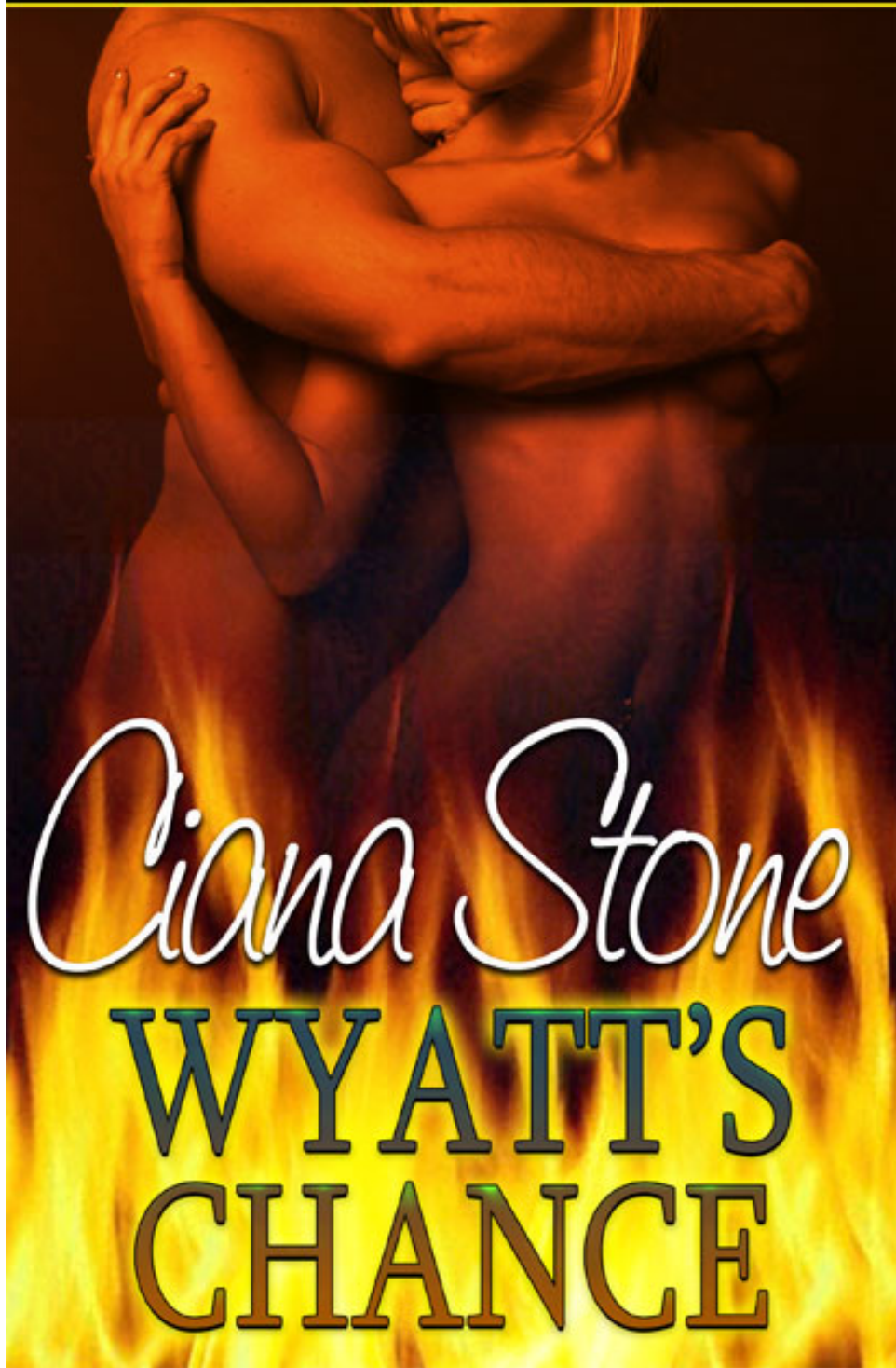


ELLORA'S CAVE PRESENTS



*Ciana Stone*

**WYATT'S  
CHANCE**

An Ellora's Cave Romantica Publication



[www.ellorascave.com](http://www.ellorascave.com)

Wyatt's Chance

ISBN # 1-4199-0699-2

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

Wyatt's Chance Copyright© 2006 Ciana Stone

Edited by Sue-Ellen Gower.

