harder. She began to sob in frustration.

“Hurry!” he ordered, his voice becoming a deathly growl.

“You're making me nervous-”

Using his fingers, he delivered a slap. She sobbed in pain and anxiety, ripping the shirt open, then crying hysterically, knowing he would beat her. Instead, he shoved her to her back and covered her mouth and nose so she couldn't breathe. She forgot all about her fear and began to struggle for air.

“Stop it!” he hissed applying more pressure.

She felt unconsciousness starting to envelope her, so she obeyed, lying still. He moved his hand away and she gasped for air. When she gained a little control of her senses, he got off the bed and turned her around until she was sitting on the edge of the bed.

Abigail couldn't stop trembling. She was so scared, she didn't know what to do.

His strong hands grabbed her wrists again as he lowered to the floor on his knees in front of her, between her legs. He placed one hand on his cuff and she knew what he wanted. He wanted to humiliate her by making her undress him. It was as if she was giving him her permission, but she wasn't. She didn't want to.

When her fingers didn't move, he applied pressure to her wrist. She still didn't obey.

“Do it!” he ordered.

“No!”

Another slap.

Her fingers began to move. She tore open the buttons in defiance, but he didn't punish her for the damage to his shirt. He raised to his feet, after she pushed the shirt off his broad shoulders and the clothing fell to the floor by the bed, then moved her hands to his belt buckle.

As she opened his pants, she could smell him. Her nose and hearing were very keen and he smelled so masculine. He wore no cologne and his body scent was natural, not obscene or gross; yet pleasant and she found herself wanting to bury her face into his flesh to treasure his aroma.

Abigail nervously pushed the jeans down until he stepped out of them and he stood naked before her. She diverted her eyes to his stomach, blushing until her cheeks almost hurt, very humiliated.

She waited for his next move, wondering what else he could possibly do to strip her of what little pride she had left. His hands came up to her face to cup her cheeks.

“Open your mouth,” he ordered.

She frowned confused, but parted her soft lips. He placed her hands on his now soft manhood and she gasped, closing her mouth.

“Open!” he growled as he moved her hands to circumference him. One of his hands held down her palms there, while his other hand went to the back of her head to press her towards him.

She opened her mouth, but when his velvet softness pressed against her lips, she closed her mouth and the tip of him smashed against her lips as she moaned her protest.

He backhanded her sending her sprawling across the bed. She tasted blood in her mouth as his body covered her. “You'll deny me nothing!” he growled. “You'll do as I say or I'll beat the living shit out of you, you little bitch.” He was shaking her and she thought she would pass out just from his verbal brutality.

He sat her up again, put her hands back and dug his fingers so harshly in her face she was forced to open her mouth. He gave one last warning. “If you even think about using your teeth, you'll regret it.”

It had crossed her mind, but she didn't have the guts. His softness filled her mouth and she tasted its saltiness immediately, but she felt as if she were tasting hot ice cream as his soft shaft moved into her mouth. He drew her head forward so his shaft went further into her mouth. She found that if she placed her tongue over her bottom teeth and drew her upper lip over her top row, her teeth would not touch his maleness that was slowly growing in her mouth. He drew towards her, then away and each time he returned, she felt a fluttering in her belly, as she could smell his delicious scent. Soon he was becoming so large she had to stretch her mouth wide to contain him, but it meant letting her teeth brush against him. The first time it happened she stiffened, noting the shudder that passed through him, but on the second time she

noticed it and a sense of power filled her knowing she had made this awesome man weak with her oral ministrations.

Suddenly he pressed her down toward the foot of the bed and shot his hand down between her legs. He groaned, feeling her dryness. Spreading her legs wide, he positioned himself at her opening. Abigail could see him almost aching to have her, yet he was in a quandary about her body's unresponsiveness. This was probably the first time something of this nature had occurred with him by the way he was acting, but she was so terrified and confused, she didn't know how to respond to this entire situation.

The thought that he would beat her because of her unresponsiveness made her began trembling again. When he had parted her thighs, being quite tender, but it was barely noted by her, because she was so embarrassed at being naked underneath him.

He leaned his face above hers and growled, "Kiss me."

Her eyes widened in shock. This was the humiliation to top it all. He was forcing her willingness and if she protested, it would mean punishment. She knew if he slapped her this time it wouldn't stop. He would probably beat her to death just like he promised!

Raising her head, she placed her lips on his slanted, thin mouth, then drew away.

"What the hell was that?" he snarled.

She could hear the displeasure and began to become nervous all over again. "A kiss?" she guessed.

"You don't even know what that was, idiot."

She stiffened at his name calling. "I do know and any time lips touch another person's it's called a kiss."

"Thank you, Webster's fucking Dictionary. Now, if you don't give me a real kiss, I'll cut your fucking lips off and shove them down your damn throat, smart-ass."

"I-I don't know.." She was afraid to say it, knowing that he would become angry or just think she was being stubborn. She did the only thing she could think of and flung her arms around his neck, burying her face in his thickly muscled neck. "P-Please don't hurt me, cause I-I can't kiss."

"Liar," he sneered, pushing her away.

She almost let out a wail, knowing he would kill her for her innocence. Instead he covered her mouth and nose again. She didn't struggle, but used the time to calm herself, placing her arms at her side. He took his hand away when he was sure she had a grip on her equilibrium again.

"Have you ever eaten a lollipop?" he asked huskily his mouth against her ear.

It sent shivers down her spine. His voice was a deeply caressing whisper; his breath playing havoc with her sensitive ears. “Y-Yes, but what does this have t-to do with kiss...kissing.” It was hard to speak with him so close.

“Close your eyes and open your mouth a little.”

She obeyed immediately, curiosity getting the best of her. His lips covered hers so fiercely that her breath caught in her throat and his tongue licked her mouth, thoroughly tasting her innocent sweetness.

Finally he drew away, “You taste so sweet,” he whispered.

She blushed.

“Now kiss me,” he ordered.

“A real kiss?”

“Those are the only ones I like and you'll give it to me.”

She raised up and joined their mouths together. Her tongue pushed passed his lips entwining her tongue with his. Her arms came up automatically, moving around over his brawny shoulders clasping in the back of his thick hair to hold her neck up, because he made no effort to lower his body. The only thing he moved was his lips and the rest of him remained rock hard above her.

The one kiss was doing wonders to Abigail. Her whole body began to relax and she felt herself slowly becoming aroused as his manhood brushed against her most sensitive part.

Her back began to tire and she moaned as she had to break off the kiss in disappointment, but as she laid back down, her back arched on its own accord and she realized he had slipped the tip of himself inside of her. What she couldn't understand was how on earth was she feeling the pressure?

He strained his lower body against her and the deeper he moved, the more powerful the aching inside of her grew. It was a yearning, quivering sensation she had felt in the pit of her belly. It was becoming a pain mixed with a needful pleasure she relished in and even drew him close. She could feel it! She could feel him!

Abigail arched her body a little more, relaxing her stomach and felt him push even deeper into her. Suddenly she stiffened, when the tip of him pressed against her inner barrier.

“Relax,” he ordered gently in her ear.

Abigail was really scared now. If she could feel pleasure and pain from his entry then she most definitely would feel him splitting her wide open. “You're too big.”

She heard amazement in his voice as he asked, “You can feel me?”

“Most definitely,” she said proudly.

“Then relax or it will hurt more.”

She still did not obey and gasped as he dipped his mouth to cover her hardened nipple. Her hands came up to draw him away, but his body didn't even bulge and soon his mouth was actually beginning to affect her pleasantly all over. She was amazed to feel his gentle hands knead her other breast - no more than a handful and shower them with all kinds of different kisses. It was exciting to feel his mouth and hands worshipping her body and she let herself go, not feeling the least shame, but as soon as he felt her arousal increase, he drove so deep in her that it rocked her hips upward. He shouldered her legs and repeatedly plunged into her.

Abigail felt the huge wave of pain, but it was over before it began, as his motions filled her with pleasure far beyond her imagination. She let herself surrender to his body as he took her body to a sensual heaven she could only dream of. Her insides were bursting all over the place, but he covered her mouth with his to muffle the cries of her ecstasy. These kisses were wild, savage, and hard, but she met them with a passion to equal and surpass his own.

When her peak showered upon her soul, she could feel a warmth spreading in her loins and happiness washed over her.

His body collapsed on her, burying his face in her neck. They were both drenched from each other's sweat; yet it was a sweet scent that they relished. He was first to gather his senses and got up withdrawing quickly from her and going in the bathroom not turning on any lights.

Laying there alone, Abigail reflected on what she had just experienced and was glad he didn't turn on any lights because she was blushing clear down to her toes. She pushed up to a sitting position just as he returned.

“Lay down,” he ordered, nudging her shoulder. She did as she was told and saw him kneel. She sensed that he was cleaning her and again she blushed. When he was done, he set the washcloth on the bed stand and picked her up as if she weighed but a feather.

He laid her correctly on the bed and turned her to the wall, and then after tossing her nightgown to the floor he laid behind her.

“You're staying-”

He covered her mouth and nose. She relaxed as he drew her body to curve against his rock solid hardness. She felt so small against him and wondered if he felt too big against her.

He released his hands from her face. “Sleep,” he ordered.

Abigail closed her eyes. Why did he have to order her around? If he asked she would still do it.

Nevertheless, she was exhausted and sleep did come amazingly easily.

Chapter 19

“Abigail Yvonne McPherson!” Rebecca cried.

Abigail jumped up in bed and looked around frantically. He was gone. She relaxed, but then she looked down at herself. She was naked!

Rebecca tossed a robe at her to cover herself, just as her parents came to the door. Her nightgown lay on the floor and the sheets on her bed were gone.

Marilyn picked up the shredded nightgown. “Abigail, what happened?”

Abigail looked at the torn bloody nightgown and was speechless. So she burst out and cried. Rebecca and Marilyn fought to get over to her for comfort, but Ramsey beat them to her and swept his daughter in his arms.

“She's still upset from last night,” Marilyn perceived.

“Where did the blood come from?” Rebecca asked.

Abigail wailed louder to throw everyone off.

“Where the hell do you think it came from?” Ramsey bellowed. “Now get that out of here. Can't you see that upsets her.”

Rebecca left with the torn garment and Abigail pretended to calm down. Marilyn assisted in righting her daughter's robe. “Rest, sweetheart,” Ramsey said. “I'll call the doctor over.”

“I-I'm sorry. I must of had one of my nightmares.”

“It's evident. You're so stressed you came on two weeks early,” Marilyn said. “Can you remember anything from last night?”

Abigail remembered everything from last night, but she couldn't tell her parents; yet she decided to tell them what had sent her into a panic. “A van!”

“What van?” Ramsey said.

Abigail saw that familiar look her father got when he knew something was going his way. “A blue van.”

“With bars on the windows?”

“It was dark. I couldn't see it very well,” she lied partially.

“If you saw it again would you recognize it?” he asked.

“Ramsey quit putting her through the third degree like she was a defendant on the stands,” Marilyn snapped. “She's your daughter.”

“And if my guess is right, he chose last night to terrorize our daughter,” Ramsey said.

Marilyn questioned this theory of her husband's. “How? No one can get in the house unless they break in. The house is fine, Ramsey.”

“But she saw his van.”

“It could have been any one's.”

Ramsey stormed out of the room, not wanting to listen to his wife anymore.

“I didn't mean to upset him,” Abigail said.

“He'll be fine,” Marilyn assured her daughter.

Abigail seriously doubted this.

* * *

David was at his wits end. “For the last time Ramsey, my client was no where near your house.”

“My daughter saw a blue van,” Ramsey stated.

“There are over nineteen blue vans with the same make and model in Sawyer county. In your neighborhood alone you have two. Your neighbor across the street said there were in-laws visiting last night driving a dark colored van.

“But he was unsure of the color,” Ramsey pointed out.

“Abigail couldn't even see that well either, because the street lights went out. Now, if you keep on harassing my client, I'll have to draw charges on you, Ramsey,” David threatened.

Ramsey sighed in exasperation. “Fine. He's free to go.” He stumped out of the room.

William's head came up off the table when David entered the small prisoner conference room. He hadn't slept all night and was exhausted. He was a little bit scared, knowing he would be convicted of rape, but deep inside he found it all worthwhile. He would be out in ten years, maybe and would start his life all over again.

David looked hard at his client. “You look like shit.”

“I feel great.” William smiled a sheepish grin as he stretched and his eyes sparkled, taking David aback.

“I'll take you home,” the lawyer offered.

William stood up cautiously as if someone was playing a cruel joke on him. “They aren't pressing charges against me?”

“For what?” David snapped.

William's eyes widened as he realized he was really free to go. She hadn't told! “What were the charges for bringing me in?”

“Breaking a restraining order. Ramsey's daughter admitted to possibly seeing a dark-colored van like yours near the house last night, but I refuted that it could have been any ones.”

“And they're letting me go?” William asked, coming up to David who held the door opened.

“She wasn't positive and it's believed to belong to a neighbor.” David let William pass him, but grabbed his arm. “Wasn't it a neighbor's?”

William snatched his arm away. “Obviously so, if she said so. How the hell would I know?” he sneered, and then walked out of the police station a free man - for now. He had to find out what the hell happened and why hadn't she told as he had thought she would. He had been so ready to see Ramsey's face raging in front of him, calling him every name in the book, but the little idiot hadn't said a word to anyone about anything of importance.

David allowed the subject to drop and decided to pay the McPherson's a visit to check on Abigail after he dropped William off. He didn't like the gleam he had seen in Stone's eyes and the pep in his step.

Rebecca answered the door. “What do you want?” she snapped.

He greeted her politely, then said, “I would like to speak wi-”

“Uncle David!” Abigail cried.

David gently pushed past Rebecca and gathered Abigail in his arms, lifting her up. “Hi 'ya Angel.” He set her back down in the chair and noticed she looked rather different. More alive. “Are you alright?”

“I'm fine,” she assured him.

He took a careful look. Why on earth did he feel he was experiencing the same thing from two different people? Her hazel, dark penny eyes danced in pleasure and her skin seemed to vibrate with life. She glowed better than her pregnant mother.

“David,” Ella said, coming out of the kitchen toward them, surprised to see him there.

He smiled in greeting. “El, you're here for Abigail?”

"I usually don't make house calls, but Ramsey said Abigail wasn't feeling well enough to come to the hospital for testing. When I got here she was fine. Matter of fact, I've never seen her look so well," Ella noted.

David wanted to say, *'You read my mind,'* but he kept it to himself.

"I just needed a lot of rest," Abigail explained quickly.

Rebecca dismissed herself to go to her room. "And I'm not coming out until he's gone."

Marilyn came out of the kitchen greeting David.

"Mother McPherson is in a huff," David teased.

"She's always that way. Ignore her. What's the pleasure of this visit?" Marilyn asked.

"Well, since Ramsey's always away, I thought I'd sneak over here--"

"Fooled," Marilyn giggled, pushing him playfully.

He chuckled. "No, serious, I came here to check for possible breaking and entering. My client was hauled down to jail and I want to investigate your husband's claim that he was suspected in the area." He saw the upset look now in Marilyn's eyes. "I'm not going to bother anyone and I know Ramsey already checked the area. I promise to be out of your hair in seconds."

"He's in jail?" Abigail asked worriedly.

"No, he's out, but I just want to check around for my peace of mind and for your safety as well. If someone was lurking around here, it could possibly be the same person trying to frame Mr. Stone," David explained.

Marilyn interrupted anymore of Abigail's questions by snapping, "Then go. Just don't bring him up in this house again, David. He's caused enough emotional havoc in this family already."

He knew Marilyn was displeased, but he really needed to check out the area around the house.

Ella volunteered, "I'll go with you."

When they were outside in the backyard, David faced Ella. "I know you can't reveal patients' records or anything, but I really need to know something, El, and if you can answer it, would you do the best without jeopardizing your profession or work ethics?"

"Within reason, David," she said defensively.

"If Abigail was raped would she feel it?" David asked.

Ella twitched her lips impishly as she took a moment to think about it. "I think someone in Abigail's condition could. Can you keep what I say in confidence and off the record?"

“Yes, Ella. This means a lot to me. I think someone wants to hurt Abigail.”

“I think someone in Abigail's condition has discomfort in her pelvic around her period her and her body may be healing on its own. My suspicions can't be proven in any way shape or form. Matter of fact, I feel it's only a matter of time before she may be able to walk.”

“You really feel that way?” he asked excitedly.

“Yes, but I won't lay my cards on the table and tell her or even her parents. They've had too many disappointments already and it's only what I suspect.” She went on to state. “I think the only thing wrong is that she's mentally incapable of using her legs.”

“So she has a walking block in her head?” David surmised.

“I suspect Abigail's so used to people giving her bad news and bad things happening to her that her mind has given up hope, but her body is far from fighting and when her mind finally catches on, she won't be able to sit down.”

“I'd love to see that day happen.”

“You aren't the only one,” Ella agreed as her pager went off. “Oh darn, I won't be able to look for clues, but why don't you stop by my place tonight and you can look for clues on me?” she asked seductively.

He smiled wickedly and kissed her hard. “Most definitely. What do I get when I find them?”

“A very nice surprise, Mr. Lawyer.” She giggled.

David watched her swish away and his smile grew, but he caught a reflection of himself in the back window of the house and frowned. William's look had been similar and so had Abigail's. He didn't like the strange suspicion he was feeling. Abigail wouldn't keep secrets like the ones David was suspecting and if she did, why?

He went to her balcony doors and looked around. Going around to the back of the gate, he saw footprints, but they were indiscernible due to the rain washing away part of them. Still, David's suspicion that someone had been around the house last night was true, but he couldn't tell exactly who. He wouldn't reveal this information to anyone until he had more answers. Yet, he had a feeling he wouldn't be getting them from Stone nor Abigail.

His pager went off. His assistant wanted him to call the evidence room at the station William had been taken to this morning.

* * *

At the same time, William was lying down on his couch. Deep in thought about last night's events. He wasn't sure what to think or feel. His phone rang and it served as a good distraction.

“William?” someone said on the other line.

The voice was familiar, but his thoughts were so distracted he didn't recognize it immediately.

“Lydia?”

She sighed. “Long time no hear from.”

“Lydia, I thought we agreed for Dakota's sake that we wouldn't communicate.”

Angrily, she spat, “Damn those child protective people, William. I need to speak with you and I feel it's time Dakota met his only blood relative. Plus, he's been reared gently enough and I know personally you wouldn't hurt a fly or I'll box your ears good.”

It felt good to hear her voice. Taking a deep, regretful breath, he said, “Lydia, you don't know me. I've hurt a lot of people.”

“Not the ones you care about,” she disagreed.

He gripped the phone. He had cared about Abigail and he had hurt her. Now he wanted to hurt her again. “I have Lydia,” he confessed. “And I still want to hurt her.”

Lydia paused, but then decided not to press the matter. “Tomorrow night you will come for dinner. Dakota wants to meet his cousin William, who I must let you know, he greatly admires.” She hung up before he could protest.

William replaced the receiver and went to his refrigerator. Nothing he wanted in there.

'You know what you want, William. Go ahead and take it. You took it once already,' his demons tempted him.

He rubbed his face warily. He was curious as to why she never told.

'Then go see why.'

He would go, just to see why, but then he would leave.

Chapter 20

When the hand covered her mouth Abigail felt pure giddiness and the first thought that came to her was: 'He came!' He removed his hand, knowing she would not scream.

He was leaning over her closely. The full moon was out tonight, casting a blackish-blue light into the room. Her mysterious, colored hair was splayed across her white pillows and her skin seemed pale in the mystic moonlight.

“Why didn't you tell?” he whispered.

Her eyes widened as if she couldn't understand. He drew a black-silverish blade from his jacket and held it in the air. Fear was evident now in her eyes, but it was mixed with pride.

He sat on the edge of the bed and placed the tip of the knife on the nightgown fashioned just like the one last night. “Answer me,” he ordered.

She swallowed hard, but she couldn't speak. What was she to say? She enjoyed it! It would ruin his revenge.

With a feathery touch, due to the sharpness of the blade, he sliced the gown down the middle without pricking one inch of her smooth caramel skin. He even incised through her underwear in the process. She winced, knowing Rebecca would wonder about her torn clothes again.

He put the blade away, then took off his jacket and his shirt. Kicking off his shoes, he climbed on the bed and straddled her hips, not at all putting his weight on her. “You didn't answer my question.” His hands lay on her shoulders.

“You did it to hurt my father and I don't think you're crazy enough to kill people,” she retorted. “I don't think you could hurt anyone.”

He looked pretty disgusted at her. “You don't know me. I hurt you.”

Bravely she shot back, “You don't really think you hurt me do you? If I can take a car running over my legs, I can surely handle your baby slaps.”

She gasped as he flipped her over onto her stomach so fast as if she were a pancake. He yanked the pillow from under her head, lifted her waist and inserted it under her there. He grabbed a handful of hair and yanked her head back. She waited for him to take his knife and slice her neck wide open, but he didn't.

He placed his middle finger in her mouth. “Suck my finger,” he ordered.

She obeyed immediately, drawing the finger deeply into her oral cavity. Abruptly, taking his finger away from her mouth, he released her hair and his other hand pushed away the nightgown, along with her underwear. With his knees, he spread her legs wide and she felt a different pressure than what she had felt before.

“I don't need to slap you around to hurt you,” he sneered in her ear. He withdrew his finger from her rear opening and then guided his engorged shaft into her new entrance. She fought him this time. She tried to turn around and even tried to raise up and away, but he held her down with his own weight and it seemed her efforts only encouraged him to further join his body deeply in hers.

She cried hopelessly into the pillow. Even though she couldn't feel the pain she knew it was definitely wrong. She felt no pleasure, no pain, but she was being raped, nevertheless. Silent tears soaked the pillowcase under her face as he proceeded to release inside of her.

He withdrew and left the bed. She heard him cursing under his breath, then washing himself in the bathroom, before returning to the bed with the small bowl Ester used to use to wash Abigail in the mornings, when Abigail couldn't get out of the bed at all due to sickness.

He used it now to wash her down there, then he turned her over gently, redipped the washcloth, adding more soap then rinsing it off. He wiped her face.

Surprisingly, after being so brutal, he was gentle. He even went so far as to dry her face with a towel.

"You'll tell tomorrow," he ordered.

She shook her head. "No. I won't c-come between my father and your hatred for each other. I won't let you nor him use me to get to the other, because even though you raped me and could go to jail it will be my father who gets hurt in the end, because he'll only feel that he couldn't protect me from you. You know he means the world to me and I refuse to hurt him by telling on you."

"Even after I raped you again?"

"You can rape me every night for all I care." She thought for sure by the angry visage that he would flip her over and do what he did again. "Don't do it that way anymore!"

He frowned looking frustrated. "Are you saying you enjoyed-"

She suddenly put her hand over his mouth to quiet him from speaking as a door opened above their heads.

* * *

Ramsey followed his wife downstairs. She had a craving for his special ham and cheese sandwich at one in the morning and he decided to appease her by making one.

Going past Abigail's door, he decided to check on her. Putting his hand on the doorknob, he cracked the doorway open about an inch.

"Ram, please, come on. Abigail's asleep and don't you dare wake her," Marilyn ordered.

He closed the door, kissed his wife lovingly and followed her into the kitchen.

William had already had his knife in hand, ready to attack, when he saw the door cracked. They both relaxed as the door closed. It had been too close for comfort.

“Midnight snack,” Abigail whispered.

They heard Marilyn's giggling and Ramsey chuckling as they went by the door a few minutes later, back upstairs.

Abigail relaxed completely and sat up. “Leave before he decides to come back after she's asleep and check on me.”

“Not before I'm done and that's why I'm here, to get caught.” He began to undress.

There was a generous amount of light in the room, so Abigail could see him more clearly. Her cheeks bloomed as she saw the man was huge and well-defined.

She never got a chance to really examine him, because before she knew it, he was back on the bed kissing her with so much demand she responded with a desire of her own. He seemed insatiable as he parted her thighs and plunged deep inside of her wetness.

Abigail rejoined in pleasure as he moved so fiercely he brought her to orgasm twice before he gave into the gratification. Again his body collapsed on hers, but Abigail was first to regain her equilibrium and stroked his broad back dreamily. She could feel the muscles underneath her fingertips tense and relax under her light tickling.

He distributed his body weight on his waist so she could breathe a little more as he rested his head on her chest and listened to her heartbeat. She watched him close his eyes as if going to sleep, but she knew he was far from that. The gesture was so tender; Abigail knew at that moment she would never tell her father what had transpired between them.

“Did I scratch you?” she asked when he tensed with a gasp.

He nodded.

“I'm sorry, I'll cut my nails.”

“You're sorry?” he asked incredulously. He rose up giving her complete eye contact. “What makes you think I'm coming back?”

Her look became equaling serious as she said, “If you don't, I'll tell my father.” The teasing smirk clearly told him she was pulling his leg.

He only rolled his eyes heavenwards and lay back in the intimate position. “You were supposed to do that this morning.”

Her hands rubbed his back, recording every muscle and curve all the way to his firm backside. He was still embedded into her; yet made no attempt to move. The thought of a man sleeping on top of her never crossed her mind before and she had a feeling, even if there were no feelings for him of love, she

could at least use him to show her the ways of lovemaking. There would be nothing wrong with that, since he was using her to get back at her father. Maybe if she kept him hanging on for a while, until she was “well-educated,” she would learn a great deal from William.

Soon she fell asleep with this thought in mind.

Chapter 21

It was five when he awoke. He had moved to her side in his sleep to evenly distribute his weight, but his head still rested on her chest and her arms encircled him protectively, as if she didn't want to lose him. Looking down at her in the morning dawn he thought he had never seen such a beautiful woman in his life. His mother, Marie, had beauty as did Lydia, but his Abigail was extraordinary inside and out. He wanted to hold her so tight, yet he wanted to keep a distance emotionally at the same time. How could he show her he wanted her without losing his command of her fears for him? He knew she was terrified of what he could do to her, yet was confused about how he could be so gentle.

William didn't know how to feel about Abigail. On one hand he wanted to throttle her for being the daughter of his most hated enemy, Ramsey McPherson. On the other hand, he wanted to lose himself in her. He knew Abigail was a different woman in his life. He had never wanted to “snuggle” close after lovemaking until now. Awaking with her arms around him was endearing and he wished she was anyone other than Ramsey McPherson's daughter. He wished things in the past had been different, because if they had been, she would have remembered her promise.

This ticked him off the most, because he was positive she remembered nothing of their special day and her promise, which meant he had meant nothing to her; yet he couldn't blame fate. He could only blame Lowell Crane.

The bastard was dead and William was so glad about this thought that his upper lip curved in a gratifying snarl.

She stirred in her sleep and he looked at the clock. Thirty minutes had passed, while he was thoughtfully trying to understand what exactly he wanted from Abigail. He got up from the bed and by the time he was dressed and standing by the balcony staring wistfully out the glass with his back to the bed, Abigail was slowly coming awake.

It must have immediately dawned on her that it was morning, because she sat up abruptly and looked frantically beside her; then noticed him in the corner near the balcony doors. The covers had fallen to her waist and when she turned to him, she blushed, feeling those eyes upon her from his reflection in the

glass balcony doors. He came to the bed and with the morning dimness, she could see how really handsome he was and it took her breath away as he sat on the bed beside her.

Her fingers came up to touch his face. His own hand went to her nape and drew her closer to him.

She remembered his words clearly from the night before, 'You'll deny me nothing!' as his lips moved to capture hers in a gentle kiss. Her arms moved around his neck as her tongue entered his mouth and she tasted him. He groaned at her response and Abigail knew he wanted her all over again.

Abruptly, he drew away, frowning deeply and she looked into his glowing eyes. "Fuck!" he growled, standing up.

Her ears perked up as she heard her father's footsteps, which would explain William's curse.

"Good morning," she whispered to William, despite the glare he now cast her way, as if it were her fault.

He narrowed his eyes to slits and the smile diminished from her face as she faced the uncontrollable passion tumbling like hard waves in his eyes. She knew he wanted to make love all over again, but he wasn't stupid, just crazy.

He left through the balcony doors, moving like the wind, scaling the fence with no problem.

As soon as he was gone, Abigail got herself in the chair and went to her dresser. Pulling on a new nightgown, she then picked up the shredded material from last night and threw the gown in the garbage. After dumping out the water in the pan and straightening her bed, she noticed her sheets were missing again, but she only took the thick covers, climbed in bed and covered herself up, hoping no one would notice.

Her father knocked briefly before opening her door. "Abigail," he whispered.

She opened her eyes as if she had just awakened. "Morning, Daddy."

"Your grandmother would like you to go to church with her today."

"It's the least I could do since defying her about therapy."

He hugged her and thought he smelled something strange about her. "I've got work to do and your mother's been sick in the mornings."

"I really don't mind, Dad." She watched as he left, closing the door behind him.

* * *

Ramsey stared at the door for some time before walking away wondering why had he thought about Stone when he hugged his daughter and why did he have a feeling Abigail was hiding something.

Suddenly he stopped in his tracks in the hallway...

Abigail sighed when her father left. Picking up her legs she moved them on the side of the bed. Looking down, her eyes widened in horror as she saw the red handled knife with CHAVEZ engraved in gold.

She picked the knife up, carefully keeping her balance and folded it in. This was not the knife he had used last night to rip her clothes up because the blade was dull, but he must have had it on him last night, she determined. Just as she stuck the closed blade under her pillow, the door flew open and she shrieked in fright.

Ramsey charged around the bed and looked at the floor. Of course he saw nothing. His eyes rose to his daughter's.

"What's wrong?" Abigail asked innocently.

His confusion was evident. He knew what he saw, but he couldn't just up and question his daughter about that. Abigail could almost imagine the inner turmoil he was experiencing and wondered if her father thought he was going crazy. Instead he shook his head. "Nothing, I thought I saw something familiar."

* * *

He didn't come the next night or the night after that and she began to wonder. On the third evening, David came over angry and demanded to speak with Ramsey alone. Marilyn wasn't home, but Rebecca was in the kitchen making pumpkin pies for the church's annual bake sale.

David didn't even come inside when Ramsey invited him in. "Since we can't talk in the house about certain things, could you step outside," he sneered.

Abigail listened intently to the anger seething in David's tone of voice. Ramsey stepped outside onto the porch closing the door behind him. She moved over to the bay windows that overlooked the porch and peeked through the curtains. The motion lights on the porch came on, so she had the best view for the argument about to happen.

"I want to know why you're still having my client followed?" David demanded to know.

"Why on earth would I follow him?" Ramsey asked sarcastically, presuming David knew the answer to that question.

"I already cornered Hal. He said he was instructed to keep a close eye on Stone."

"Maybe because a birdie told me William purchased a plane ticket to Italy, yesterday."

"That ticket isn't for him, you dumbass," David said vehemently.

“It's in the Stone name and he can't leave town let alone the country.”

“Blast you Ramsey! My client has no intentions of going anywhere. It's his step-mother, now quit harassing my client before I file a suit against the city and you'll see if you get close to another public office again.”

“I'm just doing my job.”

“You're fucking around. You're making an innocent man look guilty. William's losing his patience. Now stop or I'll file.” David stomped off the porch to his car.

Abigail rolled away from the window.

He came that night and before anything was said he made love to her teasing her mercifully until she begged him to finish what he started. He seemed in a playful passionate virile mood that sent her over the edge at least three times to his two.

Finally sated, he turned her to her side and lay behind her. Abigail knew Rebecca would notice the ripped nightgown that William had again thrown to the floor by the bed. Holding her body close, he let his face nuzzle in her neck. “I could make love to you all day long,” he whispered huskily.

She blushed, but then became serious. “Will it be lust or love?”

He stiffened. “Who cares,” he finally answered. “I want you all the time. At work, at home.”

“Then why did you stay away for so long?”

“A problem with my step-mother.” He paused a minute, then began to speak of Lydia. “After my uncle was buried we found out that Lydia was never married to him.”

Abigail shifted around to look up at him. Her torso was in an awkward position, but she needed to at least look at him. “How could she stay with him for so long?” She was aware of William's history - almost as knowledgeable as he was.

“She has a mysterious form of amnesia that hypnosis can't cure. When I went to jail, she spent her time taking care of my cousin, but also researching her past with her psychiatrist's help. They discovered my uncle had married my step-cousin three years before I even moved in. Lydia only remembers having been there for a year before me. Her life before that was all a mystery. Edward told me she had amnesia, but he also told her he was her husband and she had no choice but to believe him.”

“That's terrible. Wasn't she suspected because they thought it was a conspiracy in his death between the two of you?”

He nudged her back to her former side position. “Lydia would never do anything to harm anyone even if they harmed her. Edward had done a lot, and I was going to take her away from there the night they

died, but she had to go to her doctor's office to pick up a bracelet she had left with him. Edward never knew she had the bracelet all that time. It seems six months after being with Edward; she went to Cleveland and happened to go into a pawnshop, because a ring in the store, which had the same design as the bracelet, attracted her attention. While I was in jail, she found out that the ring also had an old English emblem embedded in white gold. After tracing this to England, she found a Lord who told her the history of the ring. In the late eighteen hundreds the ring was passed to an Italian prince who married one woman, but loved another. He passed the ring to that woman because she was having his daughter. The child was given the ring and secretly married a baron, with her father's help. To make a long story short, the ring somehow made its way to Lydia's hands, but she really doesn't know how. This English Lord said her best bet would be to go to Italy to find out this information. I arranged everything, because she was too upset and fearful."