Cover art by Syneca.

Electronic book Publication: August 2006

This book may not be reproduced or used in whole or in part by any means existing without written permission from the publisher, Ellora's Cave Publishing, Inc.® 1056 Home Avenue, Akron OH 44310-3502.

This book is a work of fiction and any resemblance to persons, living or dead, or places, events or locales is purely coincidental. The characters are productions of the authors' imagination and used fictitiously.

### **Warning:**

The following material contains graphic sexual content meant for mature readers. This story has been rated E-rotic by a minimum of three independent reviewers.

Ellora's Cave Publishing offers three levels of Romantica™ reading entertainment: S (S-ensuous), E (E-rotic), and X (X-treme).

*S-ensuous* love scenes are explicit and leave nothing to the imagination.

*E-rotic* love scenes are explicit, leave nothing to the imagination, and are high in volume per the overall word count. In addition, some E-rated titles might contain fantasy material that some readers find objectionable, such as bondage, submission, same sex encounters, forced seductions, and so forth. E-rated titles are the most graphic titles we carry; it is common, for instance, for an author to use words such as "fucking", "cock", "pussy", and such within their work of literature.

*X-treme* titles differ from E-rated titles only in plot premise and storyline execution. Unlike E-rated titles, stories designated with the letter X tend to contain controversial subject matter not for the faint of heart.

# *WYATT'S CHANCE*

**Ciana Stone**

*To Cord: You better believe it, baby!  
And to Grandpa, thanks for all the stories when I was a child.  
Walk well with the spirits, Gramps.*

### *Acknowledgements*

*My deepest appreciation to all the people who were so instrumental  
in the creation of this book.*

*To Suz, again. Editor extraordinaire and great friend.*

*And to Raelene Gorlinsky. The world's greatest publisher. You rock!!*

### *Trademarks Acknowledgement*

The author acknowledges the trademarked status and trademark owners of the following wordmarks mentioned in this work of fiction:

American Express: American Express Company

Beretta: Fabbrica D'armi P. Beretta, S.P.A.

Brooks Bros.: Retail Brand Alliance, Inc.

CNN: Cable News Network LP, LLLP

Crown: The Crown Royal Company

Jaguar: Jaguar Cars Limited

Jeep: DaimlerChrysler

Mercedes: Daimler Chrysler AG

Rolodex: Insilco Corporation

Wrangler: DaimlerChrysler

## Chapter One

Behind them automatic weapon fire broke the silence of the night. Rapper's voice sounded in the earphones of the headset. "Rock and roll, boys. We've got contact a little sooner than planned."

The three men crouched behind a stack of crates at the side of the wooden shed were moving before Rapper's words were finished. Magnet jumped and kicked out at the same time. The weathered, wooden door of the shed cracked and splintered under the impact. Its rusty hinges gave way and the door burst inward. Magnet rushed in with DJ and Fish covering him from behind.

A short, wiry man with faded brown hair was already whirling with a gun in his hand, while a young, raven-haired woman screamed and clutched her discarded dress in front of her nude body.

Before the man could pull the trigger, Magnet fired two rounds from his Beretta. The first slug hit the man in the middle of the chest. The small crimson circle had not yet begun to spread out over his shirt before the second bullet found its mark in the center of his forehead. As the man's lifeless body fell, the woman seemed to forget the dress and made a mad dash for the window. Magnet yelled for DJ to stop her. The words were barely out of his mouth when a man burst in behind them.

Dropping and rolling, Magnet squeezed off three rounds. The man moving into the shed went down but there was another behind him who retreated outside, taking cover to one side of the door and firing inside.

DJ slammed the woman to the floor and fell on top of her, shielding her with his body as he raised his weapon. Fish jumped behind a crate and took aim at the door.

Magnet took a quick look around then hissed in the mic of his headset. "Secure the building!" Not waiting to see that his orders were followed, he took off out the door in time to see their adversary running toward a dark warehouse to one side.

Heedless of the sounds of gunfire and the explosions that rocked the terrorists' compound, Magnet pursued his target. Stretching out his long legs, he closed to within a couple of yards of the man. Launching himself into the air he tackled the man from behind, taking him down face-first into the dirt.