"Why?" Abigail asked.

"All this time she's lived a lie and now she's come closer to finding out who she really is. Seven years of her life have been wasted and now she could be on the brink of realizing the truth. She's terrified and I can't be there for her." He sounded clearly upset and bitter about the matter.

"What about Dakota?"

"He's going with her."

"Did you want to go with her?"

"Yes," he said fiercely. "Lydia is like a mother to me. I wanted to be by her side but I can't because of your father."

Abigail stared at the wall for a long moment before she asked, "Why didn't Isabella tell earlier if she saw that you were guilty of killing your uncle and step-cousin?"

His arms tightened around her and Abigail became afraid. If he was angry with her for prying, could that be reason to hurt her? He had every reason to hurt her, yet Abigail knew he wouldn't - he couldn't; yet...why did she have this feeling that she was partly responsible for the rage he had inside of him. Why did she feel it wasn't just her father's fault he was angry?

"Why are you..." her voice trailed off.

He was silent, but she knew he was waiting for her to finish her thought.

She wanted to ask was there more to why he was angry, but lost her nerve at the last moment.

"Never mind."

"What was it?" he asked.

She could hear a need in his voice that touched her spirit; yet she couldn't ask. She couldn't confront the nagging feeling that she was a part of his rage; yet only she could make things better if ...
“What made Isabella tell?”

His eyes bored hard in her back. She could feel the heat and intensity of them, without even turning around and looking at him. Abigail didn't want to, because she knew if she made eye contact she would blurt out, “Why are you so angry with me? What have I done? What am I...” the words couldn't form in her brain. It was as if she had a block that just wouldn't let her go.

“Guilt,” he finally said.

She was quiet for a moment.

He finally asked, “How did you know about the conspiracy theory?”

“You forget who my father is,” she said a bit haughtily. His arms tightened a bit more, yet she was still able to breathe.

“Not likely,” he snorted. “Ramsey wants to play ‘who-gets-his-foot-in-his-mouth-first’ and I can play hard; but I also play to win.”

“My father won't fight dirty,” she defended.

“I'll win clean and untouched.”

She faced him. “So you still plan to find a way to hurt him?”

He cupped her face and kissed her. “I already have.” He then frowned hard. “But I'm not really hurting him if he never knows I'm raping you.”

“It's not rape,” she snorted quiet unladylike. Talking with him like this was a thrill. It was like having a friend she never had before. “And he'll never know if I don't say a word.”

He reached over to the bed stand and flicked the light on. Abigail stiffened, knowing she would see his eyes glowing and maybe she would burn up, just like the doctor did.

His impenetrable, yellow eyes held hers. Bravely, she kept eye contact. How could eyes be so golden like flames? They did burn! They burned with...passion!

He cupped a breast, not taking his eyes from hers. “How could eyes so beautiful belong to a man so hateful?”

“I was just thinking the same thing,” she said.

He snarled his upper lip. “I don't hate McPherson. I loathe him. I swore a long time ago not to let anyone fuck with me. McPherson is trying to get me like he did my father.”

She trembled, remembering Javier's horrible crimes. “Is it working?”

He lowered his eyes to her breasts and she gasped as he suddenly dipped his head and filled his mouth with her caramel flesh. It was even more erotic with the lights on. He licked a path up the valley of her breasts to her neck, and then kissed her deeply. “No,” he said, breathlessly drawing away. “But to be perfectly honest, I’ll tell you the greatest revenge I could exact upon McPherson.”

She shivered as his ardor turned to hatred. He molded her to his hard bare frame and she knew instantly he wanted her again. “What?” She was afraid to ask, but curiosity was killing her.

He planted kisses all over her face, neck, and ears, igniting the fires she knew only his body could extinguish. “I know you mean the world to your father. That’s why it would be a great pleasure if I made you fall in love with me.” His hand moved to her heat and the finger he slipped inside of her readiness made her whole body quiver.

Her heart caught in her throat. It was almost difficult to speak. “You may be capable of a lot of things, but love is not something you will get from me.”

“Even if you meant the world to me?” His eyes held hers as if he were searching for something...familiar.

She tried to push his arm away, but it wouldn’t budge. “How could I mean anything to you, William?”

It was the first time she had said his name and he smiled a genuine smile that took her breath away. “You always had ever since that-” He stopped himself and lowered his eyes.

“That what?” she asked.

He shook his head as if to say what he was about to say would hurt him. “Forget it. It’s nothing.”

“But-”

He covered her mouth with his hand and at the same time plunged his finger deep inside of her, making her forget everything at that moment, except his hard, hot body and how much she wanted him. He turned out the lights and they made love until the early dawn.

Marilyn watched as Rebecca waited until Abigail had left with Ramsey before practically plundering Abigail’s room, looking through her underwear and pajama drawers, counting her daughter’s underwear, and then strangely counting all the nightgowns.

She continued to spy on her mother-in-law as Rebecca started checking her other clothing drawers and searching through them until she found something pushed all the way back in the winter clothes drawer.

Deciding not to take anymore, Marilyn barged in the doorway demanding, “Rebecca, what are you doing in Abby's room?”

“For two weeks Abigail's been missing clothes,” Rebecca stated.

“What do you mean?” Marilyn asked suspiciously.

“The girl's been hiding her clothes.”

“What on earth made you come to this conclusion?”

“I've been counting her nightgowns. When I checked a week after she went berserk-”

Marilyn was affronted and cut her off, “My daughter did not-”

Rebecca continued ignoring Marilyn's tirade. “-I found four nightgowns missing; other than the one shredded that day and five pairs of underwear missing. Two days ago I counted-”

“How ridiculous!”

“Is this ridiculous?” She held out the birth control compact triumphantly as if she had found the leprechaun's gold.

Marilyn approached Rebecca not believing her eyes and looking at the compact as if it were a block of gold. Gently taking the compact away, she opened it and still couldn't believe her eyes. There were pills missing.

“The girl's been screwing around,” Rebecca announced.

“Impossible! She never goes out enough to be doing anything.”

“Her morning walks!” Rebecca declared.

Marilyn stiffened. “Put it back where you found it Rebecca.”

“But-”

“Put it back and don't you ever search Abigail's belongings again or I'll tell Ramsey.”

She stormed out of the room and went straight to the phone, calling her husband's cell phone. “Hi honey,” she said with a controlled voice. “Yes, this is a surprise...I'll be picking up Abigail tonight. I need to speak with her about some things...No honey, nothing's wrong...I love you too.” When she hung up, she turned to Rebecca, who stood at Abigail's doorway. “Not a word to Ramsey. Whatever Abigail is doing, she obviously didn't want us finding out about it. We have to respect that. She is a grown woman and I won't have my daughter fearing that as soon as she leaves the house, we ransack her room; which you probably have already been doing on a daily basis. Ramsey will be devastated if he finds out about this and Abigail will be devastated to know her privacy was violated by her own family.”

Rebecca didn't look a bit guilty as she stomped upstairs to her room.

Abigail sighed. "I know what I felt Dr. Foster and I could pass a lie detector test. I did have an orgasm."

"Lay on your back, Abigail," Dr. Foster strapped Abigail's legs in the stirrups. "Can you feel this?"

Abigail closed her eyes so they wouldn't deceive her, "No."

Ella went over to her cabinet and found a pelvic clamp. "I'm going to give you a pelvic examination, Abigail. Just to be sure." Her patient didn't say a word as she prepped the clamp for examination. "Who is he?"

"A guy," Abigail answered evasively.

"And?"

"Ouch!" Abigail cried.

Ella frowned and repeated the motion. "Does this hurt?"

Abigail winced. "Where are you touching?"

"The clamp must have snared a portion of inner skin. Don't worry, you're fine and I don't see anything wrong."

"What do you mean by wrong?"

"Infections or torn muscles." She took some cotton swab samples from inside Abigail and placed them in an enclosed test dish. "I'm going to run some tests to make sure, though."

Abigail had to wonder had the doctor used this as an excuse to get the sample from her. "What makes you think an orgasm could be associated with infections or pain?"

Ella waited until her nursing assistant came in to take the test dishes to the lab for results before she spoke, "Abigail, the possibility of you having an orgasm is far beyond the possibility of you just moving your legs. It seems for some reason, you're healing and I can't even begin to explain how or why. Without medical treatment or any other source of treatment, except my therapy, I refuse to believe the paces I put you through have made you heal and I've been at it for years. You've had sudden, rapid healing."

Abigail sat up after Ella unbuckled her legs. "The forces of the brain are just as powerful as nature, Dr. Foster. I don't retain any hope that I will walk, but I do hope this means I can feel below my waist. Matter of fact, I know I'll be able to soon, if I keep on."

“Keep on what? Having sex? Has it occurred to you, Abigail, this guy might not like you? He's just using you as a sexual outlet.”

Abigail's back stiffened. “Of course.” Except she knew William wasn't using her for just sex, but to get back at her father. “Just as I'm using him.” She smiled wickedly.

“I never should have given you those birth control pills,” Ella said regretfully.

“Why? So I could get pregnant? I have to do this, Dr. Foster.”

Ella calmed herself down. “If you're going to be as stubborn as your father on this matter, will you promise to be careful?”

“Promise you won't tell,” she countered.

“You have my word, unless your life is in jeopardy. Deal.”

Abigail doubted the doctor. She was just too close to her family and even closer to David Reichard. She couldn't trust anyone with her real secret. Doctor's oath or not, she was having a sexual relationship with her father's worst enemy and Dr. Ella had every right to tell Abigail's parents because Dr. Ella was one of those people who believed William was guilty.

She was surprised to see her mother pick her up. “Is Daddy okay?” she asked worriedly.

“He's fine. It's you I'm worried about,” Marilyn said.

“What do you mean?”

“Rebecca found birth control pills when she was putting your laundry away.”

Abigail stiffened because she had a feeling it was part lie, but Marilyn just didn't want Abigail to know her privacy had been invaded when her daughter seemed to treasure that and Abigail had few pleasures, so Ramsey and Marilyn had done their best to pick up on and indulge her in it. Rebecca was an exception to any rule or law. “I don't mean to bother you about it, Ab, but I'm very worried.”

“Why should you worry?” Abigail asked, with a shrug, while trying her best not to look nervous.

“Abigail you're twenty years old, although an adult, but you are still very innocent to the world around you and the people who could hurt you. I don't think you're sexually mature enough to be having a sexual relationship with anyone.”

“Does Daddy know?”

“Not yet.”

“Mom, please don't tell,” Abigail beseeched her.

Marilyn said very uncomfortably, “Abigail, this is a family matter and I don't like keeping secrets from your father.”

“No, it's not. It's my business. I'm old enough and mature enough to handle responsibilities. That's why I got the birth control.”

“Who gave you those pills?” Marilyn demanded to know.

“A friend,” she said evasively.

“Abigail, you aren't making this easy for me.”

“Mom, please keep this from him. I swear to you that you'll never have any trouble from me. I can handle myself; I always have.”

Marilyn was in the grips of her emotions. “I have to think about it.” She turned on the radio to give herself time to think.

Abigail settled back. The past two weeks with William were more wonderful than she could imagine. He had come to her every night. Sometimes they would just talk. Other times no words were needed to convey what they wanted from each other. He was so masculine, so virile, so attentive to her body, it drove her to heights of passion she could only dream of.

“You'll stop it,” Marilyn pronounced, pulling in the driveway.

“Mom!” she cried.

“Abigail, if that compact isn't in my hands within a week, your father will know.”

“But it's unfair. You're treating me like I'm a child.”

“I'm only doing this for your protection, Abigail. You don't know the danger you could be in.”

“Shielding me all the time is not going to make things better. You can't expect me to learn from the world if you continually coat it with sugar and spice.”

“Last time I remembered, you were my daughter under my roof and you follow my rules,” Marilyn protested adamantly.

Abigail argued no more.

Chapter 22

That night she told William. He was the only one she could tell. No one else understood or even knew.

“You've been taking the pill?” He was rather shocked, drying her eyes with a Kleenex. It was amazing how he knew where everything was in her room, even in the dark.

“Of course - every morning, but if I stop taking it-”

He cut her off, already knowing the consequences. “Where's the compact?”

“In my bottom drawer – bottom, left drawer.”

He retrieved the compact and stuck it in his pocket, after leaving a pill out on the table by the bed for her to take tomorrow morning. “I'll bring a duplicate back tomorrow,” he promised.

“What are you-”

He pressed his finger to her lips softly. “Do you trust me?”

She hesitated, but then she wholeheartedly nodded. With her soul, she trusted this man. How could she not? He had become her friend as well as her lover. It was as if she had known him for a lifetime. “I trust you William.”

He only smirked. It was rare that he smiled, but Abigail was used to this; yet it always brought tears to her eyes, knowing how little happiness had affected him when he was a child.

He noted the tears moving down her cheek. “Why are you crying?”

She snuggled close to his body, burning her face in his taunt muscles. “Because you've had so little happiness and I wish I could do something to make you happy.”

“You know what you could do.”

She frowned confused, but what he wanted dawned on her immediately and she said nothing to respond.

“Why do you persist in being evasive?” he asked calmly. His tone was far from angry, just peeved that she continuously avoided the issue of telling her father about them. He changed the subject abruptly. “Do you remember much of the past?” he asked.

This threw her off. Was he trying to trap her? “A little,” she answered warily.

“Like what?” he questioned.

“How my brother and sister mercifully picked on me. I know Robby only followed Angie. As a child, I knew before and even after me, my mother had miscarriages, but Angela had me believing they were children that were adopted and then given away, because my mother went to visit their gravesites a lot. Angela had me believing she could convince my mother to give me away and then they'd make a gravesite for me too. She was always so mean and hateful,” she paused thoughtfully. “Until that day. She risked her life for me.” Abigail shivered a bit, remembering how tight Angie had held her hand as they ran. She closed

her eyes and remembered lying in the grass in agony - The sun hot on her face, and then a dark shadow appearing over her, shielding the sun from her eyes; yet she couldn't see his face.

“Are you asleep?” William asked.

She looked up at him and said the first thing that came to her mind, “a promise.”

William's eyes widened in astonishment. “What did you say?”

She blinked back to recognition. It was as if that part of her brain that wandered in the blackness released a tidbit of something, but she didn't know what it all meant. “N-Nothing.”

He gripped her shoulders painfully and shook her hard. “It was something.”

She hesitated, then shook her head again. “No, it wasn't. I can't remember.” She felt so weak. “There was so much pain.” Her gut began to hurt terribly and she felt a loud sob coming. “G-Go. Go before I scream.” She pushed at his chest, moaning. The pain was spreading and her waist felt on fire.

“I won't,” he said stubbornly.

“Go!” she hissed. “Just-” Abigail moaned into the pillow as the fire spread through to her fingertips and up her neck.

William felt her head. She was burning up and shaking. Not caring, he ran to the bathroom, stopped up the bathtub, and turned on the cold water. He quickly locked the door to her room and then scooped her up, carrying her back to the bathroom. She squirmed at being moved, but she was still getting hotter as she clutched the pillow to her mouth to prevent anyone else from hearing her groans of pain.

He placed her in the cold water, while holding the pillow down on her mouth as she shrieked from the severe contact to her skin. When the shrieking died down to a gurgle, he took the pillow away. Her body seemed to calm down on its own and her temperature went down. Abigail felt so far away from what was happening. When William spoke, he sounded as if he were in another room, yet she knew he was holding her in his arms.

“Breathe dammit. Just take deep breaths,” he ordered, rubbing water over her head and face. The pain went away slowly, but when he applied pressure to the side of her thigh to pick her up, her whole right leg jerked up and her knee hit him square in the right eye.

She gasped. “Are you alright?”

He sat back on the floor, swearing violently.

She used the bars in her tub to pull herself up on the edge and reached over to examine his face.

“Feels like a brick wall hit me in the fucking eye,” he growled.

She giggled, not knowing why she found this suddenly funny. “That or you hit yourself.”

“You calling me a brick wall, lady?” he asked, trying to sound upset at her.

She blushed as her eyes lowered and she realized he was affected by her nudity. “Just on the outside. On the inside you're sweeter than a cherry pie.”

He gently lifted her out of the tub and carried her back to the bed, grabbing a towel on the way. He sat her in his lap on the bed and dried her off. She shivered because she was cold, but the heat from his body was warming her outside and the heat between his thighs was warming her insides. She couldn't believe how she was so affected by this man after that mysterious ordeal.

“What just happened, sweetheart?” he questioned warily.

She was caught off guard a little by his usage of her father's nickname for her, but she enjoyed it when William said the name to her, especially as he caressed her cheek as he was doing now. “A spasm, but I haven't had one in so long.”

“How long is so long?”

“A little over two weeks, but this one was worse.”

“How do you feel now?”

“Fine.” She leaned her head on his broad shoulder.

He raised a questioning brow that made him look devilishly handsome. “Just fine?”

“Horny, too.”

He rolled his eyes heavenwards and laid her down giving her what she wanted. Abigail had to wonder who really had control in this relationship? Just as she never denied him anything, he in turn never denied her.

* * *

Two nights later, after a long lovemaking bout, she asked, “If anything happens to Lydia, who would take care of Dakota?”

“I will.”

She frowned. “Do you really think you could?”

“I've never baby-sat, but Dakota means a lot to me, sweetheart, and I would never hurt him.”

Abigail realized, in the passing days that he had begun to use the term “sweetheart” instead of saying her name. Matter of fact, he never said her name. If it wasn't sweetheart, then his eyes could do a lot of talking and she liked that even more, but she had to wonder why did he have an aversion to her name?

“Why would you think I'm not capable of taking care of Dakota?” he asked.

“I never said that. I don't doubt you love him immensely. What I want to know is, do you really love him enough to hold off your famous temper?”

He sat up. “You saying I have a temper?” he growled, clearly offended.

Abigail had a feeling that he had these same self doubts and she had hit too close to home. Whenever she brought up a subject that was bothering him, he became as such. She was learning to tell his mild to dangerous degrees of anger. This one was medium and not really directed toward her, so she had nothing to fear.

She dipped her head to lick a masculine dark nipple and the fires of his anger turned to fires of passion. “Woman, you shouldn't rile me.”

She gave him a teasing peck on the lips. “If you need to discipline him, keep in mind that love you have for him.” Her arms wrapped around his neck.

“Is there love here?” he asked, kissing her racing heart.

“There is love...” Her eyes were closed, enjoying the gentle caressing his body was doing against hers.

The room was hot, but the ceiling fan was on. It was May in Davenport and summer had come early.

“Is there love for me?” he pressed.

“Should there be?”

He frowned at her maddening evasiveness. “It's not polite to answer a question with a question.”

“William...”

“Yes.”

There was a pregnant silence before she spoke again. “If there was love in my heart for you...” She opened her eyes and looked down at him. “What will you do with it?”

“Keep it.”

“But when you leave?”

“I won't leave.”

“What if you have to go to jail? My father has condemning evidence against you and half the town believes you're guilty. You won't get a fair trial here.”

He stopped his movement. “Your father has evidence someone put to frame me.”

She looked terribly frightened. "I don't want to lose you," she confessed.

William lay on his side and gathered her in his arms. "You won't."

"How can I be sure? If I give you my love and you go to jail for life - that's what you'll get if my father has his way - what then? Do I sit forever waiting for you? And even if you do get out in a reasonable time do you actually think my father would let us marry?" She closed her eyes again. "Why does life have to be so difficult, William? Especially for me."

"I'm not going to jail!" he adamantly stated.

"It won't make a difference." She sounded hopeless. "Our circumstances won't change."

"Why not?" he asked.

"My father will always hate you and the person who's out to frame you is still out there. If he or she isn't caught, you'll spend the rest of your life in the public enmity."

"What about your father? After a while he'll see I'm not guilty. I always have a substantial alibi."

"My father doesn't just hate you because he thinks you're a cold-blooded killer. He hates you because you're Javier Chavez's son. Even if you changed your name, you'll never change your bloodline and my father clearly believes that all Chavez men are crazy."

He arose from the bed and began to dress. "Dammit! I'm not crazy."

"I never said you were."

"McPherson's a son of a bitch," he growled to no one in particular.

"Where are you going?" Abigail asked.

"I'm leaving before I throttle the shit out of you."

"Why?"

"Because you're fucking McPherson's daughter."

"No you're the one fucking McPherson's daughter."

He stopped dressing and glared at her. By this time he had on everything except his shirt and leather jacket. "I don't find anything humorous."

She could hear the amusement in his voice and laughed. "I don't mind being fucked."

Lightly, he caressed her face. "Don't curse, sweetheart."

"Why not? You do it all the time."

"That's because I grew up listening to it all the time."

“You forget who my parents are. One's part Irish and the other one is temperamental to the bone.”

He swept her in his arms. “I've got to go, sweetheart. It's nearing five.”

She knew he was right, but she didn't want him to go. Speaking with him was such a joy to her.

“Tomorrow if it's warm, we'll spend it out on the patio.”

“How?” she asked.

He kissed her deeply. “Tomorrow.”

She nodded and felt him releasing her. Lying back down in bed, she covered up and closed her eyes, because she never liked seeing him leave. It was amazing how quiet and quickly he moved for a man his size. Neither of them ever said “good bye.” It was as if those words would close the book to the fairy tale they seemed to be living.

* * *

Abigail pushed herself to the table tiredly. Her father was deep into his morning paper and her mother was too sick to even get out of bed. Rebecca made oatmeal and toast.

“Do you always take baths at three in the morning?” Rebecca bit out caustically.

Ramsey winced at her sharp tone, but his interest was piqued especially since his daughter admitted to this by flushing furiously.

“I was hot. I took a cold bath.” Abigail had lost her appetite and pushed the bowl of food away from her. “I'm going to study. Have a good day, Daddy.”

He smiled, but it was hidden in the coffee cup from Rebecca. He admired his daughter's gusto.

As she got in her room, she heard them speaking about her in the kitchen.

“Spoiled and insolent!” Rebecca huffed to her son.

“Not to me,” Ramsey proclaimed proudly.

The doorbell rang, but neither got up to answer it.

“I'm her elder, Ramsey and when I ask a question I expect it to be answered,” Rebecca snapped angrily.

“She did answer your question.”

David, who had a key to the home entered the kitchen, but mother and son were so involved in their conversation, they did not notice him.

“She lied. She had the fan on and several times last night I heard the balcony doors opening and closing. She has been sleeping restlessly the past few days, always half the time and she wears nothing to

sleep. It's as if I can set a watch by all the noise she makes. I think she's up to something, Ram and you're too blind with love to see it." She stood up snuffing her nose at David and left the room going straight to her bedroom.

David frowned at what he had heard. "What was that about?" he questioned.

"Rebecca thinks Abigail's getting too big for her britches. Why should I be concerned about what kind of noise she makes when I'm making my own noise?" He smiled to himself rather wickedly.

"Do you feel she's getting that way?"

Ramsey sighed as if he were thinking back. "I think my daughter is just tired of being railroaded by my mother, just like I was and she is showing her mother's temper."

"You sure it's not from you?" David teased. "In the state of danger you feel Stone has put your family in, why would Abigail leave the balcony doors open all night?"

"Maybe she was hot?" Ramsey guessed, with a frown coming on his face, because it wasn't making any sense to him either.

David changed the subject. "Aren't you curious as to why I'm here?"

"No." Ramsey gave his friend his best nonchalant look over the morning paper.

David smiled, ignoring Ramsey's deadly sarcasm. "It's about my client."

"Is he ready to confess? With the grand jury agreeing to do the hearing in two days, I figured he would want something." He set his paper down and leaned back ready for the worse. He was in too good of spirits, because the grand jury not only approved a trial, but they also decided on having the hearings as soon as possible.

"We might have to prolong the decision, since my client feels he won't be justly prosecuted in the city of Davenport. We will be requesting that the trial be moved to another city. We both know you haven't got enough evidence, but there's too much bad blood in Davenport for a fair trial."

"What?!" Ramsey stood up. "That could take months! That bastard would be free!"

David casually took a seat and Ramsey knew David had gotten the reaction he was looking for before he came in the door. This also meant David had a plan - a plan which could be beneficial to his client, but Ramsey would hate, yet would have no choice.

Before David could get any words out, Ramsey growled, "That son of a bitch is going to jail. Maybe not tomorrow, but he will go before life leaves my body, dammit."

"I think life will be leaving it pretty soon by his hands, because you're the only person he wants to kill. You're pressuring the wrong person, Ramsey and you're looking for a scapegoat."

“We'll agree to a closed courtroom. It's just as private as a chamber, but I want seven guards in the room.”

“Scared for your life?” David questioned.

“Hell no, but they can hold me back if the judges decide not to convict the bastard.”

David flinched his nose. “I'll agree, if you go and approve that the jury will consist of people out of the city.”

“We'll never get approval that fast,” Ramsey said.

“You can and you will if you want me to agree to your ridiculous terms of trying the case here.” He took a folder out of the briefcase he had carried with him into the house. “I've already done the homework. It's been done before on major cases in other cities. Akron just had one of these cases two years ago and a judge ruled on it. They can remain bias to both our causes. You can research the cases yourself. Agreed?”

Ramsey glared so hard at the file folder, David was sure it would burst into flames in a few minutes. He didn't want to be around if and when that happened, so he stood up, outstretching his hand. They shook hard and David smiled triumphantly. “I'll go say hello to my angel before I go, if you don't mind.”

He only snorted heatedly at David and began to look through the file.

David quietly went to Abigail's room and saw Marilyn sitting on her daughter's bed, speaking in a low tone to Abigail, who sat in front of her in the chair. His ears perked up to eavesdrop.

“...healthy young couples go out Abigail and whoever this guy is I want to meet him.”

“But-” Abigail started to protest.

“No buts about it, honey.” Marilyn cut her off. “I want to meet this gentleman very soon.”

“That's not fair mother. You're blackmailing me. I gave you the compact. What else do you want?” Abigail pleaded.

“Respect.”

Abigail's shoulders slumped in disappointment. Marilyn could use guilt like a knife in the heart. David could see Abigail looking like a lost child. “How soon is that?”

“Two weeks, no later.”

He decided to make his presence known. “Angel's got a boyfriend?” he asked.

Both females looked at him with rather strange expressions on their faces.

“Unfortunately,” Marilyn said rising from the bed on unsteady legs.

David saw her upset, but he didn't think she wanted to be questioned about it. "Mare, you look radiant with life." He kissed her cheek. "How do you feel?"

"Dead to the world. The doctor says it's just a phase and I do feel much better than I did last week." She gathered her robe closed. "I should see my husband off to work," she said, excusing herself.

David was left alone with Abigail. "So what's his name?"

"He's no one you know," she said evasively.

He found her reluctant not to speak of the man a bit disturbing. "When is he coming over?"

"Probably never...I was going to break it off any ways. I guess now would be best."

"Abigail, I've heard of privacy, but your parents have a right to meet your boyfriend."

"He's not my boyfriend," she stated firmly.

"Then what is he?"

"No one, anymore." She turned to the balcony, dismissing him.

David left thinking, like father like daughter. Something wasn't right with Abigail and he intended to find out more. He would come back by tomorrow morning, when he knew Ramsey would be busy trying to get the jury list together at his office.

Chapter 23

Abigail moved away with a contented sigh. "I never thought summer nights could be so beautiful." They had laid blankets out on the floor of the patio and left the doors open to make love by the moonlight.

William smirked, sitting halfway up, using his hand to hold up his head and putting the weight of his head on his elbow. "Only with you, sweetheart."

"Oh William, tomorrow is so close." Her voice wavered worriedly. "Have you had premonitions?"

"You mean a feeling something is going to happen?"

She nodded.

"No, why do you ask?"

"Because I had one when I took my afternoon nap. I was sitting at my desk, studying for my final tomorrow and I felt it. Next thing I knew I was asleep and dreaming."

"So it was a dream not a-"

“No, it started off as a dream.” She copied his relaxed position, facing him. “Or rather it started off as a nightmare. The nightmare that became so real.”

“You've had it before?” he asked.

Solemnly, she nodded. “It has to do with that.” She looked to the clear night sky, filled with stars and a full moon. It was definitely summer weather. “Do you know tomorrow will be the day?”

William's look became grim, but she assumed it was just confusion.

“It's the day it all happened so long ago.” She touched her legs.

He held her close and she found that she enjoyed just being in his proximity. “It happened two days from now, sweetheart.”

She was about to protest, but when she thought about it, she realized he was correct. “How did you know?”

He hesitated a bit, and then said, “I keep my ears to the ground. You'd be surprised what a crazy man like me knows.”

She smiled, thinking he was teasing, yet his smirk looked strangely cold. She continued, “In any case it was the nightmare. I was playing with my brother and sister and the ball went into the street. I went after it, but something caught my eye, so I never saw the car. Next thing I knew, Angela's yanking me and we start running.” She paused as her heart began to race, even as she thought about. There was a tightening in her stomach, just like the other night, but she forced her panic away and continued. “That's where the nightmare ended.” She trembled and he pulled the thick covers over them from the closet. Her mother kept them on the highest shelf in Abigail's closet out of the way.

“What distracted you?” he questioned.

She frowned more to herself. “A shadow...I think. I'm not sure anymore.”

“How does the nightmare usually end?”

As she spoke, her eyes drifted emotionless to the sky. “In pain, but when I started running, Angela wasn't with me anymore. I was on my own, running into a black void. The car wasn't behind me, but I knew something was still after me. I could still feel the heat on the back of my legs and arms.” She looked at him. “I looked back,” her eyes filled with tears, “and saw it was my father. I was running from my father.”

“Why?”

She shrugged, but deep down she knew. “He kept yelling come back, don't go away from me and I was screaming, save me.”

“At your father?”

She shook her head as her eyes again wandered away. “It was you. I was screaming at you.”

He asked, “Where was I?”

Her brows deepened in confusion. “At the end of the void in front of me. I heard your voice so I knew it was you, but I couldn't see your face and as I got closer, I felt strange. I felt my body leaving me and something was echoing inside the void. Through my harsh breathing, I tried to hear it. I stopped suddenly, because I couldn't hear my father behind me, just my breathing and that echo. I reached for you and asked you to save me and... and you shook your head as if you were helpless...and ...and you said...” She stopped as the tears became too much and a sob escaped. It hurt so much. Not just physically, but mentally.

He took off the covers and felt her stomach. Her body was becoming hot. Her stomach muscles tensed from his touch and she winced in pain. It was spreading down through her muscles like hot liquid fire was running through her veins. He quickly began to massage her thighs, which were so tense and hard, he had to use more than enough force to get the muscle to knead under his fingers.

“M-Make it stop,” she pleaded desperately. “William, it hurts.”

“I know. You have to relax. Concentrate on my hands, sweetheart.”

It seemed hard at first, but then she could do it if she closed her eyes. He rolled her on her belly and started at her ankles, massaging upwards. It felt wonderful by the time he got to her shoulders, and then he began a gentle relaxing decent back down her spine, this time his mouth followed.

Abigail never knew her back could be so sensitive. He continued to move downwards and Abigail gasped as butterflies fluttered in her belly, as if they were trying to explode through her skin. She could not feel him, but she knew where his mouth had gone.

“William!” she shrieked rolling to face him.

He covered her mouth with his lips. He was so aroused as soon as he entered her, she could feel his release spreading in her own wetness. His lovemaking didn't stop. It was just the beginning of a whirlwind of the unquenchable desire they had for each other.

Two hours later, they lay again in each other's arms. It was a beautiful night to make love.

He kissed her brow, gently holding her body against his. “What did I say?”

She looked at him, remembering she hadn't finished what she had been saying to him. She noted his incredible memory. He never forgot anything! “You said, you couldn't help me.”

He frowned deeply. “Why?”

She rolled on her back, taking a deep breath. “Because I didn't keep my promise.”

William stiffened. "What promise?" he seemed forced to ask.

She gave him a strange look. Something didn't click right in William's voice and although she only really knew him a short time, she was quick to pick up when he was keeping something from her. "I don't know. Do you?"

He lowered his eyes and pulled her close. "How could I know?"

She rested her head on his chest. Abigail now knew William definitely knew something she didn't know, but wouldn't tell her. It was as if he wanted her to find this out herself, but why? Why keep something when he knew the key to unlocking the memory of so long ago. She wanted to ask him - demand he tell her, but then...fear. It was fear keeping her lips from moving to form the questions, because she was afraid if she knew the truth it would hurt - who she didn't know, but it would hurt too much and she might be better at not knowing. Maybe innocence was bliss in this situation.

"In the dream, when you asked me that, I looked at you. I mean I really looked at you and even though I still couldn't see your face, I felt...I sensed it wasn't you."

"Who was it?"

She shrugged. "I also began to sense the figure was starting to hate me. Hate me for not remembering - yet it was a strange hate, because deep down he loved me fiercely."

"Remember what?" he asked insistent.

Her voice now seemed far away, as did the look in her eyes as she barely whispered, "The promise."

"Which was?" he questioned.

She looked at him. "Have you been listening to me at all William? I just said I don't know."