No sooner had he landed, he jabbed the barrel of his handgun into the base of the man's skull and yanked him to his feet. The sounds of gunfire abruptly ceased and an eerie stillness fell on the compound.

"Magnet?" He heard the voice in his radio—the voice of his commanding officer.

"Okay, Skipper. One prisoner. Send Bones. DJ and Fish have a woman in custody in the shed."

"Bones, you read that?"

"On my way."

Magnet listened to his commander as he waited for Bones to come take charge of the prisoner.

"Rapper?" A burst of static accompanied the commanding officer's question.

"A-okay."

"Anybody down?" the commander asked.

"Not here," Rapper replied.

"Magnet?"

"No injuries. Turning over the prisoner to Bones," he answered as a short, stocky man with almost white-blond hair approached him.

"Okay," the commander replied. "Let's get the goods loaded and get the hell out. Chopper's ETA is five minutes. See you at the LZ."

Magnet returned to the shed and walked in, expecting to find DJ and Fish waiting with the female prisoner. They were there, all right, but what he saw made his eyes narrow in anger. The woman was lying on her back with her arms above her head. DJ was kneeling on her hands and holding a knife at her throat while Fish was pumping away between her legs.

Magnet's eyes took in the welling blood on the woman's face from fresh cuts and the lacerations that ran down her legs. A cloud of black rage billowed inside him. His eyes burned as if they were on fire and a pressure swelled in his chest. Without warning blackness closed in around him.

Breathing hard, Wyatt sat up and looked around. Sweat poured down his body and his heart pounded like a drum, fast and hard. He threw off his sweat-drenched shirt, rose from the bed, and walked downstairs to go outside. The cool air of the mountains he called home chilled his skin but did nothing to ease the inner fire of torment.

The dream was always the same. He would wake with his heart in his throat, his chest heaving and heart pounding, as a blackness darker than any hell he could imagine swept over him. Raking his long black hair back from his face, he leaned his arms on the porch rail and stared out into the darkness.

He hadn't planned on coming home to the mountains of North Carolina, but life had a way of forcing situations on you from time to time. And this was one of those times. He'd been given an indefinite leave from the SEALs so that he could come home.

Only one night there, and already he was wishing he were out on a mission with his SEAL team. At least there he understood the rules of the game and knew how to play. Here he wasn't sure about anything. Most of all himself.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Give me one legitimate reason you cannot attend!"

Chance tried to ignore the demanding, arrogant tone and blew out her breath slowly before replying. "Father, I've already explained. I can't just drop everything. I'm in the middle of a story and –"

"Your goddamn job!" Maurice Davenport barked, not allowing her to finish. "You'd think you were the bloody president of CNN instead of some underling producer. Honestly, Chance, I can't believe that you'd let that silly job of yours come before your own mother's birthday ball!"

"She's not my mother." Chance's voice took on a sharp edge. "And my job is not silly. Just because –"

"I don't want to hear it!" Maurice cut her off again. "In fact, I won't tolerate any more excuses from you. You will attend Patricia's birthday ball. You will not spoil things for her again. Is that clear, young lady?"

Chance's nails bit into her palm as her fist clenched, but her voice carried only a hint of her anger. "I'm sorry, Father, but I won't be there. Give Patricia my regrets and I'll talk to you soon."

She could hear Maurice shouting as she cradled the receiver. She closed her eyes, leaned back in her chair and took a couple of long, deep breaths, releasing them slowly. With some measure of calm restored, she opened her eyes and turned her attention to the computer monitor on her desk. Her eyes moved over the words on the screen but her mind paid no attention. It was directed elsewhere.

Her stepmother Patricia's birthday celebrations were at the top of her list of least favorite things. Every year Patricia insisted on having some lavish affair, each more grand than the last. The last one Chance had attended was three years ago. After that she had refused to attend any more. It had been held at the family's home on the coast and Patricia had made a fool of herself as she always did, parading around in a fortune in diamonds and gold, decked out in her thousand-dollar bikini and showing off her latest cosmetic improvement.