He caressed her cheek to calm her frustration. "I'm listening, sweetheart. Trust me, I am listening to every word you say to me."

She continued. "Everything suddenly disappeared and all I remember is a lot of blackness. I was screaming for you to save me, but you were nowhere around and I held something. Something cold, but it was dark and I couldn't see it."

"What did it feel like?"

There was a pregnant silence before she said, "A ball...I think."

"Then what happened?" he eagerly asked.

"I woke up, but I knew - I knew something was going to happen."

"Soon?"

“Real soon.”

“What do you think will happen?”

Again she grew quiet for a moment as she contemplated this. “I think in spite of the fact you cannot save me, I will have to save you.”

“From what?”

She shrugged again. “My grandmother believes I have a sixth sense, and I've been getting some pretty strong gut feelings lately.”

“Concerning us?”

She nodded.

“So when the time comes for all this to end-”

She intervened. “But it won't.”

He sighed disappointedly. “Sweetheart, you don't know what you're saying.”

“I do, too,” she said stubbornly.

He frowned again, because so much of her father's pertinacious was inside of her and at that moment she reminded him of McPherson. “So you've figured out how to get your father to actually like me? And even if you have, do you actually think he would let us see each other like this again?”

“But it can't end!” she exclaimed as if that just couldn't happen.

He kissed her gently. “Sweetheart, McPherson's a very powerful man and you and I both know that when it concerns you, there's not a thing that could change his mind.”

“Then what am I going to do without you? Especially now that my mother demands to meet you?”

“She does? Did you give her the compact?” he asked.

When William had come back the next night after he had taken the compact, he handed her an identical compact. Hers had a scratch on the bottom so she wouldn't give her mother the false one, which contained sugar pills. “That just encouraged her more. What are we going to do?”

“When does she want to meet me?”

With dread in her voice, she answered, “Within two weeks.”

“Let me mull it over. Maybe something will step in or you can just tell her you stopped seeing me.”

“I was thinking the same thing,” Abigail agreed.

He changed the subject. “You ever thought about that guy who hit you any?”

“No not anymore. Not even a lot after the accident. I was so young; I just accepted my condition and went on little by little. Why do you ask, William?”

“Don't you hate him?” he questioned fiercely.

She shook her head. “It's hard for me to hate. I feel sorry for him. His lot in life wasn't great.”

“You pity him?” he was shocked at her empathy.

“Kind of.”

“But he almost killed you!”

“True, but he didn't and I lived and survived. I'm so thankful just to be alive.” She stroked his jaw to calm him. “Why should I hate when it seems you and my father have enough to go around the world?”

This calmed him a little and he even smirked his quirky grimace, which was always handsome. She wondered that if William crossed his eyes and licked out his tongue would he still be handsome, because it seemed no matter how he looked he seemed to be attractive. A yawn escaped her. “It's late William and we should sleep. I do have finals in the morning and you have to go to preliminary trials.”

He nodded. “Want to go in?”

“No. Can we spend tomorrow night out here too? If you do come tomorrow?”

“Definitely,” he promised. She snuggled close and was falling asleep, until he called her nickname.

“Yes?” she asked.

“If you ever remember that promise or whatever you remember, will you ever try to find out why the promise was made?” It seemed he had carefully chosen his words so he wouldn't reveal anything.

Again that urge to question him perked in her gut, but she lost her nerve as fast as the urge had come. “Sure,” she agreed and yawned again. “I would be curious.”

He seemed to want to venture more, but changed his mind. “It might get cool come dawn.” He swept her up in his arms, but she only murmured in protest, too deep in exhausted sleep to care, but she trusted him enough to know she could fall asleep in his presence.

He lay beside her in bed, after dragging the covers in and putting them in a white, wooden rocking chair next to the balcony; too tired to care about putting them back up on the high shelf. He would put them away come morning, she was sure of it.

Abigail had been about to have an unpleasant nightmare when she heard a shriek. Sitting up in bed, she saw her grandmother standing at the door. Abigail looked beside her in a panic praying William was long gone, because she didn't remember him leaving. She sagged back in relief, but then she realized where

her grandmother's shock came from. Abigail had a lot of marks up and down her legs from the accident, but most of them were going away, except one in particular, which even Ester looked at with pity. It was a hideous gnash in her high upper thigh where her thighbone had broken and ripped through her muscles and skin. The doctor had said that despite the grotesque nature of the wound it was one of the easiest to repair. Unfortunately, it wasn't easy to heal and now that it had, it looked like her skin had melted and shriveled. She hated looking at it; yet she was never ashamed of it. She had never been naked before anyone except the doctors, Ester, and...a blush came to her face at this thought...William, but he accepted her the way she was. He accepted everything about her with no complaints, while Rebecca openly showed her disgust. At least Ester didn't do that.

Abigail pulled the comforter about her. "What do you want?" she snapped.

"You're late," Rebecca said still aghast at what she had seen

"Late for what?"

"Don't you have an eight o'clock exam?"

"Yes, but..." She groaned and looked at the clock beside her bed reading 9:30. "I'll be out in a moment." She dismissed Rebecca with a curt nod. When Rebecca was gone, Abigail lay back in relief, closing her eyes.

"Morning," his deep voice resonated over her softly.

"Will-" she shrieked.

He covered her mouth. "Want to bring the old lady back, Sweetheart. For Pete's sake," he hissed.

She pushed his hand away and whispered, "What time does your pretrial begin?"

"In thirty minutes, but I'm not going to make it in time. I'll be about fifteen minutes late." He checked his watch, looking amused. "I can't wait until I see your old man's face when I saunter in there."

"William, go," she urged.

He kissed her passionately - long and hard.

"What was that for?" she asked breathlessly in wonder.

"Because you look beautiful in the morning, Sweetheart."

He didn't look so bad himself. His clothes were rumpled, but despite the overnight growth on his face, Abigail thought he was the most gorgeous man on this earth. "You'd better go, William," she insisted, pushing on his shoulders that didn't even move an inch from her pressure, but he understood her message.

"Wednesday we have a date." That meant the day after next.

“A date for what?”

A smile mysteriously crossed his face and she was breathless from the beauty. “Seven o'clock, you tell them you're going to bed early and don't want to be disturbed.” He fingered a loose coppery, brown curl. “Dress nice.”

“William, what are you up too?”

He changed the subject to avoid the question. “I think it might be warmer tomorrow night, Sweetheart.” He drew her close, pulling away the covers. His arousal was very evident, pressed against her belly.

Her eyes danced with pleasure as she giggled. “You'd really better go.”

He stole a short peck and released her. “Be sweet.” William pinched her nose gently and left, getting over the fence in a single bound.

When he was out of sight of her large balcony windows, she hurriedly dressed and got her mother to take her to the certified testing center at the college to explain her tardiness which was: she overslept.

* * *

Arriving in the courtroom parking lot, William paused before getting out of his van. He wasn't used to the intimacy he had grown with Abigail in this short time. Even Lydia didn't have this closeness to him. Abigail brought out a gentle warmth, touching his soul that William never dreamed he was capable of feeling. It was just amazing how much she affected him, but could he ever let her know this? When would it be safe? She was close to remembering, but she needed a little push. He wanted to be there when all the pieces fell together and just see when she knew why she had this connection with William. It would be perfect.

Would he still want revenge against McPherson after Abigail realized her past with William? Dammit, he had stopped wanting revenge against McPherson from the first night with Abigail. He knew his real revenge would be when a jury announced he was not guilty of any of the crimes against him. William was innocent and he would have to start thinking of who would be trying to set him up. He would track down that old man from the YMCA. He knew a lot - almost too much of everything. Maybe he could help William figure this mess out.

William sauntered in the courtroom - very late. The judge had not come out, but there was a definite crowd in the audience. Media, victims' family members, and other nosey, busy-bodies had their say right outside the doors, since the proceedings were closed to any audiences; yet the vindictiveness or snide questions about him being a killer didn't faze him. His Abigail had him in too good of a mood to hear what was hissed at him today.

* * *

David was so shocked at the sort of glow William had on his face and the bounce to his step to even reprimand William for his tardiness. He knew his best friend sitting beside him at the prosecution's table also noted, but Ramsey was so incensed at the fact that the lead judge had given William extra time to get to the courtroom, instead of docking him payment for his tardiness or even throwing him in jail for the night.

William even had the audacity to salute Ramsey. The young man was definitely asking for an ass whooping.

* * *

Marilyn picked up Abigail up from her therapist, which Abigail went to after her exams. She had passed with flying colors and was quite proud of herself, considering she had stayed up rather late.

“So when do I meet this boy?” Marilyn asked.

“Mom, I really don't think you ever will. I broke it off.”

“When?” Marilyn asked a bit flustered. “Why?”

With a nonchalant shrug of her shoulder, Abigail said, “Because women need many affairs of the heart to determine when they are ready to settle down.”

“If you think with your head and not your body, then you won't need many affairs of the heart.”

Abigail blushed.

“It doesn't matter if you've broken it off, Abby. The respectable thing to do is to introduce the young man. Can't you let him know you would like him to meet your parents? I'm sure he's mature enough to understand this.”

“With Daddy's temper expected, do you think any young man would be crazy enough to enter the house of the lion? I think that's what keeps guys away from me, other than my handicap. They're terrified of him.”

“That's no excuse. Wednesday Abigail, since you want to be difficult.”

Abigail protested. “You said two weeks!”

“Wednesday or I'll tell your father.”

Abigail was backed in a corner. What else was she supposed to do? “Fine, we'll just go on a date afterwards, so Daddy won't know he's really out of my life,” she agreed rather flippantly. Of course she'll only say the guy stood her up because he was scared. That would throw them off the trail for now.

“What's his name in case he doesn't show?”

She groaned. Marilyn was too intuitive for her own good. "Let's just see if he shows, and then we'll go from there."

"Where would you be going?" Marilyn questioned.

Abigail remembered William saying to dress nicely. "We could go to his church. Can we find a dress today?" It was a perfect excuse to get something nice to wear, although it was weird to ask her mother to get something with the intent to impress William Stone - the man her father hated more than life itself.

Marilyn smiled happy for her daughter's new change on the outlook on life. "I know the perfect store."

Many times Abigail had heard her parents whispering about how she never went out with people her own age and her mother was probably ecstatic her daughter was "living," with that hopeful look in her eyes.

"It all sounds so romantic. Matter of fact, it sounds like something your father would do," Marilyn noted.

"Daddy? Romantic? I find that hard to believe."

Her mother actually blushed. "Ramsey McPherson was a romantic-holic and still is."

"Is that why you fell in love with him?" Abigail asked.

Marilyn bit her lip. "No. I fell in love with him the first time I saw him. I moved to New York from Detroit at fourteen and your father was a senior in high school. I was just entering ninth grade and as tomboyish as I could be. I lived right next to Ramsey and had a straight view into his room. I was unpacking my things when I happened to look up and see the most beautiful body standing in front of the window, naked as a newborn baby and cut like meat from the butcher."

"No you didn't!" Abigail gasped.

"You bet your bottom I did. I think that day I became a woman. I realized what being a female really meant," she said. "Especially if I could get close to that fine flesh of a man."

Abigail knew exactly what her mother meant. For some reason she understood her femininity when she first laid eyes on William, who was...her thoughts trailed off as a flash zoomed from her memory.

The ball. He was holding her ball.

She screamed, "Give me back my ball."

Then she saw blackness, but not before she heard his deep voice whisper, "Promise."

"Abby, are you listening?"

Abigail feigned a smile yet she was deeply disturbed. "Yes, Mom. Please go on," she insisted hiding her upset look, but her thoughts remained very troubled.

“Anyway, you'll never believe it if he told you, but your father was awful in math and he needed to pass calculus in order to graduate and since I was the best calculus student - your grandfather was a math professor at many colleges - I volunteered to help him pass summer school. We became good friends and when he went to college we wrote each other often as friends in his mind. I used to tag along with David and Ramsey in the summer time. I learned so much and finally it happened. He fell in love with me, but then I was so in love with him I just couldn't say ‘no’ when he wanted to...” She blushed again.

Abigail couldn't believe her father had actually had sex with her mother out of wedlock. “How old were you?”

“Twenty, just like you.”

Abigail smiled. That was reassuring. “History repeats, itself I guess,” she blurted out.

“You aren't in love like we were. He loved me, Abby. Ramsey loved me and I knew he wouldn't hurt me or use me. Does this boy love you? Will he hurt you? Is he using you?”

Abigail looked away. Again Marilyn had hit the nail with a direct hit. There was no doubt in Abigail's mind that William was using her. At first she had justified their lovemaking as using each other, but she never expected to fall in love with him so quickly. “I don't think I can answer that now, Mom. Not now.”

“Think about it, Abigail,” she said to her daughter, just as they arrived at home.

Abigail took her advice and thought about her feelings for William - all afternoon.

The judge only had to hear one witness of the defense to dismiss the case until the prosecution had further evidence to convict William Stone. All through the proceedings, David was perplexed. The more he looked at William, the more he was reminded of the glow on Abigail's face just yesterday morning.

As everyone was leaving the courtroom to face the media, he turned to William. “Is there something I should know about, Mr. Stone?”

“What do you mean?” William asked in feigned innocence.

“This gleeful attitude of yours.”

“I've just been dismissed of murder, David. Why shouldn't I be?” His voice and face were becoming increasingly colder. It was as if someone had drawn the shades to a window. David was now seeing the cold ruthless dangerous violent man he was used to dealing with. The other side that had been there all this morning seemed...normal, human, sane, but those were qualities everyone thought William Stone could never possess.

“Stone, if there's something I should know about-”

“Like what?” William snapped cutting him off.

“Like why was Camp on the stand as a pre-trial witness instead of Andrew, who was with you to prove you weren't anywhere near the park at the time of the murder?” David demanded.

“I spoke to Camp at the time of the murder and he even came over to bring us something to eat. He was just as good as anyone,” William answered simply.

“That isn't who we discussed putting on the stand. Why haven't I even met Andrew for questioning?” David asked.

“It was a waste of time. You and I both knew I'd never be behind bars - not today. The prosecution was weak, wasn't it McPherson?” His eyes rose coldly over David's head to meet his shiny brown's of rusted copper.

Ramsey had come by to see what was keeping David because they had intended to go speak after the pre-trial.

“How would you know I was weak?” Ramsey growled.

“Easily, your wife told me,” William taunted.

Ramsey took a step forward and William didn't budge ready to land a few punches to Ramsey's face. David stood between them.

“You son of a bitch. You're fucking with the wrong man, Stone!” Ramsey growled.

“You're the one fucking around, McPherson. Go to hell and leave me the hell alone,” William ordered.

“That's enough,” David yelled. “Mr. Stone, please wait outside the court building, I'll be out in a moment.”

“Don't bother, I can find my own way home.”

“Stay out of trouble,” David warned.

William left, not giving Ramsey a second glance.

David dragged Ramsey back into the courtroom for privacy. Once David had his best friend calmed down and his thoughts off of Stone, he asked Ramsey, “Has Abigail been acting strange lately?”

“Not lately. It's been pretty quiet.” Ramsey smirked, a little glad. “Just this morning my wife remarked that Abigail hasn't had any nightmares in a few weeks.”

“What kind of nightmares?”

A disturbed look came on Ramsey's face. "About that day and about some stranger Abigail just happened to meet the day before the accident."

"Who was the stranger?" David persisted.

"Some man. Abigail had said that night when she had met him she thought he liked her, and he would have never hurt her. She even said she hoped he came back."

"Did the others say anything?"

"Robby was rather bothered, but he said the guy was huge with black hair and..." Ramsey's voice trailed off. "Angie seemed rather quiet that evening as if she was haunted by something. Matter of fact, Abigail was the only one in good spirits about meeting the stranger. He seemed to give the others the creeps." He looked very troubled by the thoughts going on inside his head. "I remember going to Robby's room to speak to him about what happened and I remember him saying that the stranger wouldn't give them the ball back. Angie tried to threaten the boy, but he scared them...except Abigail. He said she seemed a little frightened, but she didn't understand the danger she was in. The man looked big enough to break her in two, and when he pulled Abigail away from them, they were too scared to do anything about it."

"Did he hurt Abigail?" David asked.

Ramsey shook his head frowning. "Robby said he didn't. The stranger really never said anything to Angie and Robby." His mind went back to that night with Robby. "I remember Robby looking very haunted and terrified, as he told me the stranger's eyes...were so cold when he looked at Angie and him, but when his eyes first fell on Abigail's, it was all he could look at. Like he wanted to eat her alive, but every time Robby or Angie thought about interrupting, Abigail and dragging their sister away, the stranger's eyes would almost talk to them, daring them to try." Ramsey looked at David as he hauntingly spoke Robby's words from that night, "They were like looking at two suns. Two...bright suns, which made him feel hot all over. He was more scared for his own life than Abigail's."

David slumped in the nearest chair. "You could be saying that William could have met Abigail. He could have been around her then?"

Ramsey didn't like that, from the expression he gave David. "Just the thought of that bastard meeting my baby chills me to the bone. That's stupid, David."

"There's no other--"

Ramsey sharply disrupted David saying, "There are other possibilities. Robby had a very active imagination. Abigail has always been bright, perceptive, and a very good judge of people. If she ever saw William Stone, there's no doubt in my mind she would be frightened of him. She wouldn't keep something like that a secret from me."

David wanted to agree, but he couldn't. Something was there. Something he couldn't put his finger on. "So you don't think Abigail's interest in the case is personal?"

"No, dammit, David! I would know if Abigail met someone like William Stone. That's a secret a daughter wouldn't keep from her father - especially mine. And I know Abigail loves me just as much as I love her. By god I love her!" He slammed his fist on the table. "She would never hide the identity of a man like William Stone away from me. Then or now!"

"Unless she loved him more than she loved you," David pointed out.

"Never!" Ramsey bellowed. "Never in her life would Abigail think of loving a man like Stone." He stormed out of the room too angry to see through the haze of his thoughts, which were putting pieces together.

David's own thoughts were clicking fast. *'Wouldn't that be what William would want?'* he thought to himself. It would be a perfect revenge for the bull crap Ramsey had done to an innocent man.

Now all David had to do was find out if his train of thoughts would lead him to the truth.

Chapter 24

William was tired. He had come earlier than the usual one a.m. rendezvous. He arrived at ten and locked her doors with the bolt and propped a chair against the knob. They spoke in whispers, with the radio on. While they played chess, he told her about his day - mainly the trial. She hung on his every word, but lost the first game.

By the second game, she was telling him about her day. He was as surprised to find out that Ramsey McPherson flunked calculus.

She won the second game and they started on the third to break the tie, both enjoying the challenge of playing against one another.

"So you don't know what you're going to tell your mother when no one shows up tomorrow?" he questioned.

She rolled her beautiful eyes heavenwards in frustration. "I have no idea."

He smiled wickedly. "And you bought something really nice?"

"It will knock your eyes right out of your socket, Mr. Stone," she teased.

"Then I'll just have to make sure someone shows up to take you out tomorrow, won't I?"

“How will you accomplish that?”

His eyes only twinkled as he took her horseman. “You'll just have to wait, won't you?” It was quiet for a moment as she pondered her next move. As soon as she made it, he said, “I've been thinking about the future.”

Her heart skipped a beat and already her mind saw a huge wedding. She would bet he looked great in a tuxedo. “What about the future?” she calmly inquired.

“I know there's someone out there trying to frame me - someone in this town, so in order to stop this madness, I think I should leave. Maybe that's what this person wants and the murders will stop.”

She completely stopped breathing for a long period before she choked out, “Leave? As in go away from Davenport.”

“New York sounds good. Or even Chicago,” he suggested.

Abigail pushed herself away from the card table he had moved over near the center of the room. She usually used the table as an extra studying desk. “William, you would be leaving me.”

His eyes lowered and he fiddled with a plastic chess piece. “I know this, but you'll be going to college. Away from here.”

“I've been accepted at a lot of them, but I want to be here with you. I could just go to Ohio University, like my mother would like me too.”

He glared at her as if she had lost her mind. “Then what? You'll never know freedom. You'll never learn to do things on your own. You need that. You'd be miserable here in this house.”

“I won't if you stay.”

“This isn't a Disney movie, and this isn't a romance novel where happy endings will always come, this is the real world, woman, and in reality, you're a spoiled cripple who wants to be with a possible psychopath. Not only could I be charged with rape if I'm ever caught, but I could also be charged with violating a court order, breaking and entering and any other thing your damn father can pull out the fucking law books.”

She started to cry. Why did he have to be so right? Why couldn't this have a happy ending? It was so perfect when she was with him. Damn him! Damn society! Damn her father, who would never listen to reason!

William quietly stood and went over to her. She looked forlorn slouched in the chair looking up at him. “Sweetheart,” his voice wasn't so callous as he knelt beside her. “You'll learn life goes on. Whether you want to or not.”

“Y-You're doing this because of my handicap aren't you?” The tears were coming faster. “I-I'm not a woman, I'm j-just a cripple to you too.”

In his eyes, one could tell he hated to see her cry. Anyone else he probably would have ignored, but his look was caring and possessive. Abigail couldn't help but sob, because she knew he also believed these moments they shared would end and they would never be able to experience them again.

Gently, he lifted her out of the chair and carried her to the bed. Her face being buried in his broad shoulder muffled her sobs. “Sweetheart, please stop it.” It was unnerving him to see her like this.

“C-Can you blame me?” she sobbed. “I-I don't want to lose you, William.” She brushed her tears off her cheeks and pushed slightly away from him to look up into his face. “B-but you're right William,” she was reluctant to admit. “W-We can't be like this forever and it hurts to know we can't.”

“You do mean a lot me, Abigail.” He hugged her and she loved the feel of his body holding her tight. “You mean the world to me and you will always mean this much. Even more.”

“So after college, maybe?” she asked hopefully.

The reluctance of answering her was clearly on his face. Abigail knew it had been a silly question. College was a long time to go away. What if her feelings changed? What if she found someone and married? There were too many hurting possibilities and he didn't want to face them.

To take her mind off of the question, he kissed her. Long and passionately. She didn't refuse him. She never refused him. She denied him nothing.

When he finally drew away, she was breathless. His lips tormented her face, neck and ears, as his hands fought with her clothes.

“W-William, wait. I've been meaning to give you something.”

“And I've been meaning to take, all day.” His hands went up her thigh and she gasped with a blush as he inserted his finger into her warmth.

“W-Wait, William,” she protested, panting and struggling not to give into the deliciousness he aroused. She didn't fight him, but allowed her own body to succumb to the teasing finger, especially when his thumb found her most sensitive spot. She abandoned all resistance and let him take control as he brought her to full pleasure. She had to bite her lip to keep from screaming.

“Do you know you're beautiful when you orgasm?” he whispered huskily in her ear.

She shuddered, burying her face again in his now wet from her tears plaid work shirt. He kissed her forehead and held her close. His body was screaming for lovemaking; yet his heart just needed to feel her proximity. “Sweetheart,” there was a need in his voice as he spoke. “I want you to know you're more

woman to me than any female I've ever known. I've never met anyone so fascinating and wonderful like you, ever."

She looked up to meet his powerful eyes with wariness. "You're just saying this to make me feel better."

"No, I brought you to pleasure to make you feel better."

Abigail blushed.

"But I said those words," he continued, "because it was the honest truth and no matter what happens, you will always be mine."

She believed every word. "Oh, William," she murmured, drawing him in to kiss him. "Let's make love on the patio, now."

Eagerly, he lifted her and started towards the direction she had suggested.

"Wait!" she exclaimed. "Put me down on the floor before I forget."

He groaned in protest, his need so great for her.

"I'll forget if you don't do it now," she insisted with a slight giggle.

Reluctantly, he did, gently placing her near the bed.

"Stand up," she ordered.

He smiled wickedly. "I'll be out of your reach, won't I?"

She knew what he meant and flushed. "If I'd want to do that, William, don't you think I would have sat on the bed instead of the floor?"

He looked very disappointed, but obeyed her command with a wondering look in his beautiful eyes.

She lifted the mattress and pulled out his heirloom knife.

"How in hell did you get that?" he asked, kneeling down to her.

"That second day. It must have fallen out of your jacket pocket on the floor next to my bed"

He remembered. "Why are you just giving it back?"

"William, it's pretty hard to think of anything with you around me and you would leave before I could remember it." She admired the workmanship on the handle with the tip of her fingers. "It's beautiful. Why do you go by Stone?"

"Two generations of Chavez is enough to build up a bad reputation of insanity in the family. Kid's teased me a lot and called me crazy Chavez. My uncle gave me the opportunity to come here and be something different. To start anew, just like he did and offered me the chance to change it. I love my

original name, but the shame my father and grandfather have done to the name is too great of a burden to bear right now.” He sighed wistfully. “Legally, I did change my name back to Chavez, but every time I feel like dropping the name Stone publicly, something else happens that's linked to my father.”

“Children can be so cruel,” she said, thinking about not only his past, but also her own with her siblings.

William opened her palm and placed the knife back in her hand. “Keep it.”

“Why?” she asked.

“My grandmother gave it to my grandfather, my grandfather passed it to my father and he passed it to me when I was young. It means a lot to me.” He cupped her face. “Just like you do.”

She kissed his palm and smiled warmly. “I’ll keep it forever.”

“I know you will,” he said assuredly.

He waited until she put it back before turning out her lamp then lifting her in his arms as if she were no heavier than a newborn baby.

Abigail put her arms around his neck and giggled when he snatched the covers off the shelf and practically kicked open the balcony door in his eagerness. The night air was warm and she enjoyed the feel of it and him together.

He laid her down and then proceeded to hurriedly undress while she spread out the blanket. By the time she was done, he was kneeling in front of her. Her legs were tucked under her and with great balance; she was able to sit straight. He reached to finish undressing her, but she pushed his hands away.

“Wait, William,” she insisted.

“Why?” he asked bitterly.

“Because this night is special.” She placed her hands on his stiffening member. Meeting those mystical, yellowish brown eyes that smoldered with passion, she smiled. “Why did you make me taste you that first night?”

The question caught him off guard. “To humiliate you.”

“Is it supposed to humiliate a woman when she puts her mouth on a man?” she asked.

His voice was thick and choked full of passion as her hands moved softly up and down his member. “Only if they don't enjoy it.”

She raised a dark, camel brown brow. “What if I did?”

“Did you?” he asked.

She didn't answer. Instead she dipped her head down and drew his velvety pulsing muscle deep in her mouth.

William's eyes went as wide as saucers as her mouth proceeded to manipulate him to the edge of pleasure, then she swallowed him further as he let himself go.

When it was over, she shyly looked up at him to gauge his shocked reaction.

“W-Why?” he simply forced out cupping her face.

She blushed. “I-I wanted to know if it would feel the same.” She looked proud for a brief moment. “I've been thinking about doing that to you a lot.”

He chuckled as he undressed her. “You're a good student, sweetheart.” He kissed her, but she moved away with a slight frown. “What's wrong?” he asked.

“What do you taste when you kiss me?” she asked innocently.

“What should I taste?”

“You,” Abigail said simply.

He kissed her deeply. “I taste you,” he paused, but finished, “and me.” The tip of his tongue traced along her lower lip in a sensual erotic caress. “We taste good together.”

She chuckled and let him finish undressing her. With his ardor cooled, he took his time, kissing every inch he revealed, loving with his hands and mouth. Their lovemaking lasted throughout the night. Undisturbed and beautiful.

Little did they know they were nearing the end.

Chapter 25

A beautiful Rolls Royce pulled up to the garage. Stuckey, who was helping William replace an engine in a 1972 Mustang, was glad for the distraction. William was usually aware that Stuckey wasn't used to working long hours like William, but today was different. William's mind was miles away today. Stuckey had been badgering him to open up about what he'd done about his plans for revenge, but William had only told Stuckey that he took care of his problem with McPherson and nothing else, yet Stuckey seemed a bit too interested in what was done. Stuckey wasn't interested in anything except drugs, smoking, and a good whore from time to time, so his interest in William's personal business made him a little wary as to why Stuckey would want to know so eagerly.

The car caused a good enough distraction to make both men pause in their work.

“Know them?” Stuckey asked pushing the brownish-red, natural curly lock of hair out of his eyes and peering at the vehicle with a little envy.

“Never have. Must be out of towners,” William grumbled. “Go see what they want. I’m going to finish this up.” He turned back to work on the motor. He had a lot on his mind. He had left Abigail early for one strange reason; he wasn’t sure what had happened. He knew they fell asleep near three or four - he wasn’t positive, because they were still out on the patio. Yet, what had awakened him was movement and not from him, but since he hadn’t seen it actually happen, he couldn’t be absolutely sure if it had come from her.

He would ask her tonight when Andrew brought her to him. William noted that he would have to verify Hal’s and David’s location before the boy went over to the house. Ramsey had never seen Camp’s nephew up close, so it would be safe to send him in as long as Hal or David weren’t in the area.

“William Stone?” a callous male voice said behind him.

He didn’t bother to turn around. “Yeah, that’s my name. What’s it to you?”

The voice spoke again, sounding like the person had too many cigarettes, possible cancer in the throat - or someone had rubbed a knife in their throat. He knew no one in either of those conditions enough to give them any attention.

“My name’s Jack Truman. I’m from Chicago. Can we talk in private, sir?” the stranger asked politely. with more respect in his voice than what most people were giving William these days.

Lately, William had his other employees deal with any customers that came in, because of all the media and negative attention he was getting.

“Can I ask what’s your business?” he asked warily.

“Cars, my name. Strictly cars.”

William faced him and saw how the man stepped back from the glare William’s eyes shot at him. That was usual and by now, William was used to people doing that when they looked at him especially as he raised up to his full height of six foot five. The Caucasian man, a head shorter than William, was in his fifties, puffing on a cigar in an expensive greenish/gray silk suit that brought out the similar color of his eyes. His oily black hair was slicked back and cut short at his nape. His eyes stared up at William’s as if he found a long lost son.

Jack Truman followed the bullock, large young man into a spacious, yet very comfortable office and surprisingly clean- almost pristine. William kept a very neat appearance and his workplace exhumed his own personality. He could tell that the gossip Jack Truman probably had heard about William Stone being two feet away from the loony bin couldn’t be right from, the way the older man looked in shock at William and

back at his surroundings. If William had any problems it was his strict, life guidelines, his perfectionist quality, and his hard working style.

“You don't know me, Mr. Stone, but my cousin was Leroy Blade who owned an automobile dealership in Boca Raton, Florida,” Jack spoke, extinguishing his cigar in the clean ashtray at the end of the desk.

William nodded, acknowledging he knew who Jack was talking about. “Leroy helped me get my degree from high school early. I followed him from California and he gave me different jobs around the dealership.” His voice was calm and cool, but his brow stayed furrowed.

“I'm sad to say, Leroy died two weeks ago,” he informed William disappointedly.

“How?” William asked.

“Heart failure. Damn coke did it.”

“This is almost no surprise, Mr. Truman. He was addicted to cocaine long before I even met him. I'm sorry to hear that. You have my deepest condolences.”

Jack waved that away. “No need. Life goes on and so do we. Leroy and I were never close. That's why I'm surprised he even asked me for a favor after his death.”

“After Mr. Truman? I thought a person had to be alive in order to speak?” His humor was dry.

“He wrote me a letter. He asked me to go into his safe and look through his personal things until I found what I liked, but I was only allowed to take one item. The old fart left a million in cash, four million in jewelry, and six million in cocaine. At the bottom of all this, there was a folder with a bunch of designs and ideas.” He pulled out an old, crappy folder from the expensive briefcase.

William gave him a straight-forward ‘stuck-on-stupid-look.’ “You chose the folder over everything else?”

“Yes, because I believe just like my brother thought, it's worth more than all that combined. Do you remember any of this, Mr. Stone?” He placed the folder on the desk in front of William.

William quietly looked though it immediately recognizing his handwriting and the improved designs of vehicles. “How are those worth a fortune?”

“I've been in the car business for thirty-eight years. Longer than you've been alive, Mr. Stone and I know an auto money maker when I see it. This,” he pointed to the papers, “is the best thing I've seen in a long time and I have a guy up in Detroit just dying to become partnered with you in assisting in getting these off the paper and in the nearest show room. He has a lot of ties with the big three and he can help you get the ball rolling.”

“What does all this mean to me, really?” William asked warily.

“It means I’m asking you to apply the knowledge you have now and see if you can improve these drawings even more. Go into detail and see if you can come up with even more things. In the meantime, I will personally fund any project you come up with. We’ll split the profits fifty/fifty - or whatever you’d like that’s reasonable and become filthy rich before I die.”

“Where would your money come from?” he asked suspiciously.

“I have money,” Jack Truman answered. “Other legal investments, stock options here and there. Take it I’m no Daddy Warbucks, but I have millions in assets around the world all very legit. I’ve been waiting for this opportunity.”

“What opportunity? These are the drawings of a bored little boy, passing the time.”

“Car companies would pay good money to get their hands on these designs. A lot of money. Are you following me?”

“I’m tagging along a little. You mind if we go step by step over lunch, Mr. Truman,” William invited.

Jack Truman smiled, honored. “The pleasure is all mine.”