In truth, however, Patricia was not the real reason Chance refused to attend any more of the parties. The real reason was the fear of who she might run into. Three years ago Wyatt had shown up unexpectedly with his latest woman in tow.

Realizing that she had not read a word of the report on the screen, Chance turned away from the monitor. Her eyes fell on the only picture that sat on her desk. Midnight black eyes set in a face of carved masculine lines stared back at her.

She studied the face. It was the kind of face women created in their fantasies. Too handsome to be real, but not perfect and smooth in the way many beautiful men are. There was nothing effeminate about it. It was totally masculine, the kind of face one would imagine belonging to the heroes of Greek mythology.

She sighed and picked up the picture. After a moment she put it facedown in the top desk drawer. She should have done that a long time ago. In fact, she didn't

understand why she had it to begin with. It was just another reminder that things do not always work out the way you want them to.

With a wish that she had the courage just to get rid of the picture altogether, she closed the drawer. Wishing was fruitless. She would never get rid of it. And even if she did, it wouldn't solve anything. It wouldn't get rid of her feelings. She didn't believe anything would ever do that.

\* \* \* \* \*

*He stared at her for a long time, his dark eyes unreadable. Chance felt her heart rate rise. He was going to turn her down. She couldn't take that. It would destroy her. Summoning every ounce of courage she possessed, she moved closer to him, placing her palm on the firm swell of his chest. Muscles twitched beneath the warm skin. She didn't know if that was good or bad. "Please," she whispered.*

*Still there was no response from him. Chance trembled with nervousness as she raised both hands to his shoulders and stood up on her toes to kiss him softly.*

*It was not a long kiss, nor a passionate one. She didn't have the courage for that. Perched on her toes, she still had to look up to meet his eyes. He stared down at her for what seemed an eternity. She wobbled and the motion pressed her forward against his muscular body. Wyatt suddenly groaned and wrapped his arms around her. His lips crushed against hers, parting her lips with his tongue and diving into her mouth.*

*She had never experienced a kiss like that. She felt like she was being devoured and while it was a little frightening, it was the most exciting thing she had ever felt. Her nipples felt like they were on fire, and her sex suddenly felt swollen. She had never had such sensations. But it felt good and she eagerly returned the kiss, being bold enough to explore the warm interior of his mouth with her tongue and enjoying his spicy taste.*

*All at once, he pushed her to arm's length. "This isn't right."*

*Chance couldn't have cared less about what was right or wrong. All she wanted was another kiss. Sensations and yearnings, new and exhilarating, filled her. She wanted more.*

*"Yes, it is," she argued. "Please, I want to."*

*She thought he was going to turn her down. Instead, he yanked her T-shirt over her head and tossed it aside. Her first reaction was to cross her arms over her chest to cover her breasts. She almost did. But that would prove that she was afraid, not ready. So she took a deep breath and forced herself to face him.*

*His eyes moved slowly down her body, lingering on her breasts then moving lower. The heat of his gaze made her feel a strange hunger. His hand reached up to cup her breasts. She liked the feel of his hands on her, but when his fingers began circling her nipples, her breath caught in her throat and her hands fisted at her sides. Her nipples tingled then burned, and every caress seemed to make her sex feel more full and wet.*

*He ran one hand down her body, into her underwear. She gasped as his fingers worked between the wet folds and penetrated her core. He stroked her gently. Chance struggled not to*



make a sound. It was not easy. With his finger probing inside her, she wanted to moan and move against him.

Before she could do either, he removed his hand and slid her panties down her legs. She stepped out of them and he guided her backward to the bed, pushing her down on her back.

She wasn't sure what he was going to do. He knelt in front of her and pulled her over to the edge of the bed, spreading her legs, and she almost chickened out. She had never been so exposed to a man's eyes. He lowered his head and lapped at her wet channel and she nearly fainted from the sensation. She had never imagined. It made her skin burn, her toes curl and her muscles tense.

His tongue flicked inside her, probing and withdrawing. She gripped the bedcovers, thrusting against his questing tongue for more of the delicious sensations. His tongue moved higher, circling her clit. She couldn't stop the gasp that burst from her. When he sucked her clit into his mouth, her legs spread as if of their own accord. Her hands moved to fist in his hair. Her body arched back, the veins in her neck standing out as she panted and moaned.