* * *

David was sure Ramsey wasn’t home when he knocked on the McPherson’s front door. He was exhausted from his five a.m. call from Tampa. He’d been speaking to Darwin Moses, a bartender at the time of Lowell Crane’s murder. He found out that two weeks after the murder of Crane, his son had come into the bar, ranting and raving about the injustice of his father’s death and how he would make sure that whoever tore his father from limb to limb would pay.

“The boy never said the name of the guy, but he said he’d seen the man walking away and he knew how to get to him. He also knew how he was going to get him. He said even if it took forever, he would knock the stone down,” Darwin Moses said over the phone.

“The stone? Are you sure he didn’t just say stone?”

Moses seemed hesitant. “It was so long ago, we didn’t think much about it, but then my sister was up in Akron for a family reunion and she came back with a Davenport paper detailing the murder that boy did to his uncle. I also recognized that boy’s face.”

“Are you saying William Stone was at the bar around the time of Lowell Crane’s murder?” David asked.

The bartender's tone of voice was assured as he said, "Yeah, he was there. I remember those eyes. He used to come and sit in a dark corner and watch the goings-on every Friday night when Crane was at his worst. I used to think that the kid was going to jump up and kill Crane where he stood with a look; cause I never seen no Hispanic kid with eyes all golden like that and I seen a lot of Hispanics. He made me nervous, but he was never no trouble." Moses described William even down to the shape of the scar on his hand. "The day Crane died though wasn't a Friday, so I ain't sure where the kid was."

David had made several other calls, because he wanted to get his facts together. The Crane son had so many aliases it was difficult to keep track of him. The last location where he had lived was in Indianapolis, two years ago. The lawyer had a junior high buddy working at Equifax as a supervisor, with an alert on the social security of the boy, but nothing had come up.

He knocked again, assured that the person he wanted to see was at the McPherson's home.

"No one's here you need to see," Rebecca snapped, after peering through the keyhole. Her voice was muffled, but he could still hear the disdain.

"I'm here to see you, Mrs. McPherson," David said.

She opened the door only partially to peek out. "Why? I won't help your murderer."

"I'm not here on my client's behalf."

"Then why are you here?" she asked skeptically.

"Because what I need to know from you is for a more personal reason. I couldn't ask Ramsey or even Marilyn, but I'm hoping you can answer my questions. Is Marilyn around?"

"She's sleeping upstairs and Abby's in her room sleeping, as if she hadn't slept for days." She invited him in and directed him towards the living room. There were doors that she closed on purpose to give them some privacy. "What do you want to know?"

"I want to know if, before the accident, did any of the children keep a diary?"

"Why?" she asked suspiciously.

"The day before the 'event' a stranger came here." This was the truth, but the next was a lie. "I think this stranger had something to do with that day and was getting Ramsey back for prosecuting him in the past."

She gasped. "Revenge? You think some criminal hurt my Ramsey by killing the children?"

He nodded.

She gripped her chest in despair. "I told Ramsey to become a salesman, like his father, but did he listen to his Mother? No, he listened to that wife of his." She sobbed. "Poor Angie, poor Robby. Poor Abigail. She suffers worse every day."

"What do you mean?"

"Hasn't Ramsey or Marilyn told you? The girl's been ripping her clothes to shreds at night, hitting the walls, talking in her sleep and lately, I think she's coming down with something. Her winter covers were on the floor by the bed yesterday morning and last night she had her study table in the middle of the floor."

"Has that been all?" David inquired.

Rebecca shook her head disappointedly. "She's tired a lot, as if she doesn't sleep at night and she's been groaning when she does sleep. But these walls are thick, so I can't hear much that goes on in there. She keeps her door locked a lot more than she used to as if she is keeping something a secret."

'Or keeping someone a secret,' David thought to himself. "Do you think it may be because of the baby?"

"No. There's something more." She stepped closer keeping her voice low. "Most of the things I tell you, they don't know. But Marilyn knows Abigail's been sexually active."

David gasped, shocked. "What?!" His heart was pounding in his chest.

"The girl thinks she's in love." Rebecca said in a disgusted huff.

He turned away to hide his horrified expression. This wasn't true! His thoughts were picturing Stone and Abigail together and she wanted it? She was having sex with him? No! It couldn't be true, he tried to convince himself. Composing himself, he turned back to Rebecca. "How did you find out?"

Proudly, Rebecca answered, "I found birth control pills in her dresser. Marilyn took them away, but I don't think that's stopped Abigail. I think she's still trying to see the boy and won't tell us who he is, even though Marilyn said she did break it off with the boy."

"Does Ramsey know?" David asked aghast.

She cackled. "Do you actually think Ramsey would let this atrocity simply end like that? There would be more than one murderer in this town. Ramsey would be out for this boy's blood."

David closed his eyes to stop the woozy sensation spreading throughout his brain. If what he thought was true, Rebecca couldn't be more right. Ramsey would rip Stone's head off his body with his bare hands. Yet, he had to wonder why would Marilyn keep the fact about the birth control pills from Ramsey? She didn't know whom Abigail was seeing, nor did she suspect anything as monstrous as David thought. He decided to get back on track and asked his original inquiry again. "Do you know if there was a diary around the time, back then, before the accident?"

Rather evasively, Rebecca said, "I believe...Angela may have had one. I packed Robby's things away while Marilyn packed Angie's. I was careful about my packing and didn't find anything. Marilyn was so distraught at the time, she practically threw all the belongings in the boxes." She motioned for David to follow her to the basement. "Abigail has never kept a diary of anything, because if she did, I would probably know a lot more of what's going on with that girl." She looked back at him worriedly. "Do you think that someone could still mean to harm my Ramsey?"

"I think so," David answered.

Again she gripped her chest and took him over to a closet filled with old boxes of tax records, old family albums and other boxes. "My second sight told me this. It told me my Ramsey was in over his head."

David listened to her prattling as she riffled through the boxes. "Has this sight told you anything about Abigail?" he inquired.

She gasped, "It's why I'm here! I felt it in my dreams that someone was haunting her. He plans to do her harm."

"Who?" he questioned.

"A fearsome man with a black soul. He wished she were dead every day she breathes life into her body. I saw him standing over her body...in a park."

"Was she dead?"

Rebecca sighed worriedly, "She was that or asleep. I must protect Abigail."

David didn't believe in all her craziness about the senses, but the way she spoke, he could feel her fear and it was real to her. "What makes you think this person wants to do her harm?"

"He had hatred in his heart. I know I speak in riddles, Mr. Reichard, but my dreams speak to me like that," she tried to explain.

He nodded in understanding. "Is there a chance that you may have interpreted the dream wrong?"

She stopped her searching and looked at him, insulted. "Is there a chance that you may be defending a killer?"

David lowered his head in docility. "You may not approve of my profession, Mrs. McPherson, but I haven't found my client guilty of anything, yet."

Her brows raised in curiosity. "So you think he could possibly kill?"

"I think insanity does run in this particular family, yet anyone could be a killer," he disputed.

Rebecca started searching again and then whooped with excitement as she pulled out a locked old book. "I now remember now Marilyn buying this for Angela when she was eleven, after they found Robby looking through his sister's things."

"Just like a little brother," he teased, taking the diary she handed to him.

"Will it come in handy?" Rebecca inquired hopefully.

"I think it will, but I'll have to see after I read it." He put it in the inside of his coat and took Rebecca's hand in a warm shake. "Thank you, Mrs. McPherson. You've been a big help."

He went out to his car and checked his voicemail. Lewis Muller, the junior high buddy at Equifax, had found Marshall Allen's social security number, which had been used to run a credit check on an expensive item being purchased in Toledo, Ohio. Muller had done one better and researched the store to find that it was a knife customization shop, but the proprietor said the item ordered was already picked up. There was no security camera inside the store to get a look at the young man, but the shop owner would be able to provide a detailed description of the person who had come in to make the request, if David could get to Toledo by nightfall. Muller left the business information on the voice mail, so David could confirm with the proprietor when he would be arriving.

David booked first class on the Amtrak and took the diary out as he rested in his chair. It would be a good read on the way there and back.

Abigail was more nervous than anyone. Marilyn had made sure Ramsey came home early only telling him Abigail had a "date." Dressed in a purple halter, ankle length dress with a high split on the right and a matching wrap to keep her warm if the night became cool, Abigail was stunning. Ester had come by to even pull her hair in a tight French wrap with light brown curls on the side. Marilyn helped her with the light touch of make up and even helped her paint her toe nails, with which she graced open toe, one inch sandals that went perfect with her outfit.

When the hallway's grandfather clock struck seven and no one knocked on the door, she became so nervous. Five minutes afterwards, the doorbell rang. She started to rush to the door, but her father stepped in her way.

"I'll get it," he said, walking tall as if he were a ten-foot giant.

Abigail looked at her mother for help. "He'll scare him away!" she exclaimed.

Marilyn only smiled sympathetically. "He's your father. Let him put a little fear in the boy. He'll respect you so much more, Ab."

Abigail's stomach felt like it had midgets wrestling around inside and her head began to hurt from the stress. She heard the front door open and a nervous, deep voice asked for her by name as if unsure of whom he was asking for.

"Come in, I'm Ramsey McPherson." Ramsey could be seen shaking the boy's hand then leading him around the corner to Abigail. He was cute, Abigail thought, and would have been even cuter if it didn't look as if he were about to pass out. Yet, he looked almost mystified at Abigail, who was almost just as nervous, but gave him a warm smile.

"Hi," she said, unsure of what to say.

"Hi," he said also unsure.

They assessed each other carefully. Abigail heard Marilyn anxiously clear her voice, awaiting introductions.

The young man stepped forward into the light. His eyes never left Abigail's as if he were trying to read her thoughts with his dark brown eyes searching hers intently. He was about six feet and couldn't be more than twenty. She noted his rough hands and the uncomfortable way he walked in those clothes, which seemed like he borrowed the suit from his father's closet.

He knelt at her chair, never breaking eye contact. "You look more than he..." he stuttered. "...than I imagined you'd be."

She smiled and breathlessly laughed. "Thank you."

This time Rebecca anxiously cleared her throat.

Then the young man stood up abruptly, as if all of a sudden remembering something very important. "I'm Jonathan..." He spoke as if he were testing the name on his tongue. "Jonathan Smith."

Marilyn shook his hand. "Do you have classes with Abigail?"

"No mamm," he answered.

"Then how did you two meet?" she interrogated.

"We do go to the same college, Mother," Abigail said quickly.

He smiled down at her with a thank you smile. "We should be going. We have reservations at ...Louie's Bay."

"That's the new Louisiana restaurant in the next town over, isn't it?" Marilyn asked protectively.

"Yes, mamm. Abigail loves spicy food and I thought I'd do something special. Before we go there, though, I was going to take her over to meet my grandmother, who has a farm just on the outskirts of town." He moved to Abigail's side and looked unsure if he should push her out or have her do it. Abigail

knew, if he knew her, she didn't like to be pushed and it would give him away if he went around and did it, so she moved herself to the door past her father while the young man followed, shaking everyone's hand. He last shook Ramsey's hand and gave him an index card. "I wrote down where we'll be and my cell phone number in case you get worried, sir."

Ramsey looked very proud and gave Abigail his most approving smile.

Abigail just wanted to get out of the door. "Good night Dad."

Ramsey gave her a warm hug. "I love you." He gave her an approving wink.

Abigail was going to be sick. She had lied to her parents and she knew if she didn't get out of there fast, her conscious would be talking the truth faster than her lips could form the words. There was a very beautiful 1979 Mustang in front of the house and she went to it knowing this had to be what he drove.

Ramsey and Marilyn stood on the porch while Rebecca only menacingly peered, out of the living room's bay window. There was a look of pure distrust on her face as the young man helped Abigail in the car mumbling, "You think they bought it?"

Abigail waited until he sat in the driver's side and began to drive away. "I sure do hope so, Jonathan," she answered.

He flushed. "That's not my name. I usually go by Andrew. My uncle works for Mr. Stone who paid me fifty dollars not to shit in my shorts." He snorted. "I'm sorry, I'm not used to talking to a sophisticated lady."

Abigail laughed, relieved. "Did you shit?"

He smiled. "No, but Mr. McPherson almost made me with that fearsome look in his eyes when he opened the door."

"You did very well...Andrew," she complimented him proudly.

He drove them quietly to a farmhouse on the outskirts of town, just like he said, driving straight into a dark, five-car garage, which connected to the house, past a covered bridge that crossed the small pond behind the house toward a road. "Stay here." He closed the door to the garage and honked the horn. It was even darker than when they first drove in and Abigail became rather nervous, hoping nothing was wrong. A ray of light suddenly filtered through the dark as a door opened and a tall figure ducked into the doorway. Behind him was a girl dressed in jeans and a sweater. Abigail's heart fluttered at seeing William in a nice silk black shirt and black pants. His hair was pulled back in a neat ponytail and he walked with an arrogance that was very arousing to Abigail's senses, but she groaned to herself, remembering that her period came on just that morning. Opening the door, he lifted her out the convertible car. Before she could get a word out, he captured her lips in a soul-searching kiss that warmed her to the bones.

“You look magnificent,” he whispered against her lips.

“You aren't so bad yourself,” she said teasingly.

He chuckled and swung her around. “You know what to do kid?” he asked, not breaking eye contact with Abigail, but speaking to Andrew.

“Yeah, you ready to go, Kat?” Andrew asked the girl.

“Not yet. If I'm going to be impersonating someone in a wheelchair, then I'd better go get dressed up like her. Give me five minutes. I got something inside that will do.” The other girl ran back to the house and Abigail gave William a questioning look as he carried her over to his blue van and began to back it out of the doors, going to the bridge. Andrew opened the larger doors so they could get out without a problem and waved his hands, flashing his palms repeatedly. William groaned, cursing under his breath.

“What does that mean?” Abigail asked.

“It means your father must have told him, without you knowing, that your curfew is at ten,” he said disappointedly.

This shocked her. “He did?”

“Ramsey thinks he's a slick fucker. I'm tempted not to bring you back on time.”

“William,” she protested. “He'd hunt Andrew down and tear him from limb to limb.”

“That's the only reason I'm bringing you back on time,” he muttered.

She laughed at his stubborn streak. There was nothing she could possibly do to make him even remotely like her father, but she wouldn't force the issue. Sooner or later, if William's words were true from last night, he would accept Ramsey because he loved her so much.

William took her to a smaller cabin up the private road and carried her to the porch, since they'd left her wheelchair in the car. Once on the porch that went almost encircled the entire cabin, he ordered her to close her eyes.

Without hesitating, she did, and felt herself being set on a very comfortable chair, which was a great support for her back.

He then ordered her to open her eyes and she gasped. He'd sat her in a wheelchair, which looked specially designed just for her.

“For you,” he said.

She hugged him. “Oh William, you're too full of surprises.”

His lips brushed hers. "The night isn't over yet, sweetheart."

The wheels were so easy to move and she was so relaxed in the chair, then she groaned upset. "How could you?"

"What?" he asked worriedly.

"You know I can't take it with me," she cried.

"We'll find a way," he assured her.

The night was young. After they had a wonderful dinner, William drove her to a cliff where he parked backwards, almost looking as if he were going to drive the van over the ledge. He helped her get in the back, where a nice bed was situated, then he opened the back doors. The view overlooked the new orchestra hall, where they were now practicing. There was a woman singing a beautiful operatic piece, which Abigail couldn't help but become touched by the sheer intensity of her voice. Afterwards, they returned to the cabin to have a sweet, chocolate éclair dessert, which made Abigail's hair stand on end. William fed it to her, as he rested his head on her lap and recounted the events of that morning. "Hal is visiting his sick mother in the hospital and David's assistant informed me that he had to make an appointment in Toledo by tonight. It was so convenient to do this today. No one will be able to tell Ramsey who you were with until the trial, of course, but by then, I figure the shit will hit the fan."

"So getting my father back is your only objective in this whole thing?" she asked suspiciously.

"Keeping this a secret is even better, sweetheart. He never has to know."

Abigail wondered if her father would ever find out? After their deceit today, she was really rethinking about keeping their affair a secret. If Ramsey found out, what could he do? She was old enough to take care of herself and she knew, if worse came to worse, her mother wouldn't just abandon her and neither would Rebecca. She had their support, even if her father thought she had hurt him...or was hurting him.

Time passed so quickly for them and they tried to hold on to every moment, as if it were their last. To make him aware of her flow, she took his hand to make him feel the bulky pad that her mother insisted she wear. He only nodded and still enjoyed every moment with her, knowing his limits.

When William reluctantly took her back to the garage at fifteen minutes 'till ten, he turned to her. "Tell 'Drew to hurry home. I'll be waiting for you."

"The night isn't over?" she asked, suppressing a yawn, surprised he wanted to spend more time with her.

"I'm going to spend the night with you, Sweetheart." His kiss was tender and sweet. "See you tonight," he promised, before letting Andrew drive her away towards home.

Arriving home, Andrew almost had to push her up the ramp, because she was so exhausted. Everyone in the household, including Ester, greeted her as Andrew helped her in. He kissed her cheek and left them. Her father watched him drive away and frowned a little.

“What is it Daddy?” Abigail frowned.

“He has dealer plates on his car,” Ramsey pointed out.

The lie came almost too quickly. “His father is in the car business.”

Ramsey looked a little at ease, but decided to accept the excuse as Marilyn eagerly asked her what happened.

“It was just a date, Mother.” She yawned. “Maybe I’ll have more energy in the morning. I’m going to bed, please don’t bother me.”

They all watched as she ensconced herself into her room. Abigail quickly washed up and dressed in a nightgown, assured William wouldn’t tear this one off. She heard everyone adjourning to their rooms, because the hour was late.

Laying down in bed after turning out the light, she could feel her bladder telling her to go before he came, but her body wouldn’t budge, feeling like dead weight. Soon she could feel a cool breeze and his warm body pressing against her for comfort. He must have been almost right behind them.

“If I go away to school, will you come to see me?” she asked, not bothering to open her heavy lids, but knowing he was listening.

He was silent for a moment, almost not breathing, and then answered, “I’m going to be honest with you, sweetheart and say if it’s far away; probably not. With the prospect offered to me, I’m going to be extremely busy. I have a feeling our time here may be coming to an end.”

She pressed her lips together, remembering their conversation similar to this from before. “I know.”

“Let’s not talk about that again.”

She agreed.

He was quiet for another strange moment, but she could almost hear him thinking. “Do you think there’s a chance of you walking?”

“No.” She said this without the least hesitation.

“Why not?”

This was never her best subject. Too often, it reminded her of the day that she fell and broke her arm because she thought that the doctors were wrong in saying that she couldn't walk. It hurt - her arm and her pride - because she felt so damn trapped in that chair from day one. "I just don't." Her tone was brusque.

"But if you found out there might-"

"There are no might or hopes or possibilities, William. I used to have them, but not anymore." She turned on her back and stared up at the ceiling.

He lifted himself up to look down at her. "What about these spasms?"

"I've had them for a while. They mean nothing."

"How long is a while?" he asked.

"I won't hope again, William so these questions are silly."

He laid back down. "Fine," he said, frustrated.

"William, please don't ruin the night with talk that hurts. We've had such a perfect day together," Abigail insisted.

He was sorry he'd upset her and pulled her in his arms.

She said, "I'm happy for you, about your prospects. I think things will turn out for the better, even if it is just for you and not us."

"No matter what happens, I want you to keep the knife," he said.

"Why?"

"Because I know that if you keep the knife, it will mean something. I only kept it because it was all I had from my past. My father gave it to me, but as the years went by, I found myself hating him. Hating him more than I have ever hated anyone," William answered gruffly.

"So it was just something that went into the pocket, no more abnormal than a wallet."

"Actually, I kept it on my desk in my office at work and never bothered it until the day I decided to go through with coming here."

"I'll keep it close, William," she swore. "I'll treasure it, just like I will treasure the memories that we have together."

He stiffened and she could feel his upset. "Will you? Do you really treasure our memories?" There was coldness in his tone and Abigail was positive he knew something she couldn't remember.

She hesitated before answering, but then she nodded. There was a piercing doubt in her mind and for some reason she kept visualizing a ball. “Always,” she promised.

He forced her to turn away and curved his body against hers. He was hurt and didn't want her to know this, yet her lips couldn't form the words to speak of what he didn't want to tell her, but was waiting for her to figure out on her own. She remembered the last words he mumbled, “What's the use?”

'Wake up,' she told herself, but Abigail didn't want to listen. She was tired. If you don't there's going to be a river. She smiled, thinking that amusing. Ester would be so upset and... wait William wouldn't find it amusing.

'All right, I'll get up,' sleepily, she told herself, but Abigail found herself in the dream all of a sudden.

Playing with her precious ball...

* * *

William awoke abruptly. He had felt cold all of a sudden and realized why. Abigail wasn't beside him, even though he had fenced her in between the wall and his body. He looked at the foot of the bed, where her chair sat, but it was also empty. He looked down at the floor to see if she had rolled onto the floor.

Nothing!

Movement drew his eyes to the dark bathroom and he couldn't believe his eyes.

* * *

“Abigail!” William shook her.

She sat up, not only scared by that nightmare she was having, but also terrified, because her greatest fear was to see Ramsey bursting in on them, or Rebecca, or even her mother.

Looking around frantically, ready to explain, she rested her eyes on William when she saw no one around, looking quite put out by the panic he had caused. “William, there better be a good reason you woke me up.”

“You just walked,” he announced.

“I did what?” she asked again not believing her ears.

“I just saw you walk from the bathroom to the bed.”

Frustrated, she huffed, “William, we dropped this subject earlier.”

“No,” he refuted. “You dropped it and now I think it's safe to say that you can walk because last night I felt your leg move against mine, but I couldn't be sure.”

She still looked as if she didn't believe a word he was saying. "When?"

"Just last night," he said.

"William, if you're trying to amuse me--"

He cut her off, "I'm not, woman. I know what I felt."

"You just said you weren't sure."

He felt like he was on a witness stand. Angrily, he got out the bed. "I know for sure what I saw and that was you, using the bathroom, then walking to the bed like you've done it all your life."

"William, stop it." She covered her ears, wanting to block out his cruelty.

He yanked her hands away. "How could you be so stubborn? Why do you think I would hurt you like this?"

"To get back at my father. Just get out, William!" She tried to yank her hands away from his tight grip, but her efforts were futile.

"Dammit, woman, listen to me!" he demanded.

"I don't want to listen to you."

"Then don't listen to me." His voice became soft, almost pleading. "Listen to the bathroom. You can still hear the toilet refilling itself." He released her wrist.

Abigail glared hard at him. "The joke is over, William." She rubbed her wrist. "If flushing a toilet is suppose, to make a believer out of me, you've got another thing coming."

He became angry again. "If you aren't the most obstinate, hard-headed woman I've ever met--"

"Leave, William. Just go!" she ordered.

"Or what?" he sneered, jumping out of the bed.

"Or I'll scream that's what," Abigail threatened.

He clinched his fist so angry, he wanted to throttle her, but Abigail didn't cower. She wasn't afraid of him, she had never really been. "I know what I saw."

"Get out!" she exclaimed.

William shoved his clothes on.

"And don't ever come back!" she ordered, throwing a pillow at him.

He growled assuredly, "I'll come back when I feel like it."

"I won't sleep with you."

"I never asked for your permission in the first place."

"That's because I gave it from the start," she taunted.

He grabbed her shoulders. "I'll have you whenever and however I choose to."

She clawed at his face and chest, screaming for him to let her go.

He released her and grabbed his clothes. They both heard the footsteps scuffling upstairs. With his back to her, he never saw the stricken look on her face. When he faced her, his eyes were hard and cold, but she had shielded the pain in her eyes so he couldn't see it.

Almost calm, knowing her parents would be knocking on the door any second, she said, her voice quivering on the brink of a sob, "I guess you got your revenge William."

"Sweet--"

"Don't call me that!" she hissed, cutting him off.

"Abigail--"

She wanted to rip her heart out of her body. It was the first time he had ever called her by her name. Why couldn't the moment have been nicer? "Get out! Get out, now!" she screamed, not caring she could hear her parents' footsteps rushing down the stairs.

"Dammit Abigail, you know none of this was planned." He kept his voice down.

Marilyn had begun to beat at the door ordering Abigail to wake up and unlock the door. "Ramsey, hurry and get this door open! We're coming, baby!" Marilyn screamed on the other side. They assumed she was having one of her dreams. "Dammit, Ram, break it down." There was even more pounding on the door.

She covered her ears, as if to block William out. Both of them were ignoring the chaos happening outside of the room.

"You're being childish," he said, just as a loud boom hit the door. Her father was trying to knock the door down.

She pretended not to hear him.

He headed for the balcony, just as a second loud boom was heard against her bedroom door.

"And don't come back," she ordered, putting her hands down.

"Fine!" he jeered.

"Good!" she countered.

"Bitch!" he sneered.

“Bastard!” she hurled right back

He slammed the balcony doors so hard that one of the panes shattered. Before he even cleared the fence, Abigail buried her face in the pillow and howled. Her bedroom door slammed open, as her father burst in almost collapsing to the floor. Marilyn darted past him to the bed to comfort Abigail, who had not bothered to look to see who came into her room.

“Abigail, what the hell happened?” her father asked, staring at the broken balcony doors.

“I was throwing things,” she cried. “Go back to bed, Daddy.”

Panting, he looked at Abigail who allowed her mother's arms to comfort her.

Rebecca stood at the doorway and Abigail was very aware of the look of disbelief that her father and his mother exchanged, but Abigail wasn't going to try to explain anything. It was too painful to speak about. Ramsey stormed out of the room and back upstairs. Rebecca waited a few minutes, and then also went upstairs.

Abigail pulled away from her mother. “I'm fine, Mother. Please go to bed.”

“Abigail, you just shattered a valuable piece of glass and you think it's alright?” her mother said.

“I'm sorry. I'll do whatever I can to have it fixed.” She rested her head on her pillow and looked at her clock, which read four-fifteen in the morning. She closed her eyes, but it was a long time before she got back to sleep.

Chapter 26

David looked down at the report again. Taking a deep breath, he re-read the investigators report, which had just been completed at eleven this morning. It was nearing one p.m. and David had yet to get a wink of sleep; since his trip home from Toledo last night at one in the morning. So many things were running through his head. He couldn't think straight and he wanted to immediately get over to the McPherson's house to speak to Abigail; but as soon as he came into town, his pager was blowing off his hip and he had five voice mails.

“Another body” was the only message his two-way pager read and he needed no other explanation. The last voice mail was Ramsey, calling from home. The police took William into custody seven this morning and “the murderer” wasn't talking. He was giving no alibi for his whereabouts last night, but Hal knew he wasn't at home between the hours of six yesterday afternoon until five this morning, because he'd staked out the hallway in front of William's loft with a security camera.

Rubbing his eyes, David began to read the report again for the third time, hoping this time he wouldn't get distracted.

Gregory Connor, a thirty-six-year-old father of two, married to Alice Henderson Connor (whose father was mayor of Davenport, Arnold Henderson) had decided to venture on the low side of Davenport with a few of his buddies for a Wednesday night get together. The bar they chose was right across the street from Lowry Park. While his buddies were having a good time, he followed a waitress outside and decided to walk her home. She told him that she didn't want him to and cut through the park, thinking he wouldn't follow her. At first he didn't, but after a few moments, he changed his mind. By then her brisk walk had carried her about twenty feet ahead of him.

Her police statement read as such, "I heard him call my name," Doris Mitchell stated. "And I checked my watch, thinking this jerk was going to hold me up from seeing Star Trek. It was twelve thirty, by my watch. He called me again, but when I looked up from my watch, he was gone. I got scared, thinking that any second, he was going to jump out of the trees and rape me, so I ran all the way home."

His body was found at five the next morning, the same time William was clocked walking into the door of his own apartment.

In the autopsy report, which was done immediately, Connor's stomach was carved from his body and every rib was crushed. He was missing several nails, to indicate that he had clawed at something or someone, and there were marks around his mouth, to show that he had been tightly gagged, which investigators assumed: Connor was still alive when he stomach was being severed from his body.

William's pubic hair and fingerprints were found at the scene of the crime and a fresh trail of his footprints were found going through the park.

David took out a fresh legal pad and started writing down what he needed to investigate:

Public Hair

Fingerprints

Footprints

Alibi

He double underlined the latter and closed the file. There was a lot to do and little time to do it. Not just with William. Ramsey had gotten the trial date moved up. It would happen in two days. David checked his watch and wondered where should he go first. The McPherson's or go find something to eat? He decided on the latter, because he hadn't eaten since yesterday, before the Toledo run.

* * *

Marilyn leaned her head near Abigail's door. The whimpering started again. She knew her daughter was still lying in bed and refused to get out for anything, except to use the bathroom. Abigail didn't want to

eat and she didn't want to talk to anyone. She'd asked for everyone to leave her alone. Marilyn and Ramsey had respected this, but Rebecca was dying to know what was going on.

Just that morning, Marilyn and Rebecca had argued in the kitchen. Rebecca had stated that it was crazy to give the girl so much privacy and that none of this would be so if her parents didn't allow Abigail so much "space." Yet, the strange behavior could have been caused from yesterday's date.

Marilyn had felt she and Ramsey had done Abigail justice by indulging her in the only thing their daughter valued after the accident and that was to be left alone. They allowed her to have her moments of quietness in her room all by herself. That was all she would ask for and her parents had done their best to make sure that no one bothered her.

Yet now Marilyn didn't know for sure that if allowing her daughter to enclose herself in the room had been the right decision for Abigail's mental health.

Moving away from the door, Marilyn looked at the clock: Four in the afternoon. Rebecca would be home from her doctor's appointment and Marilyn knew the woman would approach her again about Abigail's strange behavior.

The girl hadn't even allowed anyone to come in to pick up the glass shards off the floor. She'd screamed at Rebecca to leave, when her grandmother had made an attempt to straighten up.

Before Rebecca left, Marilyn had told the woman that Abigail had told her earlier this week that she was going to call it quits with the young man and was probably suffering heartbreak or something from her first love. It was a usual stage and if they gave Abigail enough room, she would get over it. If not, Marilyn would be prepared to help her daughter.

* * *

Abigail sat up in bed. It must have been in the afternoon by now and she had finally gotten to the point that if she didn't answer nature's call; she'd be swimming in bed later. Getting in her chair, all by herself, she took care of herself, even combing her hair back into a ponytail and changing into a long, black skirt and pastel shirt. Rolling back into her room from the bathroom, she stopped in the middle of the floor and pulled up the foot braces on her chair, lowering her bare feet on the floor, after tightly putting the brake on the chair. Carefully, she pushed herself up, using her armrest and table for balance. After straining and concentrating, her left leg twitched, and then slowly started to lift two inches off the floor, before Abigail lost her balance at the last moment, and fell back in her chair. Yet, in those few seconds, when her leg had risen on her command it had been a joyous occasion, despite her somber mood.

Needing some kind of comfort, she moved over to her bed and reached under the mattress digging the knife from its hiding place. Carefully, she placed it under her thigh, as if it were some kind of omen to keep her stable. She felt horrible all over and didn't know how to go about feeling any better. They had

caused each other so much pain and all because he was right all along, but then she just didn't want to believe him.

This wasn't all that bothered her, though. At eight-thirty that morning, the phone in her room had rang. Only her parents called into her room, when they were out of the house, but she knew it couldn't be them; so it was strange to hear the phone ringing. Slowly picking up the receiver and bringing it to her ear, she didn't bother to say anything, but waited to hear who was on the other end of the line; knowing deep in her gut who the person was on the other end of the line.

“Don't say anything,” he said quietly.

Her heart quickened at the sound of his ominous voice, but she didn't speak.

“I know you're there and I know you know what I mean. By God, Abigail, I swear, every threat I've ever said to you, I'll do, if you open your fucking mouth. It's nobody's goddamn business where I was. I know I didn't do it and you know I didn't do it and that's all that needs to be known.” The line clicked hard and Abigail replaced the receiver, wondering if she should actually take him seriously.

Even though she did not know the details, she knew another body had been found earlier this morning, by the way her father shot out the door that time of day.

Not tell anyone? He would go to jail for the rest of his life. Did he want that? Why? Was he guilty of something else and felt doing this would make it all right on his conscious? William was a fool, but Abigail would be a bigger fool, if she kept her mouth closed.

Yet, he did sound very serious.

Checking the time, it was six at night and her father had come home too happy for words, just to sit down and get something to eat; but would be returning back to the office as soon as possible. Through her door, she heard her parents talking about her moodiness and Marilyn was insisting that Abigail not be bothered until Abigail felt like being bothered.

While Ramsey waited for dinner, he went to the study to make some phone calls. She listened, as she busied herself with solitaire.

Her parents and Rebecca were baffled at her moodiness. She refused any company or comforting and food. It seemed as if everything made her cry and there was nothing anyone could do about it. William had gotten his revenge and now, from listening to her father, William was going to be tried for the murder of Gregory Connor, a suspected child molester. Even though she knew where William was between the time Connor was last seen until the police discovered the body, she had to make a decision on whether she should confess to everyone about where William had been.

David arrived at six-thirty that night. Her father had left ten minutes ago, just before David's arrival. Abigail thought it strange, because David knew her father was going to pull an all nighter to get his prosecution team ready to take on trying William Stone for murder and David needed to be busy getting ready to defend his own client. It was also strange that Rebecca answered the door, eagerly let him in and they quietly adjourned to the living room; but she couldn't hear anything they were saying.