Something expanded inside her mind and abdomen, swelling until it consumed her and her clit burned and throbbed like it was going to explode. It wasn't long until the sensation overwhelmed her and she was consumed by the most exquisite feeling she had ever experienced. She collapsed on the bed, feeling strangely spent.

He rose and dropped his pants and her eyes grew round. She had imagined him naked more times than she could count, but imagination did not do him justice. He was totally beautiful, strong and tall and perfectly proportioned. Her eyes moved up, seeking his.

Wyatt's dark eyes were intense and seemed to draw her in. She read longing in their dark depths, and something that told her this was as important to him as it was to her. He gave her a gentle smile and stroked his hand down the side of her face.

Chance closed her eyes and felt his hands move to softly spread her legs. She opened her eyes as he lowered himself down, guiding his cock into her wet pussy. Before he was fully seated inside her, he met with resistance. He looked at her and for a moment they were frozen. She knew that he would stop if she asked, that he did not want to hurt her. But she didn't want him to stop. She nodded, biting her lip against the pain.

He pushed through the thin membrane and paused again, giving her the opportunity to stop what was happening. She could feel the tension in his body, and searched his eyes. What she saw in them told her that regardless of what had gone before this moment, Wyatt's feelings for her ran deep.

"Don't stop," she begged. The pain was already vanishing, to be replaced with a new longing. "Please."

Jolted from dream by the shrill ring of the phone, Chance rolled over and fumbled for the receiver in the dark. With her heart in her throat she lifted it to her ear. No one called in the middle of the night unless it was to relay bad news.

"Hello?" Her voice was thick with a combination of sleep and fear.

“Chance? Is that you? I-I wanted...I needed to...I had to talk...” the voice trailed off.

Chance sat straight up in bed. “Wyatt? Is that you? What’s wrong?”

“I called your father’s house and Abbott gave me this number.” He didn’t answer her questions.

“Why? What’s wrong?”

“It’s starting again.” Wyatt’s voice sounded slurred and strained. “I never should have...”

“What’s starting? Wyatt, what’re you talking about?”

There was no reply to her questions. She turned on the light beside the bed, glancing at the time on the alarm clock. It was just after three in the morning.

“Wyatt? Are you still there? Are you talking about some mission you were sent on?”

“Forget I called,” he mumbled. “Just forget...”

“No, wait!” she exclaimed, afraid that he would hang up. “Wyatt, please, tell me what’s wrong.”

“I can’t get away from it,” he replied after a long moment of silence. “It follows me and I can’t escape it. I’ve tried.”

“Escape what? Wyatt, you’re not making sense. What are you fighting? Please, just tell me where you are and I’ll come. We’ll figure out something, I promise. But I need to know where you are.”

“No, forget I called.”

“Wyatt, don’t—” she exclaimed. “...hang up,” she finished to a dead line. She checked the caller ID to see where the number originated. All that displayed was a *No Data* message, indicating that the number was blocked.

She replaced the receiver and leaned back to stare up at the ceiling. Her heart was racing to keep up with the thoughts that tore through her mind. *What’s going on? He’s got to be in some kind of trouble. But how do I help him if I don’t know where he is? Damn! What do I do?*

After a few minutes she turned off the light and lay down, but she was too troubled by the call to sleep. She got out of bed, threw on a robe and went downstairs. After she put on a pot of coffee she brushed her teeth and washed her face. The coffee was ready when she returned to the kitchen. She poured herself a cup and walked into the den, stopping in front of the window to stare out at the darkness.

She hadn’t heard anything from Wyatt for over three years, since Patricia’s birthday party. As far as she knew he was still in the Navy, part of their special forces, the SEALs. For him to contact her at all was a surprise. For him to sound so desperate was frightening.

Hearing his voice had caused feelings to rise back up she had spent almost her whole life trying to suppress. She felt the all too familiar heaviness settle in her chest and fought to push back the anguish.

For a long time she stood frozen in front of the window, staring sightlessly out into the darkness. The forgotten cup of coffee grew cold in her hand. At last she sighed and turned away from the window. She put the cup down on the kitchen counter and returned to the bedroom. In the bottom drawer of the dresser was an old photo album, one she had purposely not looked at in years. She took it from the drawer, sat down on the bed and opened it.