* * *

Turning to Rebecca, trying not to look so troubled, he picked his words carefully, hoping she would be helpful to him. "How much do you know about Lowell Crane, Mrs. McPherson?"

"How much should an old lady like me know?" Rebecca asked defensively.

He was perturbed at the old woman's evasiveness, but maybe she was just being cautious because of who could be listening. "Where's Marilyn?"

"Upstairs, asleep. She said she was exhausted from worrying all day about Abigail," she answered.

David repeated his question. "Again, I ask you, how much do you know about Crane?"

"I know enough to say that whatever your client did to him, he deserved it. I know enough to say that if your client hadn't done it, I would have paid someone to do it - damn the legal system," she said evasively.

"Then you know he was the father of Angela and Robby?"

Rebecca stiffened, after a long pregnant silence, she said, "Yes, I knew."

"Did you also know Angela knew too?" David asked.

Rebecca's brow arched in surprise. "How? How could she know? We were very careful about not letting the children know."

"Well, you didn't know that Crane came here three days before that day and confronted Marilyn about taking her and the children away, but she refused."

Rebecca sat down in the nearest chair, or more like collapsed, as the shock overcame her. The doors to the living room opened and Marilyn stood there looking accusingly at David. She slowly walked up to David and slapped him on the side of his face, with all her might. The diary fell from his hands to the floor, she picked it up and held it tight to her breast.

The wail of pain emitting from her lips was enough to draw Abigail out of her room to the doorway of the living room. Marilyn composed herself and sat on the couch. "Ab...come in here. You might as well be a part of this. If anything you should know, and maybe...maybe it will help."

David moved over to Marilyn and sat beside her, but didn't touch her. She was stiff and pale, still gripping the diary to her bosom, as if it were her life.

Abigail moved beside the couch, where her mother sat. There was complete silence as Marilyn stared off into nothing and began to recount the past.

Her breathing was shallow and she looked as if she were on the verge of a nervous breakdown. "He came. Lowell Crane showed up on the doorstep looking as if I should be glad he were there. I wasn't. Ramsey and I had healed from the pain we had caused each other and decided to go on. We decided to become a normal family." Tears streamed faster down her face. "I didn't know Angela had a half a day and was in the house. I would have told him to leave, but I thought if I heard him out and told him nicely that there was nothing for us, he would go...he didn't. He became so angry with me. He called me horrible names and he threatened me. He said if he couldn't have me, Ramsey couldn't either. I thought Lowell understood that I was married and that I was only recovering from losing Ramsey to his work when I started this affair. This was only supposed to be a short fling, but it ended up lasting years. When I became pregnant with Angela, I refused to tell Ramsey about the affair, or even to end it even after Angela was born; but, then I became pregnant again, with Robby by Lowell. By that time, he was crazy in love with me, but I was only using him to get over Ramsey, which I never did. I never will. Ramsey has and will always be the love of my life." She cried in her hands on the brink of hysteria, but continued. "Ramsey forgave me. We swore to never forsake each other again and we kept that promise. We continued to lose babies though, until you Abby. You lived and I knew it was a sign that everything was going to be fine. Lowell disappeared out of my life, but he showed up, just like David said three days before the accident." Again she paused for a long time. "Yet...if I had to do it all over again, I would have made the same decisions, but I would have taken his threat more serious and made everyone stay in the house, until we were sure he was gone out of town." She stood up and knelt at Abigail's feet. "I should have told you all this sooner, but Ramsey and I thought you would hate us. You would blame us for what has happened to you. Oh baby, you know you mean everything to us and we love you more than life itself, don't you?"

Abigail took her mother's hand in her own. "Yes, Mother, I know this, but I've healed from all of that. I blame no one and I forgive everyone."

Marilyn threw her arms around her daughter. "Thank you, Abby. You don't know how much hearing those words make me feel. I've felt guiltier than ever and I blame myself; Only myself, not your father or even Lowell. I was wrong. I was wrong in not listening to my heart and using Lowell. I should never have used him."

Abigail's mind swirled at the emotions soaring through her chest. All these years her mother had felt so much guilt at seeing her daughter in this condition. Should she now tell Marilyn about her spasms? More importantly, should she tell them about William?

Her eyes rose up to meet David's, who looked on, with something else to say.

"I didn't come over here to confront you, Marilyn. I'm just digging for the truth," David said.

Marilyn stood up, after setting the diary on the couch, where she had been sitting and looked at David. "The truth about what?"

"The truth about Abigail and William," David said, looking straight at Abigail, who sat emotionless in the chair, not breaking eye contact with David.

It was Abigail's turn to stiffen.

Rebecca quickly came to her granddaughter's defense. "There isn't anything to say about that killer and my granddaughter."

David's eyes narrowed at Abigail as he stood up. He was waiting to hear it from her lips.

Marilyn wiped the tears from her face. "Why would you think there was something between my daughter and that killer?" her mother asked quietly.

David picked up the diary off the couch and opened it to a page he had previously marked. His voice was ominous as he read the excerpt.

"We were teasing Abigail really bad. When she kicked Robby, he threw her ball across the street. I saw him first. I saw him standing there, staring at her like she was a piece of meat and I was scared for Abigail. He picked up Abby's ball and held it like he didn't want to let it go. I went over to him to get her ball back. I'd seen him at school, not talking to no one and looking at the world through those horrible eyes, that could make you stop breathing, just because. I was so scared, but he didn't pay me any attention. Abigail ran over there yelling at him to give her back the ball. I admired her stupidity, but she didn't know the danger she was in. This was the son of a serial killer. I remember Daddy working on the case real hard, when I was little. I knew if Daddy found out that Abigail had anything to do with this boy, I would be the one in trouble, but I was too terrified to move and Abigail moved to him like a magnet moves to steel. They spoke quietly and even Robby didn't make a move to hear what they were saying. He pulled her so close, I thought those big hands of his would crush her small bones, but he didn't. He whispered in her ear a secret. Before dinner, Abigail told me she would never tell, because then it wouldn't be a secret anymore. I hate when she acts like a smarty-pants. I hate when she acts like she's the special one. She doesn't know she is special, but I'm going to make sure she pays for it for the rest of her life. I know the truth and when Robby's old enough, he'll understand the truth. I don't care if that big, old bully thinks he can protect Abigail from me. God thinks he has other designs for Abigail. He's trying to use that boy to protect her from me, but it won't work, because I'm there, when she's all alone, covering in her room at the dark and he can't do anything about it. I'm going to get my revenge against my parents' lies and deceit, by hurting the only thing they really care about. I'm going to hurt Abigail."

When David was done, there was a long moment of silence in the room. Abigail broke the moment by saying, "She didn't mean that. She didn't mean those words. She saved me. Robby saved me. I

remember them saving me.” Her head started to hurt. “He...couldn't.” Her look was far away. “For the first time in his life, he was scared and by the time it was over...it was too late.” Abigail covered her mouth. “Oh, my god! I didn't know. I didn't know there was more to his revenge than just my father. He wanted to hurt me because...” A sob escaped. “Because he hates me for forgetting.”

“Who?” Marilyn asked her daughter, sitting beside her.

Abigail continued to look at David.

“William,” David said quietly. “He was the big bully, wasn't he Abigail?”

She nodded slowly. Her mind was swirling from the memories now pouring in her head. “He was there - that day, but it all happened so fast that even if he could have come, it would have still been too late. The car was going too fast, but that wasn't what made h-him...hate me so much.” The words were difficult to form with her lips, as she began to remember more and more about the last days Angela and Robby were alive.

“What was the secret Abigail?” David asked moving closer to her.

Abigail closed her eyes, frowning hard. “I-I don't know.” She struggled to remember, but her mind wouldn't open the door to allow her to remember.

Rebecca gasped. “What did you mean by his revenge against your father? That's why you're miserable, aren't you? He hurt you, didn't he?”

Abigail's eyes were still puffy from all the crying she had been doing all day. She bowed her head guilty.

“I told you Marilyn. It's not over that guy who picked her up last night. It has nothing to do with him,” Rebecca said.

David sat across from Abigail in arms reach. “Tell me, princess. Tell me what did he do. I swear it's going to be okay, but if this has anything to do with what is going on now, then as his lawyer, I need to know.”

Marilyn protested. “David, stop it! Abigail wouldn't keep anything like that from us. She knows how much-”

“Mother,” Abigail said weakly. “Please.”

“What Abby? What is making you so miserable? It's that boy, right? Tell them it's that boy.” Marilyn almost sounded desperate and Abigail knew why. “I'll do anything to make you feel better, baby.”

Abigail drew away from her mother's touch, too sickened by what she had done to even deserve her mother's comfort. She knew what she must do. It was the only way to make sure William Stone never came

into her life again and to stop him from going to jail for whatever reason he thought he needed to go.

“David,” she asked. “Stone might go to jail, won't he?”

David nodded. “Whenever I ask him where he was that night, he won't say a word.”

“And?”

“And that's it. He has no alibi. The evidence is so stacked against him that I don't think I can throw it out. It looks like William was there at the crime scene that night.”

She looked down at her lap and wiped her face with the back of her hand. “What if I can prove him innocent?”

“Abigail-” her mother started.

“Answer me, David!” she demanded.

“How?” David asked desperately.

“Just answer me. What if he does have an alibi? A very substantial alibi that could hold up in any court. What if I can prove that the evidence the prosecution has is all part of framing William?” she asked.

He answered, “He would be released. He wouldn't be tried for murder for any of the crimes.”

“And...” her voice trailed off because she was hesitant to admit. “And his revenge would be known.”

“What revenge?” Rebecca said.

Abigail ignored her grandmother's question. “I want to testify, David. I want you to let me testify.”

“No!” Marilyn stated. “You won't lie for that monster.”

“Mother, just shut up and listen. I'm sorry for everything, but I knew he was innocent and we shared...we shared something that I couldn't explain. I still can't.”

“Why would you testify, Abigail?” David asked.

“Because I can prove him innocent. He wasn't at his apartment all night-”

“We know this,” he interrupted.

“Let me finish, David.” Taking the knife from under her thigh, which she had placed there earlier for comfort, she raised it up in the air. David's eyes went wide as saucers as he recognized the knife.

Abigail took a deep breath and admitted, “He wasn't at his apartment all night because he was with me.”

The room went deathly quiet.

Chapter 27

Marilyn watched as her husband awoke the next day. He was so happy. No one had seen him happy like this in a long time. He sung in the shower, whistled while he shaved, and practically danced around the room as he dressed.

Yet he could sense something was strange about his household of women. He probably expected to awaken to a wife very happy for him and a family ready to give him full support for what would be the biggest trial of his life. One he was going to remember for the rest of his life.

Yet, the women in the house were oddly quiet and somber. Abigail still refused to come out of her room and even had her door locked. Marilyn snapped at him to leave the girl alone and even Rebecca came to his wife's defense about having Abigail left alone.

Marilyn accompanied him to court, but Rebecca said she would stay there with Abigail for support. He probably figured his daughter was probably distraught over that boy, but Marilyn knew Ramsey would also think depression was no reason to ruin her father's greatest day.

As they drove to the court house, he said to his wife, "When I finish with today's session, I'll go straight home and find out what's really bothering Abigail."

"Please Ramsey. Leave her alone," Marilyn persisted.

When they brought William into the courtroom, Marilyn was seated behind Ramsey. There wasn't media in the courtroom, but David had conceded to having people in courtroom, yet under close security. The crowd hissed at his arrival. The widow Connor sat behind him, on the other side of Marilyn, with her sons at her side; who sat as quietly as she was.

Ramsey leaned back to his wife and whispered, "Is that pity in her eyes, Marilyn?"

Marilyn didn't answer. Her eyes were stuck on William and she wondered what the young man's was thinking. On the outside, she saw a cold, ruthless man who could be a killer. With his size and his build, he looked as if he could have hurt Abigail with just a touch. The man did not look like the man her daughter had described last night and Marilyn was confused, yet she bit her tongue. Abigail had made her swear for silence.

David entered the courtroom and didn't speak to anyone, except his team of lawyers. Marilyn watched him intently, but he never made eye contact with her.

Leaning to her husband, she asked, "How does it look for the home team?"

Since they were waiting for the judge to arrive, Ramsey didn't mind sharing what he had with his wife. Marilyn looked down at the list of witnesses that the defense team supplied. There were only five names with a possible sixth, but the defense had submitted an "if" possibility statement. Meaning that if those five determine something, then the sixth witness would be needed in order to coordinate the testimony of the other witnesses. Yet, there was no name supplied for the sixth witness

"This is strange for David's defense. He usually lays all the cards out on the table and don't bullshit," Ramsey muttered. On the present list was a state shrink, Camp, Lydia Stone, and Camp's nephew, Andrew, who David was supposed to bring at the other trial, but had called Camp instead, according to her husband's explanation. Ramsey knew these people would only testify about William's character.

The fifth name on the list was a man named Carlton Fullerton, who sounded very familiar to her husband, but Ramsey couldn't pinpoint the name, until two minutes before the judge entered and she knew he was baffled as to why David had subpoenaed him to this trial.

David allowed Ramsey to go first and Marilyn could tell her that seriously shocked husband. Usually David argued defense side first, but Ramsey probably figured he didn't have a good defense and would just try to shoot down anything the prosecution presented. As Ramsey laid out all the evidence and the witnesses, David made little objection to anything that Ramsey presented to the jury.

By lunch, the prosecution team had all their witnesses up and had their side done. All fingers pointed to William Stone, who sat through the whole thing as if he weren't there. He was so withdrawn, the guards had to nudge him a couple of times to get his attention, when they were standing as the judge and jury made their exit for lunch.

The cold look he shot both the guards made them step away defensively, but nonetheless he led them out of the room to the cell where he would eat and stay until lunch was over with.

David stayed seated, busy writing on his legal pad, while Ramsey took his wife out of the courtroom to lunch. "Should we call to see if Abigail's alright?" he asked Marilyn.

"No." She answered rather quickly - too quickly. "She probably needs this time alone, Ram."

"To cry?" he sneered, still perturbed by his daughter's depressing mood. "The girl doesn't go to therapy. She's lost her appetite and she acts as if the end of the world is coming, and you say she needs to be alone. I think we should-"

"No one asked your opinion, Ramsey," Rebecca said behind them.

"What are you doing here?" he asked surprised to see her. He looked around her for something. "Where's Abigail?"

“At home. Marilyn's right. You need to leave Abigail alone. I did. She said she would be fine.” She went past Ramsey and took Marilyn's hand. Tenderly, she asked, “How are you doing, dear?”

Marilyn smiled, with comfort and decided to change the subject. “You did an excellent job, Ram, but David didn't look the least bit worried.”

She knew talking about the case distracted him from lingering on the thought that his mother and wife looked like long lost friends standing there holding hands.

Ramsey addressed his wife's statement. “I figured he had on his poker face. The old boy is probably so nervous that he doesn't know what to do.”

“So you think you have this one in the bag?” Rebecca asked.

“Definitely,” he answered rather cocky. “The only thing I'm really wondering about is why does David have Carlton Fullerton coming up?”

“Wasn't he a knife expert in the New York case?” Marilyn remembered. “Short white guy, who looked like Mr. Peabody with a mustache and beer belly.”

Ramsey nodded. “He was the weapon's analysts for the Javier Chavez trial.”

“Why would he be needed for this one?” Marilyn asked. David hadn't discussed his defense strategy with her. He just asked her to assist him the best way possible. The only reason she had done anything to help David was for her daughter's happiness. Marilyn despised keeping secrets away from her husband, but her daughter had beseeched her mother, most of the night, to assist in anything David needed to do.

“My guess is that he is needed to check out the knife found near the body. It seems the knife we found has a little history and if anyone would know it, it would be Carlton. But I'm not worried,” Ramsey said, with great confidence, bordering on arrogance.

“You shouldn't count your chickens before they hatch, Ramsey.” Rebecca cautioned, but both women knew Ramsey would ignore this piece of advice. He was clearly set on bagging this thing today and putting William Stone behind bars for the rest of his life.

* * *

Defense brought up the psychiatrist, Dr. Sean Patterson, and David's assistant Louis Kidd questioned the doctor, while David took notes. Marilyn noticed the little smirk that came and went on David's face, when he came to the end of the page. Ramsey was looking at David as well, and she knew that her husband noticed that quite often, David also peered back at the door to the courtroom, as if God would walk in any moment. Kidd also questioned Camp and Lydia.

In the middle of Lydia's questioning, the court doors opened and Ella Foster entered. David's eyes went big as saucers and the smirk turned into a wide grin, as she whispered in his ear.

Ramsey would have paid anything to know what she said, just like Marilyn, but just as Ella slipped in quietly, she slipped right back out. Ramsey looked at David, who whispered something in William's ear, but William didn't even blink. Ramsey then looked at his wife, who only shrugged innocently.

Marilyn knew her husband wanted to know, *'What the hell was going on?'*

* * *

David leaned over and sneered, "I just might save your ass, but don't think it was from your damn help."

William didn't even twitch, but David didn't care. He knew why William was like this. The guy was either love sick or just annoyed that Abigail had found a way to crawl into his heart. Nevertheless, David was positive Abigail had meant something to William and it was a sorry shame that she had Ramsey McPherson as a father.

When Lydia Stone was done - William didn't want her to testify - David called Andrew to the stand.

The courtroom doors opened and the young man stepped down the aisle.

"What the fuck?!" Ramsey sneered. "His name is Jonathan Smith your honor."

Andrew sat nervously down in the chair and was sworn in, while Ramsey and David had to approach the bench.

"Your honor, this is Andrew Nelson, who will testify he was with my client earlier in the day at his grandmother's farm house on the outskirts of town. They were there most of the day, and then my client went home to change clothes. I need to let the court know that my client has an alibi for his whereabouts earlier in the evening, all the way until they found the body," David explained.

"That boy's name is Jonathan Smith. He came to take my daughter out Wednesday night, David," Ramsey protested.

"That boy is Andrew Nelson, Camp's nephew," David said adamantly.

"I don't care if his name is Bend Dover," the lead judge, Henry Kaiser, snapped. "Are you going to cause a bitch, McPherson, over the name of this witness?"

David knew Ramsey felt like an ass. He looked back at his wife and Rebecca, who looked truly shocked, as he felt. "No, your honor."

Andrew was an excellent witness. David made him feel comfortable and Andrew didn't hesitate in any of his answers.

Ramsey decided to question the witness, instead of his legal team. "Mr. Nelson, on the night in question, where were you?"

“Objection, your honor,” David said. “The whereabouts of this witness that night has nothing to do with the case. We are only establishing the defendant's characteristics and his whereabouts before six o'clock.”

“But your honor-” Ramsey started to protest.

“Over ruled,” Judge Kaiser said, giving Ramsey a “don't-waste-my-time” glare.

“Your honor,” Ramsey protested. “This boy was at my home.”

“This witness is not on trial,” the judge refuted.

“He's a lying shit,” Ramsey shot out, losing his temper.

“Objection!” David countered.

“Fuck you, David!” Ramsey sneered and stormed to his chair. “No further questions for this witness, your honor.”

David almost smiled at the spectacle Ramsey had made. The next witness was called: Carlton Fullerton.

Ramsey shot to his feet to disagree just as David had expected. “I don't feel that this witness has any bearing on this case.”

“Permission to approach the bench your honor,” David requested.

Kaiser looked reluctant, but gave his permission.

Ramsey spoke first, as soon as the lawyers were at the bench. “I don't feel Mr. Fullerton even knows Mr. Stone, so he can't possibly be a character witness.”

“Your honor,” David said quite calmly. “With Mr. Fullerton's testimony, I intend to prove to the court that the knife found by the body does not belong to Mr. Stone.”

“I find that hard to believe David,” Ramsey snorted. “His name is on it and also his fingerprints.”

“But it isn't his knife. It's a fake and if you would let me proceed, your honor, I'm assured I can prove it to Mr. McPherson, given the chance.”

“I over rule you, McPherson,” Judge Kaiser said banging his gavel.

Ramsey cursed under his breath and stormed back to his seat, as Fullerton was sworn in.

David looked at William, who showed a little curiosity. He didn't know who Fullerton was and since he had never asked David what the lawyer was planning, William had no idea what David had up his sleeve.

After getting Fullerton's credentials and expertise on record, David started asking the serious questions. "Mr. Fullerton, you handled the weapon's investigation for Javier Chavez, the defendant's father, didn't you?"

"Yes, I did," the Mr. Peabody nasal sounding man said. "I was the weapon's analyst for the case."

"Exactly what does this job require of you?" David inquired.

"Mr. Chavez used several different weapons and devises to kill his victims. I was the one who found out which instrument was used and how."

David went over to the evidence table and picked up the knife. It was a twelve-inch, fold in blade with a lead handle, which had CHAVEZ in gold colored letters. "Are you familiar with this weapon, Mr. Fullerton?"

"I think. From this distance it looks like the knife that belonged to Yared Chavez, who was just as psychotic as his son, Javier. Yared received the knife from his grandmother. In turn, he gave it to his son, Javier, who passed it down to his son, William."

"Why was the knife so interesting to study?"

"Objection?" Ramsey shouted. "Leading the witness, your honor."

"I'm sorry," David apologized, when his question was sustained and told to rephrase the question. "Mr. Fullerton, why wasn't the knife ever kept as police evidence?"

"Because it was never used as a weapon." He spoke as if it were obvious to everyone.

David decided to beat around the bush. "So this looks like the knife that was, shall we call an heirloom?"

"From the distance you're standing, Mr. Reichard, it looks like the heirloom."

David approached Fullerton. "I would like you to inspect the knife, Mr. Fullerton and describe it out loud to the court."

Fullerton put his special inspection glasses on and began to describe the knife out loud. "It's a twelve inch, fold out blade with a red, heavy plastic handle, with gold colored letters on the handle, that has C-H-A-V-E-Z printed on it." He opened the blade and winced, then frowned with a huff of confusion. "The blade is sharp and it has a pointed edge." He looked very disturbed.

David suppressed the grin and played dumb. "Is something wrong, Mr. Fullerton?"

"I'm afraid this isn't the knife Mr. Chavez was given. This isn't the heirloom," Fullerton stated.

The courtroom talk grew loud and Judge Kaiser hit his gavel against his altar demanding silence. David glanced at William, whose eyes were narrowed in suspicion. He had no idea they had found a knife near the crime scene and David could see a snarl coming to his lips.

When the crowd was quiet, David returned to question Fullerton. "How do you know? How can you be so sure?"

"I told you a few minutes ago, Mr. Reichard. The knife I'm holding is a weapon, but the knife Mr. Chavez...I mean Mr. Stone was given from his father, is not a weapon. The blade inside the knife is made of real steel while the one inside the heirloom is made of a hard, ceramic-like material that's very strong and looks like steel. It was made from a very old Spanish culture that is highly prized. The heirloom blade is so dull it could barely cut butter."

"Is there anything else that proves this knife is not Mr. Stone's heirloom?"

"Well, the handle. This handle is made of a type of heavy-duty plastic, but the original is made of real ivory, dyed red, which is rare and very expensive, so anyone trying to copy the knife would assume it's plastic. Also, the font on this knife is not like the original. The man who made the heirloom knife had arthritis in his hand and when he got to the Z in Chavez, it began to act up and the middle line in the letter Z has a slight lump to it. This one has no lump. On top of that, the handle had a slight nick on the edge at the bottom and the blade of the original had a flat end, not a pointy end."

The judge had to threaten to clear the courtroom before the crowd went quiet again.

"Can all of this that you've said be proved in some legal document, Mr. Fullerton?" David said.

"Of course. When I first studied the knife, I was a defense aid for Yared Chavez's case. I wrote a report on the knife and when I was the weapon's analyst, I did another study on the knife. My recent report was when Mr. Stone was brought in and the police searched his office for clues. I did a report on the knife, since it was in his office on his desk."

"Where anyone could possibly see it?" David feigned surprise.

Carlton nodded. "Right next to his mounted college ring, almost like a trophy, I would say, but that's only my opinion."

David went to his desk and pulled out three reports. "Are these the reports, Mr. Fullerton?"

Carlton looked through them thoroughly. "Yes, these are the reports."

David gave the copies to the bailiff and the prosecution. "A few more questions, Mr. Fullerton. Have you tried to study the original knife recently?"

"Yes. About three and a half weeks ago, I went to Mr. Stone's office to see if there were any new marks I may have missed or may have been added of late, just to get a record of it," Mr. Fullerton proudly

said. "Recently, I received a European grant to do a history of this knife to trace its origins, but Mr. Stone wasn't there. His employee checked my credentials and let me into the office."

"And did you examine the knife?"

Carlton looked very disappointed. "The knife wasn't there. I called there again the following week and Mr. Stone said the knife was misplaced and he was too busy to look for it."

"So you gave up on this examination?"

"Yes. It didn't seem as if I would ever get a chance to examine the knife."

David put the knife on the table and went to his desk. Opening his briefcase, he pulled out a paper bag. "Mr. Fullerton I would like you to read your last description of the knife to the court."

Marilyn could see her husband wanted to object, but he didn't. He was very interested in that paper bag. He had an idea as to what might be in it, but he wanted to be sure.

Fullerton read the description the court secretary quickly printed out for him just as he had previously described.

"Now are you positive that knife the police found near Mr. Connor's body that the prosecution prove was used to carve out the victim's stomach is not the knife that is an heirloom to the Chavez family?"

"I'm positive that knife on that evidence table is not the knife," Fullerton confirmed.

David opened the bag and pulled out a knife identical to the knife on the table. "Does this look like the knife?"

Fullerton's response could not be heard due to the crowd noise.

"Dammit, one more peep out of anyone and I'll clear this room faster than anyone can blink!" Kaiser threatened.

William shot to his feet as if a lightening bolt had struck him in the butt. He tried to snatch at the knife. "How did you get it?!" he demanded to know.

The guards held him back.

"Sit down, William," David ordered.

"Not until you tell me!" William was on the brink of becoming enraged beyond control and two more guards had to come hold him.

David hissed so only William could hear, "She gave it to me."

William ceased his fighting and for the first time, David saw fear in William's eyes. Ramsey was intently watching and had seen exactly what David had seen in William's eyes. William slumped in his chair, as if in defeat.

Ramsey and David's eyes met and David could read his mind. *'What was William afraid of?'* David knew they would all find out soon enough.

"It looks like the knife from this distance. May I inspect it?" Fullerton asked eagerly.

David gave him the knife. "Is it the heirloom knife?"

"Yes. Definitely. There's no doubt about it," he confirmed.

David let the judge, jury, and Ramsey inspect the knife, and then he passed it to the bailiff to enter it as evidence for the defense.

William began to look rather pale.

Ramsey didn't know who to watch, William or David.

David turned the witness over to the prosecution. Ramsey's only line of questioning dealt with making a copy of the knife and could the weapon have been a copy of the heirloom knife. Fullerton answered, "Yes, but Javier found other knives to do his dirty work, and if the son was actually following in his footsteps, Mr. Stone would not possibly go out and waste money to copy the knife, when other, cheaper methods could be used." He paused, then added, "Although Grime Knives Manufacturing located in Toledo is close by and they are the number one knife and sword replica company in the United States."

David came back up to do a second line of questions for Mr. Fullerton from the Prosecution's line of questions. "Do you really feel the weapon is an exact copy of the original, Mr. Fullerton?"

"No. It seems as if, whoever got the knife copied, did a quick look at the heirloom and described the knife to the person who made the knife. In my opinion, if Mr. Stone wanted a copy, I would definitely think he'd want an exact copy, except with a sharp blade, but still with a flat top and not a pointed one."

David dismissed the witness. Louis Kidd recalled the shrink, who had analyzed Mr. Stone from the first time he had been incarcerated; except this time, Kidd addressed about the knife and if Mr. Stone would have made a copy and why. Of course, the good doctor told the court that wouldn't be in Stone's behavior to waste time in doing something of this nature.

William looked at David. "What the hell's going on, Reichard?" he demanded.

"I'm saving your ass," David answered simply and calmly, yet the look in his eyes was clearly menacing.

"Why did she give you the knife?"

David's eyes pierced William's in anger. "You tell me, Stone. You should know."

William did know. If Abigail gave up the knife, then she must have given up on them, so it was truly over.

"Are there any more witnesses, Mr. Reichard?" Kaiser asked tiredly.

"One more, your honor. I did have room for one more before I brought Mr. Stone to the stand."

"Then bring the witness, on if the prosecution doesn't object."

Ramsey looked at David. David was striking points and he knew Ramsey's gut feeling told him to disagree, but curiosity was eating him alive and he gave his consent to the court.

That smile came to play on David's lips as he faced the judge. "Your honor, I'd like to call, Abigail McPherson to the stand."

* * *

Abigail heard her name being called and the bailiff opened the door. Ella was sitting in the side waiting room with her for company, and her doctor gave her an assuring hug. "Here we go kid," Ella said, giving her a little push to help her out.

William and Ramsey jumped to their feet as Abigail appeared at the doorway next to the jury box. She had her hair in a bun and even applied a little make-up (to hide her puffy eyes.) She wore a very nice Donna Karen, blue business suit to look very professional.

"What the hell is going on?!" Ramsey bellowed, above the courtroom noise.

"Silence!" Kaiser ordered.

"I demand to know-"

"Mr. McPherson last time I checked, this was my court," Kaiser sneered.

Reluctantly, Ramsey apologized. "I'm sorry, your honor."

Abigail kept her head down. If she stared at the floor she could handle it. *'Just don't look at him, not yet anyway.'*

"Now, Mr. Reichard, I demand to know what the hell is going on?" Kaiser demanded.

"Ms. McPherson was brought here to testify, your honor. If you would just let me proceed, you will understand," David said.

"Objection! My daughter has no bearing on this case!" Ramsey disputed.

"Over ruled, McPherson. Mr. Reichard, you may proceed," the judge said.

"No!" came a strong, baritone voice.

Abigail closed her eyes. *'He can't do this. Not here. Not now!'*

“Did you say something, Mr. Stone?” Kaiser questioned, as shocked as everyone else to hear the young man speak.

“Dammit, no!” he sneered, fighting his way around the desk before the four guards could hold him back, but it was clear that he was speaking to Abigail. “You shut your mouth, you little brat, or I'll rip your fucking tongue out.”

Abigail slowly looked at him. Everyone was sure they would see fear, but was amazed to see anger. “Your threats are as empty as your head, William. You have no control over what I do. You never have and you never will.”

“Dammit, don't do this!” He was almost pleading.

Abigail ordered the bailiff to swear her in, while the guards wrestled Stone back to his seat, which they had to handcuff him to.

After being sworn in, the bailiff lifted her from the chair and placed her on the witness stand. When she was comfortable, David spoke.

“Can you tell us about yourself, Ms. McPherson?”

“Objection!” Ramsey said.

“To what?” the judge questioned.

“That's nobody's business,” Ramsey said obviously.

“Over ruled.”

Her voice was strong and carried quite audibly over the courtroom. “My name is Abigail Yvonne McPherson. I'm twenty years of age and I just finished my bachelor's in architectural studies at the University of Ohio with a 3.9 G.P.A.”

“That's good,” David complimented.

She blushed, knowing David was just trying to get her to relax. She kept her eyes fully on David, but she was very aware of 'his' eyes on her. “I have lived in Davenport all of my life, with my parents, Marilyn and Ramsey McPherson. I had a sister and brother, but they were killed in an accident when I was young. This same accident also paralyzed me from the waist down.”

“Objection!” Ramsey said. “She's trying to get the pity of the court.”

“Over ruled!” the judge exclaimed.

Ramsey cursed under his breath.

“You are a very beautiful, smart girl, Abigail,” David said.

“Thank you, Mr. Reichard,” she said blushing again.

He went over to the evidence table and picked up the heirloom knife. “Have you ever seen this before?”

She looked at her father, but ignored his baffled expression and answered the question. “Yes.”

“Who does it belong too?” David inquired

“Mr. Stone.”

“Is this Mr. Stone you speak of in this courtroom today?” he asked.

“Yes,” she answered bravely.

“Could you point to him?” He moved aside and waited.

Abigail met William's golden, hot glare. He looked ready to pounce on her and rip her to shreds. She bit her tongue remembering his threat, but she pointed to him, as she answered, “That's him.”

“Let the record show, Ms. McPherson pointed out the defendant, William Stone, as being the Mr. Stone in question,” David said then continued. “When did you see the knife first, Ms. McPherson?”

“About three and a half weeks ago, in Mr. Stone's possession.”

“Where was this?”

She hesitated, “In my room.”

“Your what?” Ramsey bellowed, again above the crowd.

The judge silenced everyone.

“Repeat the answer, Ms. McPherson, but go into detail, please,” David insisted, after handing her the knife.

“Mr. Stone came to me, about three and a half weeks ago to my room at my parents' house, to get revenge against my father. At first, I was scared of him, but he never harmed a hair on my head,” Abigail said, smirking to herself at the double connotation.

William groaned loudly.

“The knife must have dropped from his jacket, but he didn't know it and neither did I, until the next day. I kept it and never told anyone, because I knew Mr. Stone wanted only to be left alone and if anyone knew that he had come to me, he would get in a lot more trouble.”

“So how long have you had the knife?”

“Until yesterday, when I relinquished it to Davenport Forensics.” She closed her hands around the knife and held it close to her chest.

William groaned again and briefly closed his eyes.

“Ms. McPherson, was there any other time you saw William Stone?” David asked.

Abigail looked down at the knife. “Yes.”

“When?”

“Often.” She waited until the crowd hushed. Ramsey was gripping the side of his chair, one could almost hear the wood splintering as she continued, only looking at David or her lap, where the knife lay.

“He came around at night to keep me...company. We would talk and play board games. He was a friend to me when I had none outside my own family...and you David...I mean Mr. Reichard, but you're a good friend to our family.”

“Not anymore,” Ramsey grumbled.

She ignored her father and went on, “I became very close to Mr. Stone.”

David asked, “And you told no one?”

“Not a soul. He would have gotten in trouble and I'm sure Mr. Stone never intended to come back, but I've been told I'm quite irresistible.” She gave the judge a wicked smile and wink.

Kaiser chuckled, “I must agree, Ms. McPherson.”

“Objection,” Ramsey shouted. “Wish to strike your honor's opinion from the record.”

“Over ruled,” Kaiser disputed.

“Oh, Daddy, stop being so stubborn,” Abigail protested.

Ramsey slumped in his seat.

Abigail continued, “Mr. Stone came to me even more frequently and he always came at exactly one o'clock and left between four and five in the morning. You could set a clock by him.”

“Why did he leave so early?” David questioned.

“Because my father gets up at five-thirty.” She smiled wickedly. “Once we overslept and my grandmother came in. Mr. Stone hid under the bed, while I got my grandmother out of the room.”

Rebecca gasped and Ramsey glared at her.

“How do you feel about Mr. Stone?” David asked seriously.

Abigail licked her lip and said, “I told you, David. He was like a friend.”

“Was? You're using past tense, Ms. McPherson.”

“Because...” She took a deep breath. “Because we had an argument and I told him that I never wanted to see him again.”

David frowned, concerned. Of course he knew exactly what she was going to say, but his look of concern had everyone interested, as if even he were the first to know about this. David could play courtroom theatrics very well. “And he left just because you told him?”

She answered, “We argued some more about it, but he did leave.”

“When did you have the argument?”

“On the morning of May twenty-ninth.”

“Could you tell us about that entire night before and morning after?”

She recounted from the time Andrew picked her up, until she fell asleep late in the night with William in her bed.

David interjected. “You fell asleep together?”

She nodded. “We both dozed off together in my bed.”

“Don't you think he could have left and came back, while you were asleep?”

She shook her head. “I was lying my head on his chest. If he had moved, I would have known. On top of that, I had awakened at two because...” She looked at William. “I had to use the bathroom, but I was too tired to get up, even though I knew William would have helped me in my chair, I didn't want to bother him. He was sleeping like a baby.” She looked back at David. “I fell back asleep and didn't wake up until after four.”

“Why?”

“He was shaking me to wake up and I was upset that he woke me up. We argued and I told him to leave and never come back. He slammed out of my balcony doors so hard that one of the window panes broke. My family heard it and came to check on me, but I lied and told them I threw something,” she admitted.

Ramsey looked at his wife who showed no emotions.

“What time did Mr. Stone leave?” David asked.

“Four fifteen. I checked my clock as soon as everyone left the room.”

“How far is Lowry Park from your home?”

“About fifteen minutes by car, but for me, it's about two hours.”

David chuckled at her exaggeration.

“By foot, it would probably be a forty minute walk. I do remember my brother and I walking up there once, when I was little.”

David gave a dramatic pause. The testimony was mind boggling. Abigail had been a perfect witness. “Why are you testifying, Ms. McPherson?”

There was a pregnant silence in the courtroom, as Abigail lowered her face. “Every once in a while the thought had crossed my mind that Stone might have a little lunacy in him, but not like his father or grandfather. I think everyone might lose it, but unlike everyone, Mr. Stone knows this might be true and can help himself. He's a nice guy when you look past that huge body and mean exterior. Almost sweet and he doesn't deserve to go to jail for something he didn't do. He deserves better and I don't feel anyone should judge him for his past, nor his parents.” She looked accusingly at her father. “Mr. Stone is innocent, Daddy. He was with me that night. All night long, so there was no way he could have been at the park during the time of the murder. David even had forensics check my room, when you weren't home yesterday, to prove that Stone had been there. There was also glass shards on Williams clothes at his home that matched my balcony window that broke.”

David went to his desk and pulled out copied reports, which he passed out. “These were rather rushed, your honor, since Ms. McPherson gave us one day to prepare for all of this. I can bring in Bill Heathers, Chief Investigator of Davenport’s Forensics Division, who conducted the tests.”

“These are sufficient,” Kaiser approved, as he looked through the reports himself.

While Marilyn looked over her husband's shoulder, Ramsey looked through the file passed to him. There were pictures of Abigail's room. Reports on evidence of hair, fingerprints, and even footprints in the carpet and fibers from William Stone's jacket and clothes. Turning the pages, he stopped at a DNA test and read that report. Described in detail was confirmation of a sample retrieved from the center of the bed of...

“You bastard!” Ramsey bellowed, jumping out of his chair.

Abigail watched as her father practically jumped across the courtroom and tackled William who was still handcuffed to the chair. The chair fell back, with both men in it, behind the defense desk. All Abigail could see was her father's arms swinging down at William. She screamed for her father to stop. The uproar in the courtroom was overwhelming, as seven bailiffs were needed to pull Ramsey off of William and hold him back; while three-bailiffs helped William up. More bailiffs came from outside the courtroom to assist in helping with crowd control.

“I'm going to kill him!” Ramsey screeched.

“Calm down, McPherson!” Judge Kaiser order.

Rebecca and Marilyn were at Ramsey's side helping him to calm down. Ramsey felt a sense of betrayal towards his daughter. Hanging his head low, he sat down at his desk.

Once the courtroom was under control again, and the guards were applying something to William's nose to stop the bleeding, the judge asked David, "Are there any more questions for Ms. McPherson?"

"Not unless Mr. McPherson wishes to question his daughter," David said, sitting down.

Ramsey looked up at his daughter, who met his eyes without an ounce of guilt. She had done the right thing and would argue to hell and back with him about it. He then looked at David, who seemed rather nervous. David knew he was going to win just, by Abigail's testimony.

"Unfortunately, your honor, the prosecution has no questions." Ramsey stood and went to his daughter. She held out her arms and let him carry her to the wheelchair. He kissed her brow. "I love you, sweetheart."

"I love you too, Daddy."

Ella came over to help her out of the room, the same way she came. Abigail didn't dare make eye contact with William, but she did see a familiar face in the crowd and wondered why he was there and looking very upset by the court proceedings. He even shot Abigail a cold look and she hurried out, because those eyes reminded her of someone else.

"Are there any more witnesses, Mr. Reichard?" Kaiser asked reluctant.

"Well, I could bring Detective Haas who did the investigation for the murder my client is accused of committing and question him on the possibility of Mr. Stone being framed. And also, if the prosecution will allow it, have someone from Grime Knives, who can testify that a Marshall Crane obtained credit in order to make a replica of the knife a week ago, but we can not track this Marshall Crane down." He handed the judge and Ramsey copies of the receipt from Grimes.

"No need," Ramsey snapped. "The prosecution withdraws all charges, David. You've proved your fucking point, but I'm personally filing charges against your client for breaking and entering, malicious destruction of property, breaking a court order, trespassing on private property and possible rape."

"Do what you like Ramsey. The defense rests, your honor," David said simply.

Chapter 28

Rebecca quietly knocked on Abigail's door already opened door. Just yesterday, the construction to the room had been finished. Ramsey had cement blocked the entire balcony doors and made a small window, so high and small, Abigail could only see the sky from her chair. It was rather cruel, but Ramsey

had not been in a good mood for the past week, since the trial ended. On top of that, she threatened to go to the press with a detailed interview of her "sexual escapades" with William, if her father didn't drop charges against him. Rebecca almost passed out when Abigail made this declaration.

Marilyn had chose to spend time with Ella, needing to get away from the hostile tempers her husband and daughter kept spurting at each other all the time.

Until the construction had been done to her room - all in three days - Ramsey slept in the hallway, outside his daughter's room and Abigail was forced to keep the door open at all times.

"He's not coming back here, Daddy. He got his revenge," she protested, when he demanded that she had to do this, but she obeyed reluctantly.

Now, Rebecca looked at Abigail who sat in her chair with her back to the door, staring at the wall as if it were going to melt. She had ignored the knocking. Lately, she ignored everyone around the house and stayed in her room.

"Are you coming to dinner, Abigail?" Rebecca asked. "Your mother is gone and Ramsey's in his study."

"Is he going to eat with us?" Abigail questioned with a sneer.

"No," Rebecca answered.

Abigail went into the kitchen. She heard her father on his phone, through the open door of his study. He sounded upset. In the past two weeks, since the trial, he sounded upset all the time, but she ignored that. David wasn't allowed to come around and Abigail couldn't see Ella anymore, since the therapist had accepted David's marriage proposal the night the trial ended. Ramsey also removed the phone from her room.

For Abigail's own mindset, she tried not to think about him anymore. She tried to pretend that the weeks they shared together were really all dreams. There was no depth of emotions, other than lust, between the two of them and since William had made no attempt to right her mind set nor even try to make contact with her after the trial, she was at the point of despising him, along with her father. If Ramsey and William had a score still to settle, she wouldn't be a pawn in their revenge game against each other. She planned to really leave in the upcoming month to go to Detroit for therapy and school.

She swore she would never think of William Stone again.

Rebecca had cooked beef stew with mashed potatoes and muffins. Abigail ate only a little and was glad when the phone rang.

"I'll get it," she volunteered.

Her grandmother warned, "Your father doesn't want you to touch the phone."

Abigail sighed and let Rebecca get it. Ramsey wouldn't allow her out of the house, nor allow her to answer the phone. Later, Abigail rarely saw any of her mail, not even her magazines. What he was doing was cruel, and she was really starting to get extremely angry. Men could be so frustrating. All of them.

"Hello?...Hello?...no, I think you have the wrong number, young man." Rebecca hung up and joined Abigail in the kitchen.

"Who was it?" Abigail inquired.

Rebecca answered, "Some little boy, asking for Chad."

Abigail looked disappointed.

"I thought you said that man wasn't going to bother you?" Rebecca asked suspiciously, seeing Abigail's chagrin expression.

"He hasn't and I don't think he ever will, but I had hoped...never mind. He used me. He used my affections and I never want to see him again," she said tenaciously.

"So you don't care if your father treats you like a prisoner?" Rebecca asked.

"No," Abigail lied. "It will keep me even further away from him and I know he won't bother me as long as my father protects me."

Rebecca's look told quite clearly she didn't believe a word Abigail spoke, but Abigail ignored her grandmother for the moment and picked up her fork to play with her food, not so eager to go back into her room, since she couldn't close the door.

The phone rang again.

Impatiently, Abigail said, "I'll get it."

"But your father--"

Abigail cut her grandmother off, "I'm old enough to do anything I please and I please to answer the phone." She reached the hallway phone house and picked up the receiver by the second ring. "Hello?..."

No one spoke but she could tell this was someone calling from a pay phone, because of the background noise of the traffic.

"Hello?" she repeated.

"Abigail."

A shudder passed through her body and she found herself struck speechless.

"Abigail, speak to me." His voice was seriously calm. Too calm.

"W-Why are you calling me?" she spoke so low he could barely hear her.

"I need to see you," he said.

"No. You can't." The quivering in her own voice was clear. "You can't ever and you know that. Why don't you stop it? You've proven your point, William. You've had your revenge."

William cursed viciously on the other line. "Dammit, Abigail. You know all this was never about the revenge...I will come to you. You can't just ignore me. I'm coming now."

"You stay away from me, William. You've hurt me enough and I won't let you do it anymore-" The phone was snatched out of her hand by her father.

"Stone, I'm warning you that if you come near here, I'll kill you dead on the spot." He slammed the phone down and grabbed Abigail's arm. "I told you not to answer the phone."

"He's called here before, hasn't he?" she demanded to know.

"You live in my house and you're under my rules, Abigail. I'm still your father, even if you chose to ignore that fact," Ramsey said in derision.

She angrily snatched from his grip. "You've denied him from seeing me, haven't you?"

He stated matter-of-factly, "You said he wouldn't come."

"That's no reason to deny him!" she cried incredulously.

Rebecca was the only one to hear the knock at the door and figured it was Marilyn. Father and daughter were so involved in their argument, they never noticed Rebecca flinging the door open, but they did hear her scream. By the time Abigail turned to see who was at the door, William had his hand over Rebecca's mouth and had her against him, but his eyes were intently on Abigail.

"Call the police, Abigail," Ramsey ordered, but Abigail didn't budge.

William released Rebecca, who ran up the stairs. "Abigail, tell him what we had. Tell him all I want to do is speak to you," William ordered.

Abigail looked from William to her father, then back at William. "Go. Just go, please," she desperately implored.

Ramsey snarled, "You heard her, Stone. Get your ass off my property before I shoot it off."

"I'm not going until I speak with Abigail," William bellowed.

"William, just leave!" Abigail cried when her father stormed into his study. She went forward and William knelt to her.

He spoke in a calm tone, beseeching her, "Sweetheart, please just give me a chance to speak-"

"Your chances are up, Stone." Ramsey sneered at the study door. "Move away from him, Abigail."

Abigail looked over her shoulder at her father as William rose not looking the least afraid as Ramsey held the .38 caliber gun at his side, but was angrily squeezing the handle tight.

She turned around and cried, "Daddy--"

"Dammit, Abigail," Ramsey screamed. "Do as I say."

She looked at William, who didn't look as if he was about to budge. "If I promise to come, you promise to put the gun away," Abigail implored to her father.

"Come here, Abigail," was all Ramsey said.

She moved slowly to him and faced William. "Go William, please, before he hurts you."

"Not without speaking to you," William said obstinately.

Ramsey aimed the gun. "I'll blow you away faster than you can blink, Stone."

Abigail watched her father and William stand off against each other, and then William took a step toward them.

She screamed as the gun went off twice and William fell to the ground. Nothing mattered at that point. Nothing at all, as she felt her body rise and go over to William's side. Blood came from his chest and leg. Gently, she cradled his head in her arms. His eyes were closed and she would swear he was dead.

"William," she whispered, her tears clouding her vision. "William please don't die." She pressed her face close to his, rubbing her cheek to his.

"Ab..." he barely whispered. If her ear hadn't been so close to his lips, she would never have heard him.

"Oh, William," she cried.

His eyes slowly opened. They were a cool, honey-brown that put her at ease. "My n-name..."

"What? William what are you saying?" she asked confused.

"S-Say...my...name," he strained to speak.

"William," she answered.

He closed his eyes as if in defeat and gravely shook his head. "P-Promise...broken." His breathing became shallow. "D-Don't...know..."

Abigail looked hopelessly at her father, who stood stunned as if he couldn't believe he had done this, and then she looked back at her William. Her mind seemed to become clear, as she looked down at his relaxed face and so many memories poured into her brain at once. Most of all, a whispered promise from a boy destined to be the true love of her life. A whispered name so erotic, she could still remember the

tremble her little body experienced when he spoke it so close to her ear that afternoon, so long ago. “Please don't die, William. I'll do anything. I do remember your promise. You've won.” She kissed his cool lips, hoping it wasn't too late. “You've won, William.”

The paramedics arrived and began to check him.

She felt someone trying to help her away, but she resisted. Leaning to his ear, she kissed his cheek. “You've gotten your revenge. I do love you more than my father, Yared.”

Chapter 29

TWO YEARS LATER

Stepping off the plane into the Davenport Airport terminal, Abigail stared down at her black Patton-leather pumps and smiled to herself. If anyone had told her five years ago she would be here, standing and feeling like a million bucks, she would not have believed them.

“Abigail!” Marilyn shouted, running to her daughter.

Abigail shrieked, just as excited and ran - really ran, almost knocking Marilyn back, but catching her in her arms and hugging her mother for dear life. “I missed you so much, Momma.”

Marilyn was crying as much as Abigail.

“Okay Mare, you can't keep her all to yourself,” Ramsey cajoled.

Abigail moved to her father, who also held Michael, who hugged his sister, when her father embraced her in a wonderful, comforting bear hug. He was only two years old, but an exact image of his father.

“Hey, kiddo,” she said ruffling the dark coppery curls of her brother's head.

“You look beautiful, swe-” He stopped and stiffened. “Where are your bags?”

She smiled meekly. It was difficult to speak about the past and usually when they spoke, they tried not to speak about it, but sometimes things - like this - happened that brought up the past. “I had them sent down to the porter, to meet in front, just like Mom told me to do. Hopefully, your driver will get them”

“Of course,” Ramsey confirmed, kissing her forehead.

Abigail looked past her father to the security team trying to look inconspicuous.

“Does it bother you?” he asked defensively.

“Should it?” she asked.

“I am the mayor of the city now,” he pointed out.

“Well, then it doesn't. I'm proud of you.” She hugged him again. “I would love to see the mayor's house.”

“We'll lead the way, right Mike?” he said to his son.

“Yeah!” the two year old giggled.

Marilyn picked up Abigail's carry on bag and took her daughter's hand. “How was college?”

“Great. Fun. So much different from when I went to school here, but I wasn't so ostracized. I mean it wasn't anyone's fault, but my own. I'm glad I went.” She gave her mother's hand an extra squeeze as Marilyn began to update her on old times.

A limousine awaited them and took them straight home. Abigail noticed that they passed through Lowry Park. After her father was reelected, he gave the spooky-looking park a complete make-over, including making better lighting, opening a road through the middle of it, taking out trees and putting in a pond with a bridge to walk over, a lighted-walking path throughout the park and making it one of Davenport's best landmarks. In the middle of the park, there was a monument for the victims of the Lowry Park serial killings, which were still unsolved. David, who now was the chief prosecuting attorney of Sawyer County, was always working on it in his free time and had made it his life's mission to find the mysterious Marshall Crane and the killer who had stopped the killings after the release of William Stone, two years ago.

Her mother, Ella Foster, and Peach Waters (who owned Peachy's, a very chic restaurant in Davenport) teamed together and opened up Davenport's first fitness center, complete with a health bar and restaurant, and three levels of fun and fitness throughout the place.

“Mr. Stone has made great contributions to many non-profit organizations around the area, especially for...handicapped kids. He donated the play castle in Lowry Park, complete with handicap facilities and he also donated several handmade wheelchairs to the paraplegic association,” Marilyn rattled on quickly. She gave her quiet, brooding husband a warning look.

“So is the park safe?” Abigail asked.

“There's been no trouble. Matter of fact, the city has basically returned to normal, as if the killings never happened and William didn't even sue the county or the city.” Marilyn said matter-of-factly, “He didn't even press charges against your father.”

Both women looked at Ramsey, who was now trying to concentrate on his cell phone call.

Michael gurgled happily in his car seat.

Abigail smiled at the happy boy and asked Marilyn. “How's being a mother again?”

“Wonderful,” Marilyn glowed, as the limousine pulled into the gates of the Davenport mayor's mansion.

“Oh Mom, it's so huge. Do you really use all of this space?” Abigail questioned.

Marilyn chuckled and answered, “Only for entertainment. Otherwise, we shut down the house and stay basically near the back, by the kitchen.”

As everyone filed in the house, her father and Michael headed for the back to lay her little brother down for a nap while her mother showed her the beautiful new home, filled with Davenport's history.

Walking around, Marilyn asked about Abigail's graduating opportunities. Throughout her master's degree program, she did extensive traveling around the world, working with the best architects on interior designs. Before she graduated, two of her works were in Architect Digest and several more were in other popular magazines. She'd been requested by two, very prominent movie stars and very rich couples to design the interiors of their homes. In her last year, several companies approached her, the best offer came from Bellini Real Estate, but she declined at the last moment and decided to become a freelancer for the company. She wanted to have an opportunity to make more money and to be able to serve her clients better, on her own time and schedule.

Marilyn showed her daughter to her room and placed her bag on the bed, then turned to Abigail with a very serious look on her face. “I want to discuss your relationship with William.”

“There is no relationship with William anymore and just because I'm back in town, nothing has changed about how I feel. What I felt back then is all in the past, Mother. It was some crazy girl fantasy with a man I knew I couldn't be with. I was immature. You were right, Mom. I didn't know the world and I were young and innocent.” A hurt look passed through her eyes, but she blinked it away. “I'm a woman of the world now and I am over that man and over what happened in the past. It's going to stay there.”

Marilyn's eyes narrowed a bit, then brightened. “Well, I should let you know, your father has no hard feelings about what happened in the past for you, although he still carries a lot of animosity for William, but the young man and your father have amazingly stayed out of each other's hair considering they still live in the same town and both in the public spotlight a lot. I should warn you also, that the restraining order against William for you has been renewed every year you've been away.”

Abigail huffed, exasperated. “Tell me that it wasn't, Mother.”

Her mother answered, “Well, your father wanted to make sure William didn't try to come to Detroit to...get you.”

“That's ridiculous, Mother. I can't believe he would do something like that.” Abigail was clearly perturbed by the ludicrous insinuation.

“We were still your guardians, due to your condition, and we thought it best to protect you; even when we weren't around, just in case you had trouble out of that man. We wanted to make it as clear as possible for him, that we didn't want him around you anymore,” her mother explained, as if it were plain as day to anyone.

“I think Daddy made it quite clear when he put a bullet in his chest and thigh,” she replied sarcastically. “If anything, the message was apparent enough. I'm surprised William didn't press charges against Daddy.”

“Well, it's water under the bridge and your father's face still winces at any mention of that, so please keep it out of the subject of any conversation. You can still renew the restraining order if you want.”

Exasperated even more, Abigail screeched impatiently, “Mother!”

“Okay, fine, Abigail. Be difficult.”

“I'm not being difficult, Mother. I'm not afraid of William Stone trying to hurt me or use me.”

Marilyn hugged her daughter. “Despite everything, we are very happy, you are home, and you're welcome to stay as long as you want.”

“Thank you, Mother, but I've had the taste of independence and I loved it. I won't be here for long. I've already been searching for a good place to stay.”

Marilyn only smiled to herself, as if she knew something Abigail didn't. “Whatever you decide I want you to know that I support any decision you make; just be careful and do not upset your father, please.”

Abigail sighed tiredly when her mother left the room. The rest of the night was very quiet. Marilyn let Abigail know that she knew someone in the real estate business, who could help her find a nice place.

She responded to this eagerly. “I was thinking of a loft downtown. There's a lot of room and I could use it as my business set up as well. I was thinking of a two-floor condominium, which would also suit my needs, but the location is important.”

“I'm going to the club in the morning, you can join me,” Marilyn said. “We can meet my real estate contact there.”

Abigail agreed to accompany her mother. Her mother did most of the chattering, but Abigail and her father did exchange some words. Abigail asked basically about politics around the city and how the city itself was fairing under her father's leadership. She was very proud of him and let him know.

Lying in bed that night, she wondered if her words to her mother were as true as they sounded. Many times, she had thought about that last night with William and how much her memory had come into play and her body had moved on its own accord. She should be thanking William for giving her back her legs and her memory. Instead, she decided to stand behind her father and convinced herself it would be best to forget William. Would she forever hide behind her father in order to protect herself from pain?

She decided that if she ever saw William, she would thank him for helping her out and that would be that. Nothing to it. That was all she owed him and that was all he would get from her.

Chapter 30

Abigail packed a quick, workout bag and jumped in the car with her mother. They dropped Michael off at daycare and went to the gym. As soon as Abigail entered, she stopped dead in her tracks, looking at the man standing near the front desk, but calmed her nerves, when she realized it wasn't who she thought it was. He was much too lean and shorter, plus he had the friendliest, green eyes that she had ever seen.

“Romare Castro, I'd like you to meet my daughter, Abigail McPherson,” Marilyn introduced.

Romare smiled the most extraordinary smile, which took Abigail's breath away. “The lovely Ms. McPherson, how are you?”

“You speak as if you know me?” Abigail said shaking his hand. He longingly kissed the back of her palm.

“Who doesn't? You are more of a celebrity around here and I owe you a personal thanks for getting my brother off for those murder charges,” he said.

“Your brother?” she inquired, looking at her mother for an explanation.

“Yes, Romare is William's half brother, from Marie and Harrison.”

“As soon as I could walk, my father put me in military school. I've been reared by the Hessman Military School for boys.”

She assessed him in detail, from head to toe, with an appreciation for a very fine specimen of a man. “Nothing like your brother, I hope,” she said, in a rather coquettish manner.

He chuckled as his green eyes twinkled. “Never like that stiff prick - if you don't mind me saying.”

Abigail laughed. “I don't mind at all.”

Marilyn suggested, "Why don't Romare show you around our fine facility Abigail, while I take care of some business? Would you mind baby?"

Abigail linked arms with him. "Come Romare, show me around."

"With pleasure." He guided her towards the weight room.

She found him to be very charming, with a wonderful sense of humor. He was truly enamored by her. After the tour, they found a nice seat in the health bar, where he ordered drinks for them. "You look nothing like those pictures I've seen of you."

"You might say I was rather frumpy. I lost weight. Staying active during these last two years has made me physically fit," she answered.

It was his turn to look her over, with a dance in his beautiful eyes. "Would it be too forward of me to ask if I would be in competition with my brother?"

"For what? Me? No. Whatever you've heard is untrue." She paused for a moment. "What have you heard?"

"That William was three times crazy for every inch of you and when you came back, there would be no doubt who you'd belong to," he answered.

"That's a lie. William hasn't spoken to me since my father shot him and whatever we had, we don't have anymore," she stated firmly.

He smiled relieved. "Good, so you'll accept my invitation to the policeman's ball Saturday night?"

"I will not only accept it, Mr. Castro, but I will be honored by the invitation." She kissed his cheek.

He checked his watch. "I have to do a lap around the track. Do you want to join me?"

"Sure." She had already changed after the tour and warmed up from the walk around the large facility.

He took her to the second floor, where the track overlooked the first floor weight room, and explained how things worked. "Regular runners are on the first set of tracks. Some people enjoy variety and prefer to go the other way around the tracks, so the second set of tracks are for the opposite direction. It gives details on how many miles you've walked. I usually take the second set, because there's a slight texture variation, which feels better on the heels. Most runners stay on the first set of tracks."

"Whenever you're ready, Romare," she urged. They enjoyed each other's company around the track and when his mile was up, they continued one more time around. Halfway into their run, they passed by several runners. Abigail was concentrating on her pace, so that all she heard was, "Hi, Will," from Romare, before she saw someone fall on the first set of tracks.

Three women rushed over to the fallen walker as if he were severely injured.

Romare stopped running, shaking his head in disgust. Abigail stopped beside him, curious to see who fell, was it really a bad fall, and why were those women crowding around the fallen man like that? Suddenly the man sprung up and Abigail's head shot upwards, taken aback by his height. Romare was as tall as her father, which was four inches shorter than Abigail.

Her heart pounded in her chest as she realized who the man was all clean-shaven and pitch-black hair, cut short. His golden glare shot daggers at her as he walked slowly toward her.

"Well, look-a-here," William snarled. "The little bird's come home. What the hell are you doing here?"

"Practicing my right as an American citizen, minding my own business. You have a problem with that," she asked too sweetly.

"You're supposed to be in Chicago," he snorted.

Before she could question about how he knew her business, Romare stepped in front of them and interjected, "Why are you trying to start stuff, brother?"

"Why are you associating yourself with her?" William sneered.

"What I do is none of your business, isn't that right?" Romare countered.

William shut his mouth quickly. Obviously, Romare must have reminded him about something he said. Matter of fact, so disgusted by this verbal reminder, William turned and walked away.

Abigail didn't expect her initial reunion with William to go so badly, but she was very shaken. Excusing herself, she went to the locker to take a shower and get dressed, and then she went to her mother's office. Romare was in there, already changed and looking very concerned about her. "Are you alright?" he asked.

"Yes, I'm fine. I just didn't expect him to be so..." She was looking for a nice way to voice her discomfort at the whole situation.

Romare helped her with some suggestions. "Horrible? Mean? A bastard? All of the above?"

She smiled, because he was only humoring her.

"Let's go over to Peachy's for some coffee," he suggested.

"Why don't I take a rain check and see you tomorrow? I do want to meet someone who is supposed to help me find a nice place in Davenport," she suggested.

He smiled knowingly. "Then, I'm your man."

"You're the real estate man?" She looked at her mother, who nodded, then looked back at Romare.

He said proudly, “The one and only. I was just speaking with your mother about your needs. We can look around today, if you would like.”

She agreed, telling herself that she would not think about her reunion with her first love. She was over it, or at least that is what she kept telling herself, as she followed Romare out to his brand new-looking, blue Mazda Miata.

Yet, she could feel those eyes on her and knew that even though she couldn't see him, he was somewhere close by, watching them.

* * *

After her first real day in Davenport, the rest of her week was very uneventful. Romare found her a nice loft downtown, which had two floors. On the first floor was a very wide-open space, where she could entertain. It also included her workspace, a kitchen, and a half-bath. The second floor contained a smaller area, which she would use as her bedroom area, with a full bathroom, complete with separate bathtub and shower.

Of course, for her own place, she gave it a beautiful makeover, and Marilyn almost died when she saw it. Abigail spared no expense. Her idea of home was pure comfort and elegance of black and purple. Her bedroom complimented her colors in a deep beautiful royal purple and white. There was a roomy hallway leading to her room, and she demanded that anyone entering her room had to take off their shoes; not only because she didn't want to dirty her carpet, but because the carpet was hand threaded in India and the sensation against the sole of the feet was incredibly relaxing.

Romare came to pick her up for the policeman's ball decked in a stylish tuxedo; while she was adorned in a beautiful, deep honey-gold colored, silk, ankle-length gown. She had bought four-inch heels to match her dress and had to spend the entire morning learning how to dance in them with her mother. Her mother couldn't stop laughing, as Abigail initially almost killed herself, balancing herself in the heels.

“I feel like an awkward teenager,” Abigail grumbled.

“But you look so beautiful,” Marilyn disputed. “If you're that uncomfortable with them, why don't you go with a lower heel.”

Anxiety filled her. “I have the flats to match my dress, but he's so tall, I will look ridiculous with them on.” She learned fast, and by five, she walked around with style and grace, like a princess.

Romare rented a limousine for the occasion. They had spoken often on the phone during the week and she was surprised at how she was so outgoing with him. Yet, from the time he picked her up, she felt that he seemed a little distracted.

Before they arrived at the place she decided to ask him what was the problem.

“William's pulling his dirty tricks again?” He sighed, frustrated. “I told myself I would never say his name around you, because I know how upset it gets you, but everyone says you know him better than anyone.”

“Who says these things?” she asked.

“Monica Bridgeclub. She is my ex-fiancé.”

“And who is she?” Abigail questioned, having no memory of this name.

Romare sighed, disconcerted. “She has this very popular father around town. Your mother told me you were a practical recluse, but everyone knows about you and William. It is no secret.”

“Which is probably why my father took everything like he did. Why are you pointing out the fact that you think I know your brother better than anyone?” she inquired.

He answered in an apparent tone of voice. “Because he's lost his mind and he's taking no prisoners.”

“I'm lost in what you're meaning, Romare.”

“He's dating Monica and he knows I'm still head over heels in love with her,” he admitted

“So that ruins my chance with you?” she teased.

He flushed. “I didn't mean to lead you on, if that's what you mean, but Monica and I have been off and on for so many years that I know he understood this. Although, you do look pretty good on my arm.”

She wasn't hurt. Romare was a good friend and she enjoyed his company. She wasn't looking for anything serious with anyone. “So what do you want me to do?”

“I swore I would never get down to William's level, but he needs to be taught a lesson.”

“And what lesson is that?” she asked curiously.

He was starting to get somewhat upset. “That he can't just have every woman. He thinks this. He's become this cocky, arrogant, ladies man and he plays the game very dangerously. He's broken hearts and I think he's going to break Monica's.”

“Does Monica feel for you Romare or are you pining away for a woman who really couldn't care which brother she has?”

He took a deep breath. “I think Monica could have some feelings for me, in some kind of way, yet she won't be sure, once William turns on the charm. We've both taken each other for granted, but I know if William gets to her, she'll be useless, just like all the others. He only does this when I piss him off.”

“What happened the last time, for him to be pissed off at you?” She inquired, with a great deal of curiosity.

"I told your father he was trying to get in touch with you in Detroit."

This news took her aback. "He was? Why?"

He looked at her as if she had lost her mind. "You don't know?"

Frowning from his evasiveness, she queried. "What should I know?"

"William still loves you, Abigail," he announced.

She snorted, very unladylike. "He does not," she denied. "If he did, he would have told me. It was over at the trial and I'm positive, when he came over that night my father shot, him it was to make sure I knew."

Romare looked baffled as he said, "Abigail, William came over that night to tell you to come with him and be with him."

"How would you know?" she asked suspiciously.

"He told me and I know he's miserable without you, but he refuses to admit it. It was your father that kept you from him all these years and William believes you want nothing to do with him."

"I don't," she said stiffly. "It's not the same and I know he's still trying to get back at my father, by using me and I won't play their revenge game anymore."

"Abigail, I seriously don't think William gives a fig about whether he hurts your father or not," Romare said sincerely.

They arrived at the hotel where the ball was being held and stopped discussing everything as they made it inside. She was given a special ticket with the number thirty-two on it and told they would be having a dance raffle later on in the evening. Each male attending bought a special basket for whomever they would be dancing with. The proceeds for the baskets would be donated to the policeman's charity fund for neighborhood organizations in Davenport.

Once Romare and Abigail were announced and began their decent into the ballroom area, being greeted by Davenport's upscale society and dignitaries, she leaned to Romare and asked, "So what is it you wish me to do to help you with William?"

He smiled wickedly. "Adore me."

"Oh, that's not hard at all, Romare," Abigail smiled mischievously. "You are the complete opposite of your brother."

He smiled and kissed her cheek for that compliment. In her peripheral vision, she saw William standing next to a very beautiful woman, with the rosiest cheeks. She was a bleached-blond, Madonna-looking woman with evergreen eyes that were sharp. Abigail didn't mean to stare, but she found she

couldn't help herself, because William looked absolutely gorgeous in a tuxedo and it had always been her dream to see him in one.

'Was that her heart pounding that loudly?' she wondered.

"That's Monica," Romare whispered to her, when he followed her eyes.

"She is quite beautiful," Abigail said, tearing her eyes away from the couple standing on the outer rim of people. "Why are they here?"

"Monica must attend. Her father's much too popular for her not to be at these events and she probably dragged William here, because I know the last thing he wants to do is spend the evening with a bunch of cops," Romare explained.

Abigail snickered. "I find it amusing."

"Well, he's always the life of any party, wherever he-" he stopped mid sentence and practically dragged Abigail out to the dance floor.

"What was that for?" she asked, falling into step with him quickly.

"He was coming our way," he answered nervously.

"It's a free country, Romare. Are you afraid of what I might do when I speak with him?"

He shrugged. "In a way, but I promised your father, I'd take real good care of you."

"You what?" she asked incredulously.

"Well, I know he barely tolerates me, because William is my brother, but he made me promise to keep you away from William tonight."

Abigail was very perturbed and looked around the room for her father, as Romare spun her around. "I can handle myself and my father can't protect me forever."

"But I can try and if you really feel that way about William, then you shouldn't be near him. He's changed a lot, Abigail. He's cold and ruthless."

She snorted, very unladylike. "He was like that when I met him."

"He's worse," Romare insisted.

"How would you know?" she questioned skeptically.

"Lydia told me before she left for Chicago," he said.

"Lydia's not here anymore?" Abigail pointed out.

"No. They found some family of hers in Chicago and her memory is fully restored. She comes to visit a lot with Dakota in the summers, but William tries to go there near Christmas and Dakota's birthday."

She stumbled somewhat, feeling a little awkward in his arms. She hadn't danced in so long and the heels made it even more difficult to concentrate. "I'm sorry, Romare."

"No apology necessary, just promise me a foot massage once we get home," he teased.

She laughed, almost stumbling again. "We'd better stop jabbering before people think we're having too much fun."

"And ruin the evil looks that William's giving us. If he looks any more crazier, I think he'll put a hole in your dress from the heat in his eyes," he said smiling nefariously.

She sighed. "I think you're exaggerating what William feels for me. Love and hate are often confused."

He snorted. "I know my brother enough to know that he couldn't hate you, even if he tried. Your father maybe, but not you."

She rolled her eyes heavenwards. "I think you want me to be with William."

"You never know Abigail. You could change him," he said, dipping her quickly and bringing her right back up.

Looking up into his eyes, she asked, "What about what I want?"

"What do you want from him?" he asked, continuing the dance.

"Nothing. I don't want anything from William. He's done more than enough for me," she said firmly.

"What has he done to you?"

Abigail hesitated briefly, but could find no other way to put it as she said, "He broke my heart, Romare, on purpose, just to get back at my father and me."

"Is it still broken?" Romare inquired, slightly amused for some strange reason.

Confidently, with pride she said, "I've healed and I swore I wouldn't let him do it again. I was just a pawn in his game and I won't be a part of it anymore."

"Did you know this? Did you know he was going to break your heart?"

"I didn't know it would be so bad. I was innocent just like my mother said, and I should have listened to her, but by then, my heart was so gone I couldn't stop even if I tried," she answered angrily.

"Your father stopped it," he stated.

Abigail pulled him close to lie her head on his chest. "Whatever stopped it, I'm glad it's stopped." Yet, she missed feeling the way William made her feel, but she wouldn't admit this to anyone.

“Here he comes,” Romare whispered in her ear.

She looked over her shoulder to see William and Monica heading in their direction, but at the same time her father stepped up to her and William stopped two feet away.

“May I have this dance,” Ramsey asked graciously even going to the extreme of bowing, as if she were royalty.

She tore her eyes away from William and smiled up at her father. “Yes, you may,” she said, glad that he had come, because she was feeling a little weak and would not be responsible if William had asked her to dance. As her father guided her deeper on the dance floor, she gave him a pensive look.

“What?” he asked innocently.

“You were watching him or me?” she asked.

“Both,” Ramsey admitted. “I don't want any trouble tonight, Abigail.”

“I know Father, and if you want me to, Romare and I can leave,” she conceded.

He smiled, very delighted to hear that from her lips. “It's still early. I don't want to ruin your night. You just got here and he's just trying to get to you.”

“Daddy, have you been keeping him away,” she asked skeptically.

“I'm only protecting you from harm again, Abigail,” he said defensively. “You've made no indication that there are any feelings for him since the trial. You said, whatever you had with him, was over. I'm only taking your word.”

“You aren't just rubbing in the fact that I chose not to be with him?” she asked.

He shrugged apathetically, but the look in his eyes belied something quite different. “I may have, but I also know you made the right decision.”

It was hard not to raise her voice, but Abigail kept low tones as she said, “Daddy! It doesn't matter with you what I choose, as long as I don't choose him.”

“I won't lie to you, Abigail. I can't stand him. He may not be a killer, but he's not a nice person and he surely doesn't deserve my daughter,” Ramsey said emphatically.

She defended her position. “You don't know him. It's only what you think he's like.”

“Are you trying to tell me your feelings aren't what you told me they are?” he asked in disbelief.

Abigail sighed, almost on the brink of confusion. “It doesn't matter what I feel for William, but I wish you'd stop trying to rile him by using me.”

“You are my concern, Abigail, you know this,” he said tenderly.

“And you're also using me to pique his anger.”

He smiled wickedly. “It is fun to see the dear boy like that. Just look at him. He's just dying to get over here and snatch you up.”

“I won't look, because that will only encourage him.” This was all very frustrating for Abigail and she really didn't need the stress. “I think I will leave.”

“So soon Abigail? I was going to enjoy watching him stalk you from afar.” He was honestly disappointed by this, which was truly sickening for Abigail, knowing that her father's chagrin was about hurtful intentions towards William.

“Daddy, you're impossible!” she said appalled.

He smiled victoriously. “You know you still have the option of renewing the restraining order, if you want.”

“I won't,” she insisted.

He shrugged again, chagrined.

Abigail completely changed the subject after a moment of quiet dancing with her father. “Did William try to get in touch with me while I was in Detroit?”

He sighed tiredly, as if this were old news and she should have known the answer to this. “By the time he found out you had gone to Detroit, he'd already spent several hundred thousand dollars looking for you, where he thought we had sent you and when I found out he knew where you were, I told him, you'd left out of the country, which was when you traveled to Rome. He thought you were purposely avoiding him, which I let him think. I never lied to him, Abigail,” he insisted. “I just let him come up with his own conclusion.”

“Daddy you are very frustrating,” she said emphatically.

He smiled with great pleasure. “When I want to be, and the more I frustrate that bastard, the happier I am.”

Abigail knew her father was impossible when it came to William. “And if my feelings were still the same for William?”

Ramsey stiffened. “I'd lock you up in a closet until you changed your mind. Abigail, when I say he's not right for you, I really mean it. You don't know him like you used to. He's changed.”

“Everyone keeps telling me that.” She had to wonder what had changed so much, for everyone to keep warning her about William.

“Keep your distance,” her father warned, as the music was stopped abruptly.

Tom Bridgeclub, Monica's father, called everyone's attention for the basket raffle. He explained how the raffle would go. "Each basket on the stage has a number assigned to it. Along with this number the man who purchased the basket has the same number. As the numbers for the baskets are called, the woman who has that number will come up here and collect her basket and return to her assigned seat at the tables, beyond the gathering floor."

Abigail heard that they started at number two and all the baskets were even numbered. This gave her time to powder her nose and rest her feet. She put her heels on again and headed out back, where Romare was standing, but someone snatched her behind a large plant covering her mouth and pressing her up against a broad body.

She closed her eyes tight, hoping this wasn't whom she thought it was, but her body knew and was responding to the all, too familiar sensations it yearned for.

"Where's your ticket, sweetheart?" he muttered in her ear.

She reached in her purse and withdrew the ticket, relaxing under his grip, so he would know that she wouldn't scream. He released her mouth and took the ticket out of her hand. When she tried to turn around he held her even closer, to stop her, as if he didn't want to look at her.

"Your father thinks he's a smart man, but he forgets you can't deny me anything, or does he know this, sweetheart?" William purred in her ear.

"Don't call me that," she seethed, using as much disgust in her tone as possible.

"And ruin the goose bumps you get on your arm when I do." His fingertips brushed her arm and Abigail's breath turned shallow. "I can smell your need, Abigail," he growled.

She swallowed hard, praying her mouth that wouldn't defy her like her own body had. "Leave me be, William."

The tip of his tongue flicked against the back of her ears and the shudder from her body made him chuckle. "When I have you alone, I will make you do more than shake, Sweetheart." His hand appeared, holding a piece of paper in front of her eyes. "Take it and read it carefully, before you think you know what you saw. Then take your basket like a good little girl and your surprise will be over shortly. Now go back and enjoy yourself like a perfect daughter." He nudged her away.

She stepped forward, once his arm released from her waist. When she turned around, all she felt was wind on her face. He still moved like a thief in the night and just the thought that no matter where she was or who she was with, he would always get to her, made her tremble in need.

When she joined Romare again, he gave her a curious look and she could just imagine her flushed appearance.

“They’re on thirty. What number are you?” he asked.

She looked down at her paper, which read thirty-eight, and frowned. Romare looked over her shoulder when she hesitated at telling him.

“What’s wrong with you?” he asked, concerned.

“He changed the number,” she stated.

Mr. Bridgeclub called thirty-two and Monica walked up to retrieve her basket. Abigail watched Romare’s eyes widen in shock.

Abigail looked towards William, who only leaned against a pole, raising a champagne glass to her. “What is going on, Romare?” Abigail asked.

“I don’t know. Fate? Destiny?” He was in a state of shock.

She huffed angrily. “William is neither of those and he’s up to something?”

“What makes you think William set this all up?” he asked suspiciously.

Mr. Bridgeclub called her number and she stepped forward to retrieve the rose-colored basket, filled with beautiful rose petals, soap, fragrance, lotion, bath salts, and body wash. It was a beautiful basket, but with dread, Abigail accepted it and went to her assigned table, waiting. She looked around for William, but he was nowhere to be found. She frowned, wondering what was going on, when a familiar face approached her, yet she couldn’t quite put her finger on the face.

“How do you do?” he asked, outstretching her hand and placing a card that had the number thirty-eight on it.

“I’m fine. Do I know you?” she questioned.

The young man smiled proudly. “Andrew. We went out on a date a long time ago.”

She remembered, but was still confused. “And why, might I, ask are you here?”

“Your basket, really. I need it,” he said.

“For what?” she demanded.

“Ms. McPherson, you of all people know him more than anyone.” He picked up the basket and left.

Abigail watched as everyone was being seated and dinner was being served. She looked over at the empty place setting and the more she stared at it, the angrier she became. By now everyone was to assume William was number thirty-eight and by not sitting here with her, he made a perfect showing that he didn’t want to be seen with her. Her mother came over after a while and let her know that William had promptly excused himself, right after she accepted the basket.

"I'm sorry dear," she said and went back to her table, where she was sitting with Mr. Bridgeclub.

He purposely was trying to embarrass her and by the amused look in Monica's eye as Abigail approached Romare's table, he had clearly achieved his objective, in making her look like a complete ass.

Romare stood as she came up to his table. "Please don't get up Romare, I just wanted to let you know that I'm leaving. I have a lot of work to do."

"I'm sorry about this, I'll take you home--"

"No," she cut him off. "I can find my own way home."

He looked over at her table then around the room for his brother. When his eyes met her, he was confused. "I don't know what got into him."

"You don't need to make excuses for him. He's made himself very clear." She looked down at Monica.

"At least we know he isn't still hooked on you, still and that he's really now a free man," Monica said triumphantly.

"If rumor be known, Ms. Bridgeclub, I was never interested in him, since from the time I left." Abigail removed herself from the ball as quickly as possible, hailing a cab and going straight home. When the cab pulled up to her loft, she was so glad to be home. She'd take a nice long bath, soak her aching feet, and go straight to bed.

Arriving on her floor, she stopped short, as she stepped off the elevator. There were rose petals on the floor leading a perfect pathway to her door. Her breath became shallow, as her heartbeat accelerated. When she opened the door to her loft, she saw small candles lighting a pathway up the stairs, with soft rose petals beside them, guiding her through the bedroom to the bathroom. A steaming bath was drawn and about a million candles lit the entire bedroom and bath. She was taken aback by this display.

Below her, soft music began to play as she went back down the stairs and stopped as she reached the bottom. William was sitting with his back to her, slouched down in a chair. She knew it was William, even by the top of his head.

Coming around the chair, she stood akimbo in front of him. "What are you doing in my place, William?"

He was rolling a single rose between his right thumb and index finger. "Passing the time. What took you so long?"

"What do you mean, what took me so long? I was sitting there embarrassed to death," she stated.

He smiled rather delightedly. "I would assume that after a minute or, so when you saw Andrew leave you'd get the message and come home."

"Your hints were rather vague," she snipped.

"Next time, I'll be more blunt," William promised.

She balked. "Next time? There won't be a next time. You're going to get out."

He stood so abruptly, she didn't have time to even step back, but instead craned her neck to follow his eyes. He smiled wickedly pulling her into his arms. "Do you know how much I've yearned to hold you upright in my arms, woman?" His lips dipped down to suckle her neck. "Do you know how much I've wanted you since you've been gone?"

Whatever she was mad at him about, completely went out of her mind, as he scooped her up and took her straight in the bathroom.

Abigail knew then, for the past two years she'd been lying to herself about how she felt about William, and no matter what, they were destined to be together.

Chapter 31

"You're distracted, aren't you?" Romare asked for the up-tenth time.

"No," she lied, because she had heard absolutely nothing of the first twenty minutes of conversation he'd doled out. "I'm horrible company today, Romare."

"You've been horrible company all week, Abigail. Ever since the ball, you've been acting strange. Did William's standing you up really affect you?" he asked, very concerned.

"Yes, it did." More than anyone would know, she told herself. Gossip going around town since the ball was how William was now available and quite over Ms. Abigail Yvonne McPherson. It was like a big announcement for a lot of single women, but Abigail didn't care. William had, once again, taken advantage of her and was giving her a choice to tell her father. This wasn't what worried her the most though. Her period was supposed to start three days ago and she was late. She was never late and she shouldn't have been with him, knowing that she wasn't taking anything to protect herself.

On top of that, this morning, she was contacted by Taylor Bellini, International Western Operations Chief of Bellini Real Estate, one of the largest real estate holding companies in the world. Taylor Bellini asked her to come to Chicago, in two weeks, with her portfolio, to meet with Dalton Bellini, CEO of Bellini Enterprises and Alexander Bellini, CEO of St. Royal Enterprises, a company consisting of hotels, motels, and resort operations. It was even known that St. Royal Enterprises held an island near the Bermuda

Triangle and was looking to change it into a luxurious resort, which would be a wonderful accomplishment for Abigail. Already, she could just imagine her designs and themes running throughout the place. To get in on the ground floor of something this spectacular was a once in a lifetime opportunity.

The way Taylor Bellini spoke, the companies wanted some major work, but of course Dalton and Alexander wanted to meet her in a business setting, check out her portfolio, and her references. Taylor was already convinced of Abigail's talents and this meant a lot for Abigail, because to acquire such a large account would mean a lot of money for her and her initial start up company.

“That's it,” Romare said in frustration. “I'm taking you home. How are you supposed to hear my big announcement, when you seem to have one of your own swimming around in your head?”

“I have nothing to announce,” she defended herself.

“Then, what's bothering you and if you say 'nothing' one more time, I'll call you a liar and demand William's head,” he teased.

“Can we go somewhere private, Romare? I really don't want to be here,” she said, very seriously.

They left Peachy's and he took her to his apartment. She was quite exhausted. As soon as they got in, she left her shoes at the door and went to the sofa. He didn't live far from her, in some nice, townhouse that he was part-investor of. “So, can I know?” he asked, sitting beside her.

She cuddled in his arms and closed her eyes. “I haven't been sleeping well.”

“Can you tell me why?” he asked casually holding her close.

“I think I'm pregnant.”

He stiffened. “What makes you think that?”

“I missed my cycle. I've never missed my cycle. It's like clockwork, and I did...” She bit her lip. “I didn't use any protection and I should have, but I didn't. It happened more than once with him that night and it was bound to happen, but I forgot. I forgot everything and now I have to tell my father.”

“Single parents aren't out of the ordinary in this day and age, Abigail,” Romare reassured her.

“Of course not,” she agreed.

“You think your father will have a problem with this?”

Abigail shook her head. “Daddy wouldn't care if the father was Godzilla, as long as it wasn't William.”

He chuckled. “Well, it's a good thing it's not.”

Abigail looked up at him, her eyes filled with guilt.

The smile slowly went off his face, as he read the seriousness in her eyes. "That is not funny."

"I wasn't being funny," she said, with the never changing look in her eyes.

He jumped up from the couch, like she was some kind of virus. "Abigail, have you lost your mind?! Do you know what your father's going to do to me?"

She looked at him as if he had gone insane. "Do to you? Romare, you had nothing to do with it. If anything, my father will be a little mad at me."

"Mad? He's going to kill me! I promised that man...when? When?" he repeatedly demanded.

She huffed tiredly. "The night of the ball. He came to my apartment."

"That bastard stole my keys. He stole the extra set to your place! I knew he was being too nice. Dammit! He pulled that crap with Monica to throw me off, because he knew I wouldn't let him near you."

She calmed him down. "Romare, you had nothing to do with it. I could have made him leave any time, but I didn't. It wasn't your fault."

He plopped down next to her, defeated. "When I'm beat to death by your father's bare hands, you make sure you say that over my dead carcass."

She became frustrated. "My father won't kill you, Romare and there are more important things than what I might be."

"What else? He's going to marry you?" he cried incredulously.

Abigail crinkled her nose impishly. "No, actually, I haven't heard hide nor hair from him since that night. I woke up and he was gone. He left four roses on the pillow next to me and the only thing I had to prove that he had been there, was the indent in the bed from his gigantic body. I thought about calling him, but I decided against that. If he wanted to speak to me, he would have called by now. He used me and I'm not going to be upset. I'm going to go on, as if nothing happened."

"And in six months, when you can't see your toes, what are you going to do? Tell everyone it's a cyst?" Romare asked, sarcastically, sitting next to her again.

For the first time since she had come to Davenport, Abigail laughed so hard tears streamed down her face. It felt so good to laugh and by the time she calmed herself down, she was so exhausted that she couldn't move a muscle. "I'm not moving," she said up to him, as she lay in his lap with her eyes closed. "I'm going to sleep and I'm not waking up until tomorrow."

"Don't you think you should go home?" he suggested.

"No. He might come."

"That's true. He still has the key, but he hasn't been back since the ball."

Abigail exhaled tiredly. “William's very unpredictable. I'm beginning to think he doesn't know what he wants.”

“What do you want, Abigail?” he asked softly.

She breathed in deeply and after a few seconds responded exhaustibly, “I want my ball back.”

Romare thought it an odd statement to make; but nevertheless, allowed her to fall asleep. She seemed as if she really needed it.

* * *

A door closing made Abigail come awake and the leopard bed spread quickly put her in her right mind. Looking down at herself, she wore only her slip and underwear. Someone had taken off her dress and put her in a king-sized feather bed. She slept like a baby throughout the night and waking up was quite refreshing.

“Good morning,” Romare said, coming out of his private bathroom, brushing his teeth, with a towel wrapped around his waist and a cloth in his hand.

Her eyes moved up and down the well cut lean body and smiled wickedly delighting in what she saw. “If I wasn't so enamored by the gorgeous body on William, I would certainly jump your bones right quickly.”

He spit the toothpaste out and wiped his mouth, but still used the brush, waving it about in the air as he spoke. “You give me more trouble than any woman I've ever met, Abigail McPherson, and you aren't even mine. I would gladly refuse any invitations of relationship with you, because your father would drive me crazy. If William wants you, he can have you. They'll drive each other crazy.”

She giggled, getting up from the bed and hugging him. “Thank you, Romare. You make me laugh and I need it so bad.”

“That's what I'm here for, comedy relief,” he said, dripping in acerbity.

Again she laughed, as he kissed her cheek.

“Am I interrupting something?” a casual, cold tone asked at the doorway.

Abigail recognized the voice immediately and looked in the direction. William leaned against the frame, wearing khaki's and a plaid shirt. It reminded Abigail of those nights he used to come to her room, dressed in the same kind of clothes. “Yes, you were,” she said stiffly. Moving away from Romare, she picked up her dress and purse from the end of the bed and went into the private bathroom to get dressed and to refresh herself.

"It's not what you think," Romare said defensively, as William assessed the tousled bedding and Romare's state of dress.

A curious brow raised and William asked in a transparent tone of voice. "It isn't? What am I thinking brother?"

"You're thinking something you shouldn't be thinking. You need to calm down," Romare placated him, putting on a heavy terry-cloth robe. "I can tell you're mad, because I can see your heartbeat in your temple."

The glow in William's eyes was very evident as he turned out of the room to go down into the kitchen. Abigail came out of the bathroom, pulling her hair up in a loose ponytail, and used her hair to wind it around at the base. "Is he gone?"

"No," Romare said, very disappointed.

She shrugged with insouciant. "I'm leaving anyway. I used my cell to get a cab downstairs, it's waiting for me outside. Thank you again."

He walked her out to the front door and watched her jump into the waiting cab. Reluctantly, he found William staring pensively out of the kitchen window into the backyard.

"You had it good, Romare," he said. "You weren't around when it was bad. That's why Mom kept you away. I forgot about you and I think she wanted it that way. She didn't want you to be affected by the madness. I'm glad you weren't. I'm glad she spared you from all of it." He finally looked at Romare, not at all angry, yet oddly calm. "You're the best man for her. You won't hurt her like I keep doing."

"I don't want her, William," he said adamantly.

Proudly, he said, "I can take defeat like a man. I won't kill you, like her father will, when he finds out."

"I don't want her! Did you hear me?" Romare insisted.

William set the coffee cup down just as cool as can be and walked up to Romare. In two seconds, he had Romare pinned up on the wall, a foot from the ground. "You fuck her?"

"We didn't do anything! Dammit, William, what the hell is wrong with you?" He was losing breath as he struggled to get out of William's death grip. "Nothing...happened!"

William released him. "She makes me crazy. She makes me like this." In frustration, he ran several fingers through his head. "But I can't help it. I have to have her." Slumping in the nearest kitchen chair he covered his eyes. "I'll make her choose. I'll go to her and tell her it's either Ramsey or me. Whoever she chooses, I'll accept it."

“And if it's not you?” Romare asked between gasps of air.

“I'll leave. I won't step foot in this god-forsaken town for as long as there's breath in my body.”

Romare smiled wickedly. “I think she's already made her decision, then.”

“How? I haven't even asked,” William pointed out.

Romare pulled a chair up to his brother. “William, you don't beat around the bush with anything. Why are you pussyfooting around with her? If you wanted her before she left, why did you let her father keep you away?”

William shook his head, disgruntled. “I thought if I gave her a little room to breathe, she would come to her senses and come back. When she didn't and I spent all that money, while her father sent me on a wild goose chase, I decided to give up and just wait for her to come to me. I didn't know she was in town, until I saw the two of you at the club and after that, I waited for her. I was as patient as possible and then, when I saw the keys to her apartment here, I couldn't resist. It was all too easy. What the hell is wrong with her? She doesn't know what she wants.”

This sounded all too familiar to Romare. “Why don't you just go buy the ring and ask her?”

“Ask her what?” he asked indignantly.

Romare sighed. “To marry you, William. You can't be that dense, when it comes to her feelings.”

“If you know something, then tell me.”

“William, she hasn't revealed to me what she really feels about you,” Romare admitted. “She let me know that you two have been intimate and that her father might be killing mad about the results of that, and when she didn't hear from you afterwards, she figured you didn't want anything to do with her. You've already embarrassed her in front of the whole town.”

He gave an euphoric smile. “That was payback for going away for two years and making me look like a love sick fool.”

“Yet, she still allowed you to make love to her or was she just horny?”

“She can't deny me,” he said rather arrogantly.

Romare groaned. “You just answered your own initial question about who she's going to choose! You're just pussy footing now.”

William sat back and thought about everything.

Romare watched the turmoil in his brother's features. William abruptly stood and walked out, without another word.

Chapter 32

The rest of Abigail's day was oddly strange. Thanksgiving was approaching in one week and she decided to go grocery shopping with her mother. This kept her very busy and she enjoyed Marilyn's constant chatter about different things going on in the city. For some reason though, throughout the day as they visited several different stores, Abigail felt as if she were being watched.

Since she knew William had the keys to her apartment, she decided to lie to her parents about spending time with them for the holidays. She was caught up on all her accounts and the two she had just opened weren't going to be able to view her designs until after Thanksgiving.

The day before Thanksgiving came and Abigail was sitting quietly in the library in the early morning hours, doing some free-hand sketches. Her father entered and looked at her drawings. "You are very talented," he complimented. "Your mother showed me your updated portfolio and I was very impressed."

"Thank you, Daddy," she said sincerely, with pride.

Ramsey sat down across from her, studying her haggard appearance. "You aren't sleeping well. When are you going to tell me why?"

"When are you going to stop being concerned about me?" she asked, trying to avoid the question.

"When you stop keeping what's in your heart away from me?"

She put the pad down and stretched tiredly. "There's so much in my heart, I don't know where to begin."

He leaned close to her with concern in his eyes. "I love you, Abigail, and no matter what you choose to do in life, the bottom line is that as long as you're happy, I'm happy."

She wanted so desperately to believe him, but whenever it concerned William she knew the criteria of his words changed. Avoiding his eyes, she picked up the sketchpad and held it against her chest as if to protect her from him. "I'm fine. I just need to be with my family and I'll be okay."

"That's another thing, Abigail. You've had a taste of freedom and you value it so greatly, yet you're here. Is there something wrong with your place?" he inquired.

"It's been violated."

He frowned worriedly. "Was there a break in?"

"No, it's just not the same. I can't sleep there."

"You can't sleep here."

"Daddy, please, just give me time," she implored.

The doorbell rang and she used this as an excuse to get away from him, to go see that was there.

The security guard opened the door to a very beautiful Rebecca, who was smiling from ear to ear. Abigail rushed in her grandmother's arms very glad for the distraction. Rebecca had a way of causing things to happen, when she came. Amazingly, everyone was glad that she had come to visit. Once her bags were taken to her regular room, she settled in the library.

"You look well, Abigail. I haven't seen you since I came up to Detroit last year. How was the graduation? I'm sorry I couldn't attend," Rebecca said, very remorseful.

Abigail smiled warmly. "It's okay. The graduation went well, Grandmother. You look so happy."

"She should," Marilyn said with a wicked wink. "She's seeing someone."

"You are? Who?" Abigail asked, shocked.

"Just an old acquaintance I bumped into about two years ago, after I returned home. We've been seeing each other off and on. Stanley's quite nice."

"So why this unexpected visit, Mother?" Ramsey asked stiffly.

Abigail assumed her father's upset was over Rebecca's new interest. She would probably act the same way if one of her parents were seeing someone else, even if the other were dead. Change was sometimes hard to accept.

Marilyn passed Abigail a glass of iced tea, as Rebecca began to answer Ramsey. "Last night, I wasn't feeling well. I felt rather nauseous if you must know, and when I went to sleep, all I dreamed about were babies."

The glass dropped out of Abigail's hand and Marilyn rushed to help her daughter wipe up the mess on the hardwood floor.

"Anything else, Mother?" Ramsey asked.

"No, well, yes. I don't know why, but this morning on my way here, my mind was wandering and I thought about those old dreams that made me come before. I wasn't asleep, but it was as if my mind replayed one of my apparitions when I see something fierce standing above Abigail in the park and she's unconscious." She sighed, very bothered. "I don't know why my mind thought of that all of a sudden and it terrified me. I booked the red eye straight here, because I needed to see if I was too late."

"So you think your premonitions might come true. Someone might still try to hurt Abigail?" Ramsey asked his mother, very concerned.

"Well I want to know about the baby," Marilyn teased.

"Mother, that's not funny," Abigail snipped.

Marilyn saw the serious look on Abigail's face. "You work too hard to even have time for anything. I'd be very surprised if you found time to meet someone and get married."

"You don't have to be married to have babies," Rebecca pointed out.

Abigail shot her grandmother a cold look. "I would very much like this subject dropped."

"Abigail, your grandmother is only teasing," Marilyn said. "Calm down. You act as if you're having a baby."

She cackled falsely. "That would be funny." Standing up, she dropped the napkins she had been using to clean the floor and left the room immediately.

"Her sense of humor had diminished, due to lack of sleep," Ramsey explained to his mother.

Abigail stopped around the corner to listen to their conversation.

"Something's bothering her," Rebecca stated.

"Don't start that again. She has assured us repeatedly that she wants nothing to do with William and he made a fool out of her just last month at the policeman's ball," Marilyn said. "I think that's what's causing all of this. Abigail's used to being the center of attention and being sympathized all of the time. She hasn't adjusted to the whispers about her emotional state, rather than her physical state. You two are jumping to conclusions. What? You think William's sneaking in her apartment?"

"It would explain why she won't go home," Ramsey pointed out.

"That's just ridiculous. Why would he go around and make a fool out of her in public, then go back behind our backs and start the same stuff all over again? It doesn't make sense, Ramsey, and you know it," Marilyn stated emphatically.

"It doesn't make sense because he didn't want us to know. That devious son of a bitch! I ought to go over there and confront him!" Ramsey sneered.

His wife said, "Calm down, Ramsey. You have to remember your blood pressure. If Abigail and William were together, don't you think we would know by now? The press has been following him around since Abigail walked into town. They would have said something by now and your daughter wouldn't start all this all over again, knowing the heartache you would suffer knowing that she was keeping something of this nature from you."

Abigail felt awful and was about to go back into the library, when the doorbell rang again. The same security guard signed for the package and turned to Abigail with the box. She placed the box on the hallway table and opened the note addressed to her with the word, "Sweetheart," written on the front of the card. Opening the card, she read, "Come to me at noon wearing only the present. Deny me nothing." It wasn't signed, but it didn't need to be. She knew exactly who sent the box.

Her pulse quickened as she opened the present and pulled out a full-length black mink, with a hood. Marilyn came out of the library to see who was at the door and gasped at the beautiful coat. “Who gave you that?” she inquired.

“I guess, a secret admirer. It didn't have any card attached,” she blatantly lied.

“Who was the sender?” Marilyn persisted.

Abigail pretended she had no idea, but was concerned. “No one to verify. It just has the local post office address.”

“It's beautiful, Abigail. Are you going to keep it?”

“I don't think I should. I think I should send it back, don't you think?”

“No. I'd keep it if I were a single, beautiful woman. Someone loves you, with a gift like that. Whoever sent it will eventually reveal who they are to you. Any man giving a gift like that wants the whole world to know who gave you that.” Marilyn smiled wickedly. “You don't think it's from Romare, do you?”

“He says I'm too much trouble and I'm not even his. I think Daddy's giving him an ulcer.”

Marilyn only chuckled. “Romare's sweet.”

“He's also head over heels in love with Monica Bridgeclub and wouldn't even dream of ever wanting anyone else, although if I wasn't-” she stopped abruptly.

“If you weren't what?”

“-so busy, I wouldn't mind trying to take him away.” Quickly gathering her gift box and coat, she went up to and looked at the clock; it read ten o'clock in the morning. If she refreshed hurriedly and caught a cab over there, she would be able to make it in time.

* * *

When Abigail arrived at the office, no one was around, but the guard let her through. William's operations were moved into a downtown office building, using two floors of the seventeen-story building. As far as she knew, he still operated a full service garage in the same place, but very much expanded. With his plans selling to the Big three companies and overseas operations, he was very busy in the automotive world. Who wouldn't be proud of this man? So why wouldn't she make up her mind if she wanted to be with him? Because she didn't know if the past was settled, mainly, and if his feelings were still the same. She wanted her old William back. Were the steps he was taking now, the steps to lead her back to that man, who came to her in the middle of the nights to hold her tight, as if tomorrow would never come?

Opening the office door, his eyes rose to meet hers. They were a cool, honey brown, yet filled with so much passion that she thought her heart would burst. Approaching the desk, she moved around to stand

beside him, with the coat drawn closed. He turned slowly, assessing the coat. She could feel his eyes trying to bore into what was beyond the coat. His hands opened the coat as she stepped between his legs to reveal that she was wearing nothing underneath, except black heels and garter stockings. The smile on his lips played havoc with her emotions and she returned the smile with one of her own, filled with enjoyment to his touch as his hands moved to her stomach, then up to her breast to cup one in each hand. He kissed her belly and licked a straight line from her navel to the soft, moist mound between her own legs. She threw her head back, allowing her mind, body and soul to succumb to the pleasure his mouth gave her. He pulled her leg up and she balanced carefully, resting her hands on his shoulders. Just as she was about to explode, he withdrew and sat back, pulling away from her.

Her confusion was evident, wondering why he stopped.

“Why did you come to me, Abigail? What do you want from me?” he asked, deeply confused.

Abigail moved her leg down, a little shaken by her still aroused state. Pulling the coat closed, she turned away, needing to think. She wanted to express to him the right words that would get them to the beginning of all of this. When she faced him again, she said softly, “I want my ball back?”

He looked on the brink of exploding with several different emotions. “You remember? You remember everything Abigail?”

She could feel his need to know this. So much of what they shared started with the day they first met. “I was so young William. I didn't know that what I felt then would be a part of me now, but it is. I remember everything.”

He stood up and came to her pulling her, in his arms. “How much?”

“Everything,” Abigail answered. “You took my ball that day of the accident and the pain didn't matter physically anymore, because you walked away. You left me and I blocked out everything, because it hurt so much to see you leave me there. I needed you more than anything, but I understand now, that you couldn't be seen there. You left so that we could be together now. So we could share those memories with our children and grandchildren-”

He kissed her deeply. “Is that what you want from me, Abigail?”

She cupped his face. “I don't want you to leave me again, William. I don't care what it takes. I want us to be together.”

Again his mouth possessed her hard and long, until she was panting and pressing her body against his. He then kissed her eyes, mouth, nose and neck, leaving a very evident love bite.

The phone ringing made them stop what they were doing and look over toward the desk. On the third ring, he drew away with a groan, joining her own, to pick up the receiver. Abigail watched his

expression become very grim and his body became tight. She moved over to him as he replaced the receiver and leaned over the desk, deeply troubled.

She placed her hand on his back for comfort and felt his body repose under tense strain. He slowly sat in the chair, looking very upset. Moving in front of him, she waited patiently for his turmoil to be revealed.

“He's dead,” he said quietly.

“Who?” she asked concerned.

“My father.” He swallowed. “I don't know if I should be happy or sad. He caused me nothing but pain, yet...he was the last family I had and somehow I know he... in the deep recesses of his insanity, he loved me.” He slammed a fist hard against the desk and she could hear the thick oak splint. She took his palm in her own hand and kissed the knuckle gently. His other arm moved around her waist and he buried his face in her stomach. “I've been so scared that I'll become insane, but I know now, it's not hereditary. I won't ever be like him. I know this now and I'll know it forever.”

She consoled him, running her hands through his short, cut hair, “I know, William.”

“You've known all along. Since the beginning, haven't you? It was you who changed me Abigail. I could have left from Edward's house that day and become like my father. I was so mad at Enid, I wanted to hurt someone just because, but then, I met you and it all changed.” His look of gratefulness beamed up at her. “I want us to make lots of babies, Abigail McPherson.”

She laughed, crawling in his lap. “Then we'd better hurry up and get started, William Stone.”

“Say the name,” he ordered softly.

She smiled mischievously, giving him an Eskimo kiss, “Yared,” she whispered, rolling the 'R' just as he had done a long time ago.

That was all he needed to arouse the passion he'd held in check for too long. He raised her up and freed himself to join with her. They didn't even bother to remove the coat and they didn't bother to remove themselves from the chair.

* * *

Ramsey stood outside of the office, almost embarrassed at what he heard. He'd arrived only after he heard William mumbling something about saying his name. He couldn't see the woman, because the hood had been drawn up over her head. He was about to leave, but curiosity was killing him. Never in his life would he imagine any woman enjoying the pleasure of William's company and he didn't really believe that his own daughter had succumbed to William on her own free will in the past. He still believed somehow, that

William forced Abigail to this day and she just didn't want to admit it. His daughter never discussed how many times she had been with William and Ramsey made himself believe it had only been one time.

Still, hearing this woman's delighted moans of pleasure, made Ramsey see William in a new light. He wasn't a monster. His accomplishments in the community and his many contacts, Ramsey knew, told him so, yet...

If it were anybody except William Stone, Ramsey would be proud to have him as a son-in-law, but it *'was'* Stone and Ramsey couldn't fathom the man becoming any part of the McPherson family. Still, Abigail was acting miserable again and he had to wonder was it because of Stone?

He didn't want to wait any longer, so he moved to the doorway to interrupt them. William and the woman were passionately kissing. Ramsey could briefly see the woman's lips, but the hood covered the rest of her face. He almost wanted to walk over to the desk and pull the hood off, just to see who it was.

William only acknowledged Ramsey with a single look, but continued to arouse the woman.

In irritation, Ramsey cleared his throat. The woman gasped and tried to get off William, but the young man wrapped his arms protectively around her and held the hood in place to cover her identity. His shirt was torn opened and Ramsey noted the fresh fingernail marks on his shoulder, where the young lady had gripped him.

"I'm sorry to interrupt you, Stone," Ramsey said.

"Then, don't," William growled.

"This is a matter of importance."

"It can wait."

The young woman buried her face in Stone's shoulder.

"Come sweetheart, don't be so shy in front of the mayor of Davenport," William coaxed her, and then he winced in pain no doubt from a secret pinch somewhere by the woman. "My love is quite shy, your honor. Can you come back at another time, when we aren't so busy?"

"I just came to let you know about your father," Ramsey stated.

"I know."

The room was quiet as the men, in silent gaze, acknowledged that there was no need to even think William was anything like his father and that what happened a long time ago was put to rest.

"I just wanted to give you my condolences personally," Ramsey said, very remorseful.

William strained. "He was old and sick. It was his time. Putting him away in that place was best for; not only him, but everyone, McPherson."

“Again, I’m sorry to interrupt.”

“Have a nice night, Mayor.”

Ramsey left feeling very awkward, but he paused after he closed the door to hear William growl teasingly, “I was being nice, woman.” He chuckled sensuously. “Just because you didn’t want him seeing you, doesn’t mean you have to make me suffer.” A groan came from the room, but Ramsey couldn’t be sure if it was from William or the woman. “You’ll be the only death of me, sweetheart if you keep doing that.”

The woman laughed softly.

“Sweet, sweet death,” William moaned.

Ramsey left, too embarrassed. He shouldn’t have stayed so long afterwards, invading upon the young man’s privacy like such. William was a very private man and whom he involved himself with was really none of Ramsey’s business, since it didn’t concern Abigail. Although, telling his daughter that William was thoroughly over her, would be nice. It would put a definite closure to all of the past.

Chapter 33

After several knocks on his door, William opened it to see Andrew standing there, looking as if the world had collapsed around him. “I said I’d be over tonight, Drew. Camp can’t wait to serve the turkey? It’s only six o’clock.”

“C-Camp’s dead,” Andrew said, as if he couldn’t believe the words coming out of his mouth.

William grabbed his jacket and followed Andrew. They drove to Akron, Ohio, where Camp had resided about a year ago. It took three hours and the police had already removed the body, taken the pictures and did the fingerprints. He talked to the investigator in charge, Investigator Mark Roberts.

“He was just adding the finishing touches to Thanksgiving and answered his door. He had to know the killer, because there was no struggle. The killer was invited in and shot the victim in the back. The place was ransacked.”

“Camp didn’t know a lot of people,” William explained. “He kept to himself. Matter of fact, the only family he had left was his nephew, then there’s me and some of the guys he worked with at the shop.”

“Had you spoken to him before all this, today?” Investigator Roberts questioned.

“He called me up about two days ago and said that he went down to the shop to clean up some of the old stuff, from when we first started. It used to be just Camp, a guy named Stuckey and myself, but Stuckey kind of disappeared after my trial.” He knew the investigator was familiar with William’s past.

“Camp ran a pretty good office, but that stuff he and Stuckey packed away was like a fire hazard. Camp told me that he would go down there and clean out the old lockers that belonged to Stuckey and himself, which the new guys just never touched. A little bit after the trial, we had a fire and we just kind of threw a lot of those lockers in storage to sort out later. Later on, after I knew that he'd been working on the lockers, he called me and told me that he had some stuff he really thought I needed to see and he wanted me out here with Drew for Thanksgiving.”

“That's all?” the investigator asked.

“That's all I remember, sir.”

The investigator handed him a card. “Call me if you find anything else. I'd like you to go in and see if there's anything that you think might be out of the ordinary or something that you would need. We picked through a lot of things, but we didn't find anything suspicious.” He gave Andrew and William some gloves.

William looked around Camp's small, one bedroom home and found nothing that would be out the ordinary for Camp, but Andrew stopped at the fireplace and frowned.

“What is it?” William asked.

“There's real wood in the fireplace,” Andrew pointed out.

“And?”

Andrew explained, “This is a fake fireplace and when I came out here last time, about a week ago, Camp didn't have this here. Why would he put real wood in a fake fireplace?”

“For decoration?” William surmised.

They both looked around the old furniture-laden, peeling paint, walled-room. Camp was definitely not into fashion, so having the real wood there would be out of the ordinary. William squatted and pulled the iron basket that held the wood. Underneath the basket, some of the bricks were cut fresh. William used his pocketknife to dig into the side of the bricks and pick them up, until five of them were up and he could see there was a compartment underneath.

“Find me a flashlight kid, then get that investigator in here,” he ordered Andrew, who then produced a flashlight.

William reached down in the compartment to pull out an old duffel bag. There was dried blood on it and part of the bag was burned. Opening up the bag, he saw bloodied clothes and then a leather pouch, with the initials 'MC' on the front. Opening up the pouch, there was identification of different names, but as he picked up one of the cards with a picture on it, everything clicked.

The same person who had been killing the people in Lowry Park killed Camp. This was also the same person who had been trying to frame William for the murders.

Standing up with the bag, he carried it over to a phone table by the sofa, where the phone and a notebook sat. The writing on the notebook caught his attention, because it was an address. Picking up the phone number, he pushed the redial button and heard the answering machine come on: "Hi, you've reached Abigail McPherson. I'm not at home at this time, but if you'll leave your name and number, I will call you back immediately."

Dropping the receiver, he ran out of the door with one purpose in mind. He had to save Abigail.

* * *

David and Ella stopped by the McPherson's for Thanksgiving and the night was very enjoyable for all of them. After dinner, David, Ramsey, and Abigail adjourned to the library. Somehow the subject went to the murders and what became of David's investigation of Marshall Crane.

"He used so many aliases, we could never find another definite trace on him. There is a most-wanted by the FBI, but wherever he may be, we don't know. I am positive that he was the one committing the murders in retaliation toward William, but William will never confess if he was near Lowell when he was tortured, although there were several eyewitnesses that say William came to the bar in the preceding days of Lowell Crane's death."

"Do you think he's out there right now, thinking of ways to get William then?" Abigail questioned.

"After the trial I thought he'd show his face up, but when nothing happened, we didn't know what to do," David answered.

"That's why I built the memorial," her father explained. "To put the horror to rest, Abigail. We all felt we let the citizens down. To this day, David keeps the case opened, but no clues have come to the surface. As suddenly as the murders started, they stopped just the same and if the murderer is still present in Davenport, unless we try to fingerprint every citizen, we can't find him. His prints have never shown up anywhere else."

They changed the subject, because her mother came into the room. Marilyn was still strict about discussing the murders in the house and the trio understood and respected this.

"You're looking so healthy," Ella noted of Abigail's appearance. "Practically glowing. Are you that happy to be at home?"

"Yes. I missed my family," Abigail said.

"I haven't seen anyone glow like that since..." Ella's words faltered, but then she excused herself from the room.

David saw the grayness come to his wife's expression and followed her out the room. Abigail excused herself as well to follow them into the living room. They were talking quietly. "Are you alright?" she asked Ella.

"No, I just felt strange. I needed a little breath of air."

Abigail started to turn away, but David called her. She looked at him. "Are you pregnant, Abigail?"

Abigail stiffened and would have answered if Michael did not find that the perfect opportunity to cry. "I'd better make sure that the baby is okay," she said hurriedly dismissing herself.

When she settled her brother down, she slipped out of the door and took a cab to her place. As she walked up to the building she bumped into someone so hard that she almost slipped back, but two hands gripped her arm. She looked up into her savior's face was gripped by terror, as she looked into eyes that were like a blast from the past. The man let her go and took off running.

The doorman, Elbert, came out to help her up. "Are you alright, Ms. McPherson?"

"Yes, who was that?" she asked.

"He's been coming by to fix some strange leaking in the wash room since this morning. Did he knock you down?" Elbert asked, concerned.

"No, but I thought I knew him." She pushed the thought out of her mind and went up to her apartment. As soon as she stepped from the elevator, she knew something was wrong. From the elevator, she could see her apartment door was wide open. Stepping into the apartment, she saw her things were ransacked. Going up into her apartment, her bed was slashed, as if someone had taken a knife and deliberately lacerated the mattress, the pillows, and covering. Going into the private bathroom, she gripped her chest as her heart rate raced uncontrollably. On the mirror in red marker read: "IT'S NOT OVER!"

She ran down the stairs, but missed one step and skipped the last one, spraining her ankle. Who would do this? Who would terrorize her apartment and write those words? Where had that man really come from? Why did his eyes remind her of...her sister?

Going back down to Elbert, she hysterically told him what happened. He called the police and, of course, notified her father. As she sat there trying to calm herself down, rubbing her sprained ankle, she realized who that man was and knew that she had to tell William, because if what she thought was the truth; William was in a lot of trouble. She ordered Elbert to flag her down a cab.

He protested, "Your father and David Reichard are on the way. They told me to keep you calm."

"I need to get to William! He's in trouble," she told him.

Elbert heard the edge in her voice and flagged down a cab for her. She jumped in, ignoring the throbbing of her ankle and told the driver where to go, but as the cab pulled away, she looked beside her out of the window and saw William pulling up to her apartment.

“Wait!” she ordered the cab driver. “Stop!”

The door locks went down and the cab kept going.

“Driver, I said stop,” she ordered again, turning to look at him in the rearview mirror.

Eyes of greenish gray glared back at her. He took off his black cap to reveal red, curly hair. “Like I said, Abigail McPherson, it's not over.”

Desperately, she tried the door as he accelerated the car, heading for Lowry Park. There was no escape and she didn't know what else to do. He pulled into a dark spot of the park and reached into a bag beside him, pulling out a familiar ten-inch blade. “My father was lied to. Your bitch of a mother lied to him twisted his heart and then, when he didn't satisfy her enough, she ran right back to that son-of-bitch, Ramsey McPherson. My daddy should have finished the job, and he was going to, until William decided to get revenge, because he was too much of a coward to stop my father in the first place. I'm going to gut you out while you're still alive. You're going to watch as I insert this knife into your body and unravel your intestines, then I'm going to wrap them around your neck and choke you with them.”

She tried kicking at the door with her good right leg, then the window, but she didn't make a dent. He got out of the front and came around to the back. She moved to the farthest door, as he opened the opposite door and reached in to grab her. She fought with everything she had, but he was intent. When he dragged her out of the car, she got a good footing and kicked him with her bad leg, as hard as she could in his shin. The pain raced up the back of her left leg, but fear overwhelmed her. He let her go and she ran, but was then tackled from behind. Her head hit a rock on the side of her jaw and she felt the earth swirl around her eyes as she pushed herself on her back.

He stood above her, victoriously nefarious. “There's no where to run to now, Abigail.”

“W-Why?” she asked, to stall. Maybe he didn't see that William had seen her leaving and hopefully, William had followed her.

Maybe in the last moments of her life, she would be watching as he gutted her unborn baby out of her body.

“Patience is a virtue, Abigail. When I couldn't get William where he really belonged, I that decided I must finish what my father started, then take care of William, just as I am going to take care of you. You are first, though. I want it in order, just like it should have happened.” He knelt down to his knees, over her body.

With the last ounce of her strength and the world spinning around her faster and faster, she pushed back until she couldn't anymore and a tree stopped her motion. "M-My baby...I didn't do anything," she cried fervently trying to think of anything to get out of this.

He fearsomely gripped the blade, raising it slowly up in the air to the side of his own, slightly freckled face. "My father hated you. You were the one that united your parents back together. She would have left Ramsey, if it hadn't been for you."

"T-That's not true," she said frantically.

He backhanded her angrily, the sharp point of the knife scraping above her eye. Blood came down her face and unconsciousness was fighting with her to sink into the darkness. If she was going to die, she would face it with her eyes wide open and alert as possible.

"Time to die, Abigail McPherson," he avowed.

He lowered the knife slowly. Abigail's hand felt like dead weight, until the second the blade touched the skin near her pelvis. She covered his hands with her own to stop the slow decent of the blade into her body. She screamed hysterically, as an inch of the steel disappeared inside of her and more inched it's way into her body.

Out of nowhere, William burst from the bushes and shoved her attacker off of Abigail taking the knife with him.

"Hurry up and face me, Stuckey, so you can die like the rest you've killed," William gnarled.

Stuckey turned sharp greenish/gray eyes to William, pointing the knife at him. "She should have died a long time ago, Billy," he sneered in a menace. "I'm only completing what my father started."

"Your father was nothing, but a love-sick ass, who felt that everyone else should suffer for his inadequacy," William taunted.

Stuckey swiped the blade thrice at William, but William dodged the sharp blade all three times, with his amazing speed.

Abigail used the distraction William gave in order to apply pressure to her bleeding stomach and get up out of the way. Despite the dizziness that she felt, She spotted the taxi, still running and headed towards the vehicle.

"Your father killed many more, for his own sense of justice," Stuckey pointed out. "You should have finished his work."

"Then die in an asylum just like him? Never!" William seethed. "Unlike you, I don't intend to follow in my father's footsteps."

“I won't, be either,” Stuckey proclaimed.

“Really?” William asked arrogantly. “Because I swear I'm going to break you inch, by inch just like I did your old man.” William partially dodged another swipe and gasped as the tip slashed in the middle of his chest. Blood appeared from the wound Stuckey caused.

Stuckey's sneer was filled with contempt, seeing he drew first blood. “It's an omen, Billy. It means you'll be dying soon.”

“Not before I crack your skull,” William growled.

Stuckey lunged toward William's torso and this time, the blade pierced through the layer of skin on his right side. William gasped as warm blood oozed through his white shirt, soaking and molding the fabric to his body. He tore the shirt off, and wrapped it around his right hand and wrist.

“Not angry yet, are you Billy?” Stuckey snorted.

William only flinched.

“Your eyes have always beheld your true emotions. You could never lie with them. I'll take great pleasure in digging them out of your face and stuffing them, for my own personal enjoyment.”

“Why'd you kill Camp?” William demanded to know.

Stuckey's eyes narrowed to slits. “He found the shit that I thought you had thrown out.”

“I didn't throw it out,” William taunted. “You'll be finished by morning, Stuckey, but I must say, you did it all pretty well. Sticking close to me. Watching my every move.”

“Pinning you for murder was easy. Killing them and leaving evidence was even easier.” He slashed at William a few more times, but William easily dodged the swipes. Stuckey continued to speak, “Getting to McPherson's daughter to kill her wasn't. I thought you would succumb to your father's insanity and do the job for me. Then Ramsey could kill you and no one would be the wiser about Marshall Crane. Even that nosey little lawyer of yours would have given up once you were dead. They'll be glad I killed you, when they find both your bodies and see that you killed yourself, after you killed her.”

“I did?” William snorted this time.

“No more playing around, William. Time to die.” He pulled out a .38 caliber in his other hand. “I know you're no match for me hand to hand. I saw you break my father in half with your bare hands.”

Abigail moved behind the steering wheel and enclosed herself inside the car. William began backing away from Stuckey, towards the car. He shielded Abigail from seeing Stuckey all the way, but if she leaned to the right a little, she could see that Stuckey now had the upper hand, with the gun.

She blinked several times to clear her vision. Stuckey raised the gun and prepared to fire it. Forcing her left sprained foot to press the brake down, with her free hand, she pulled the bar to drive. She focused on William's back and watched it tense as he heard the motor change gears. She positioned her right foot over the accelerator. Holding down the brake was becoming excruciatingly hard and the pain shot through her legs like hot lava, yet if she released too early, she would run right over William. He had to get out of the way so she could take out Stuckey and she hoped it would be soon. 'Don't lose consciousness, Abby,' she told herself. 'It's almost over. William's got to have a plan.' She just hoped he hurried and enacted this getaway plan soon, before her pain level overflowed and she couldn't hold the car anymore.

Stuckey moved forward a step. "You just had to fall for her, didn't you? You're no better than my father, Billy, for falling for that whore's daughter."

William stayed quiet as he concentrated on the end of the gun and not Stuckey's words.

"All you had to do was break her neck. She was paralyzed, you stupid—"

William's fist struck Stuckey in the jaw. Abigail saw William move like lightening, swiftly laying another blow to Stuckey's abdomen. Stuckey jabbed the knife, still held in his other hand, in William's upper arm. William fell back on the side of the car, right after the gun went off.

Abigail jammed her foot on the pedal, just as Stuckey turned around to put another bullet in William. She held the steering wheel tight, as the hood seemed to scoop Stuckey up, holding him. Just as she realized Stuckey was aiming the gun at her, the airbag deployed and Abigail's consciousness left her.

Her last thoughts were that she should have told William about the baby.

* * *

Sirens were getting closer as he stood up, gripping his left arm. The pain didn't matter, as he forced his body to move to the car, forcing the front passenger door open and getting in next to Abigail. He had to hold her. Her breathing grew more and more shallow and he prayed that they would make it to them in time.

Chapter 34

"You don't fool me. You need to stop lounging around this place and get your ass up out of that bed!" a very angry Rebecca snapped. "Your father is going to drive this entire place insane, if you don't."

Abigail forced her eyes to open and she found Rebecca pacing in front of her bed. "Grandma?" she asked to be sure, not recognizing her own rasped voice. "Where's everyone?"

"I made them leave. For the umpteenth time this week, your father and that man have disrupted your rest, with their constant bickering about who will sit vigil by your side. This has been the hospital's most stressful week with the two of them around. I sent your father out to dinner with your mother to calm him down."

"William? Where is he?" she asked, concerned.

"None of that right now." Rebecca came around the bed and gently hugged and kissed her granddaughter, looking very grateful to see her. "You need your rest even more, now that we know you're going to be all right." She pressed the nurse button for assistance. "Are you hungry? Do you want anything?"

"No, I just want William. I have to tell him something," she said urgently.

Rebecca stiffened. "I can't in my right mind go and speak to that man. He scares the devil out of me with those horrible eyes and he's so mean."

"He's just concerned, Grandmother. Please. It's important."

"I'll go get him after the nurse comes," Rebecca promised, very uneasy.

A nice woman stepped in the room with a nurse's uniform on. Abigail watched her grandmother leave, but after an hour, Rebecca did not return and Abigail's pain medicine was making her drowsy. She called the nurse to her if there were any family members in the lobby, waiting for her.

The nurse looked rather put out, yet she said, "No, Ms. McPherson. There aren't any family members waiting for you."

Abigail felt very alone at that point and allowed the morphine to put her asleep, after the nurse helped her wash up and brush her teeth.

* * *

Coming awake again, by the desperate sound in her father's voice, she smiled groggily up at him. "We've missed you."

"I've missed you too, Daddy," she rasped.

Marilyn practically shoved her husband out of the way and held her daughter. "We were so scared. How are you?"

"In a lot of pain, but I'm alive and that's all that matters, right?" she teased. "What happened to Stuckey?"

“He's dead,” Ramsey said. “You crushed him with the car. He died instantly. We checked his fingerprints and DNA and we can now say that the Lowry Park murders are solved, with the evidence that was in the bag at Camp's place. Your injuries weren't life-threatening, although you lost a lot of blood.”

“Where's William?” she asked, concerned.

Ramsey stiffened. “I told him not to come here anymore.”

“You what?” she questioned incredulously.

“He wouldn't leave your side. I had to practically have the police drag him out.”

She gasped upset. “Daddy no! How could you?”

“I figured several days locked up would calm that mouth on him.”

“Stop it, Ramsey! Can't you see that you're sending her blood pressure up,” Marilyn said, playfully pushing her husband. “We only told him your health would be better served if he stayed away.”

“How could that help? I want him here!” Abigail insisted.

Her parents looked completely baffled, but Marilyn stiffly moved to the door and said, “You can get up from that floor. She says she does want you in here.”

William appeared instantly, with a large cast over his right arm and a bandage on his left. He looked horrible, but his eyes danced when they landed on Abigail. Romare followed behind William waving excitedly at her with concern in his green eyes. He came to the bed and was about to touch her hand, but Ramsey cleared his throat and William stopped.

“How are you?” William rigidly asked Abigail.

She looked at her father. “Can I have a private word with him, Daddy?”

Her father became very upset. “No! No! All right he saved your life, but you don't owe him shit, Abigail. None of this would have started if he didn't keep his damn hands to himself and his fucking temper in check.”

Marilyn tried to calm her husband, “Ramsey please.”

“No, I won't calm down, Marilyn,” her father bellowed. “I won't have this man anywhere alone with my daughter. Do you know he's got a whore already? Did you tell her that Stone? Did you tell her that you were fucking some bimbo in your office?”

Abigail's face went flushed.

Ramsey said, “I wouldn't make it up, Abigail. I swear I'm not. Tell her Stone. Tell her you were fucking some bitch-”

William cut him off, bellowing, “She already knows, McPherson and I don't think Abigail appreciates being called a whore or a bitch.”

Abigail wanted to swoon in embarrassment, yet before her father got a chance to respond to that, the doctor came in very upset. David came into the room also, with Ella right behind the doctor.

“I take it we came at a bad time to visit,” David said. “We can hear the two of you all the way down the hall.” He moved over to the bed and kissed Abigail on the cheek. “You look wonderful Angel.”

Stiffly, the doctor said, “I won't have the two of you yelling in this hospital again! Mayor McPherson, this is your daughter. Can't the two of you be cordial in some kind of way when you're around her?”

“No!” Both men yelled at him.

“Then I will ask the both of you to leave. Abigail and the baby are in a very precarious state of health and I won't have the two of you making her upset.”

The room went dead silent as everyone stared at Abigail.

Wringing her fingers nervously. “I was going to tell you, William, but when I got to the office with the coat on...the day your father died-”

Ramsey's first punch landed dead square in William's mouth. Her father lunged over the bed and tackled William to the ground and he began to choke him. David, Romare, and the security officers rushed into the room to drag Ramsey off of William.

“I'M REALLY GOING TO KILL YOU NOW!” Ramsey bellowed viciously, fighting the guards who held him.

William slowly got to his feet, still very weak from his injuries. “Why the hell are you trying to kill me?”

“You're the only one who's been poking her; brother dear, since she's come back,” Romare pointed out. “I think it's safe to assume the baby is yours.”

William looked at Abigail accusingly.

Abigail rolled her eyes heavenwards in exasperation. “I wanted it to be a private moment, William. I didn't want them finding out - Daddy, no!”

Her father loosed himself from the men holding him, and landed several more punches to William's face, before they again got hold of Ramsey. Romare helped William to a chair by the bed, trying to stop his brother's nosebleed, but William was trying to push Romare out the way.

Marilyn ordered the guards to take Ramsey out to calm down. Romare and the nurse straightened up the mess that was made and the doctor came to Abigail's side.

"The baby's fine," he assured her. "We stitched you up very well and we're looking forward to a natural delivery in the summer."

She smiled, very grateful. William looked absolutely stunned.

The doctor came over to check William's arm and new injuries to his face. "Let the nurse apply something and you'll be fine. I don't see any fracturing. Do you feel okay, Mr. Stone?"

William's eyes were glowing brighter than Abigail had ever seen and the doctor even took a step away, a little fearful for his life.

"Please leave," William growled low at everyone, but not taking his eyes off of Abigail.

Romare looked skeptical, but the heat searing from William's eyes, made him practically run out of the room. Abigail hadn't seen William look so angry before and she wondered why was the man losing his mind now.

"Is there a problem?" she asked, solemnly once they were alone.

"Is there a problem?" he asked, repeating her question.

"You can't answer a question with a question, William and certainly not with the same question I asked you," she protested.

"Don't you dare try to humor me out of my anger, woman. You knew about the baby." He jumped out of the chair and started furiously pacing on the side of her bed.

She admitted to this fact, "I did, but like I said, I was coming over to get the nerve to tell you and you just have ways of distracting me."

"You could have been killed!" he exclaimed, stopping right by her.

"I know this, William, which is why I demanded to see you when I came awake here. Why are you so angry with me? I didn't-"

His lips smothered hers. "When the hell have I ever been angry with you?" he sneered, but his eyes were glowing like flames, heating not only the fire in her groin; but in her heart. Of course, it wasn't anger.

"You're happy?" she guessed.

He kissed her hard and long again until she was gasping for breath. "Dammit, woman, why the hell do you have to be injured?"

She smiled wickedly. "Once I get well, who's to say you'll be up to pleasing me?"

"I probably won't, once your old man learns I'm taking his daughter with me to the islands. We need to get away."

"For what?" she asked.

He pulled out a box from his breast pocket with his good hand, and opened it up to reveal a four-carat, diamond ring, encrusted in the shape of a rose. "For our honeymoon, love."

She looked down at the ring and then looked at him, as if he'd lost his mind. "You really think my father will let us get married?"

"We'll elope," he suggested.

"William--"

He cut her off. "Dammit, Abigail, you said we'll be together, no matter what. I love you and I want to be with you for the rest of my life. I want to be the best damn husband and the best damn father to our child and I want you to be with me. Not even with Ramsey McPherson. If I have to make up with that stubborn ass in order to put a ring on your finger, I swear we'll be making babies out of wedlock for the rest of our lives."

"If that's the case," Ramsey snapped at the doorway, startling them both. "This stubborn ass has no choice but to let you marry her." He walked away, closing the door behind him.

"What the hell did he mean by that?" William asked, with the most baffled expression on his face.

Abigail smiled, wonderfully delighted. "I think we just got his permission to marry."

His face brightened a little, and then formed a pout, just so he wouldn't admit Ramsey had won that round, he grumbled, "I would've kidnapped and forced you, anyway."

"Will the two of you ever quit?" she asked.

"What fun would that be, especially when I send your sheets over to that man to show exactly how many times we did make love," he said as he placed the ring on her finger.

She gasped. "You saved those sheets?"

Proudly he touted, "Cleaned and airtight all these years. Thought I'd answer the old man's curiosity about how many times we had slept together, and rub salt on the wound at the same time."

Shaking her head in unbelievable disbelief, Abigail had a feeling, as her true love held her in his arms, that this wouldn't be the last round Ramsey and William had, but she had a long time to watch them go back and forth with each other. "William--"

"No," he gently coaxed, nibbling on her bottom lip.

She rolled her eyes heavenwards, giggling. "Yared, I love you."

“I knew that from the moment we met, because that's when I first loved you and I'll love you forever, Abigail.”

Wickedly, she asked, “You'll love my dad?”

“Hell, I can't wait to annoy him to death and call him *Dad*,” he said, with a wicked smile.

“William, are you already thinking of ideas to mentally torture him?” she asked.

“Seeing us together will be torture enough, but I'll try to be good and not get any digs in - when you're around.”

She giggled. It would be a battle, but an interesting one. She had William for the rest of her life and she would never deny him.

“I have a surprise for you,” he said, nuzzling her neck.

Frowning she asked, “What?”

Reaching in the back pocket of his jeans, he pulled out a piece of folded, old rubber. As he opened it up she gasped again.

“My ball? You've kept it all this time, William?”

He answered, “That, and the hair you gave to me, which is in a safe place.”

She smiled, adoring him. “You'll show me when I get out of this place?”

“Do I need to prove that?” he asked.

“You've proved enough for two lifetimes, William. You're innocent of everything,” she assured him happily.

His lips brushed hers tenderly. “I'm guilty of some things. Loving you is number one Sweetheart.”

She dreamily requested, “Say it again.”

“What?” he asked frowning. “That I love you?”

“No,” Abigail said shaking her head.

“Sweetheart?” he guessed.

She nodded eagerly.

“I love you, Sweetheart,” William whispered like a caress sending tingles in her eardrum.

the end

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Be on the lookout for this author's third novel, [Drawing the Line](#) in 2005.

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Thank you for supporting this author's writing endeavors.

Author Bonus Notes:

Of course this isn't the end to William and Abigail's story. In 2005, William will return in the wonderful series of the Bellini family out of Chicago. Many of my readers know who have read my previous works knows this family and are excited about reading more about them.

Abigail will also appear in the Hearts book. Lethal's looking to expand his home in Detroit and she'll be brought in as a designer and of course conscious once Lethal finally finds that one woman he wants to settle on.

That's going to be fun!

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