The first thing that met her eyes was a picture taken twenty-two years ago at her father's estate. It was of a tiny fair-haired girl with uncommonly light eyes and a dark-haired boy with eyes so black they appeared bottomless. The children were sitting on the back of a big bay horse, the boy's arms holding the little girl securely as she smiled at the camera.

The children in the picture were she and Wyatt. It was taken only a couple of weeks after he came to live with her family. At the time she was almost five and he was ten.

After Chance was much older, she had wondered why Wyatt's father and grandfather would have allowed him to come live with them. According to Adeola, the woman who raised Chance, Wyatt's father felt that removing him from the place where his mother died would help him to recover from her death.

Chance smiled sadly and turned the page. The album was filled with pictures of the two of them. His childhood was recorded in the photos, as was her own. She flipped slowly through the pages, remembering the past. The last picture was of Wyatt and his third wife, Ashley. Wyatt was in his dress uniform and Ashley wore a flowery summer dress. They were standing on the deck of Chance's family's beach house. The picture had been taken on Patricia's birthday, three years ago. That was the last time Chance had seen or spoken to Wyatt.

She ran her finger over his image for a moment then closed the book. Nothing good could come out of reliving the past. Much as she wished things had worked out differently, they simply had not. Wyatt had not shared her feelings then and didn't now.

*But he called*, she told herself as she slid the album back into its drawer. He was obviously very upset so something had to be wrong. She couldn't just forget about it and pretend that it hadn't happened.

*You mean you don't want to*, a little voice said in her mind. *You want to think that he needs you.*

She shook her head and stripped off her robe. *He wouldn't have called if he didn't need me*, she argued silently. *I can't turn my back on him.*

Chance ignored the little voice in her mind that was telling her it was wishful thinking to believe that Wyatt could need her for anything. Somehow she had to locate him and find out what was going on.

\* \* \* \* \*

Wyatt threw the empty liquor bottle on the floor and ran his hands back through his hair. The room swam, tilting from one side to the other.

He knew he was drunk, but not nearly drunk enough. He could not erase what he had done from his mind.

*Of all the people on the planet, why in hell did you have to call her?* he asked himself.

"Why is right," he said aloud. "Like I need more hell right now. Wyatt, you're one dumb son of a bitch."

He climbed unsteadily off the bed and made his way downstairs, holding on to the railing as the alcohol robbed him of balance. He made it to the couch and flopped down, throwing his feet up on the coffee table.

He stared morosely into the fire, trying to dispel the images that came unbidden to his mind. "Chance," he said without being aware he had spoken until the sound of his own voice surprised him. "Damn, I really screwed up. The last thing I need is her."

He closed his eyes and leaned his head back. Chance Davenport was a closed chapter in his life. She had been for a long time. At least he had tried to make it so.

When they were young she had fooled him into feeling like he was her hero, always looking up to him and praising everything he did like he was something special. As a child he had thought she was the only person in the world who truly cared about him. But things changed. They grew up and he found out the truth. She was no different than all the other rich white people. She had used him and betrayed him. Her betrayal was the worst thing he had ever experienced because he had never seen it coming.

"And so now you call her!" he growled as he pulled a quilt over himself.

*So? a voice inside him asked. What difference does it make? She'll laugh it off and forget it – forget you. Get over it and get on with your life. Chance Davenport is poison. She always has been.*

Wyatt nodded in silent agreement with the voice and pulled the quilt up higher around his shoulders. Moments later he was out cold.

\* \* \* \* \*

Chance had been pacing the floor for hours by the time the sun came up. Unable to be patient any longer, she picked up the phone and called her father's house. Abbott Macdougall, the butler, answered the phone. "Davenport residence. May I help you?"

"Abbott, hi! This is Chance. When you spoke to Wyatt, did he say where he is?"

"No, I'm sorry. He didn't."

"He didn't give you any idea? Think, Abbott. It's really important."

"I'm sorry, but he didn't say."

"Okay," she relented with a sigh, then an idea occurred to her. "Abbott, I need to talk to my father."

"Mr. Davenport has not yet come downstairs, Miss Chance. Shall I have him ring you when he awakens?"

"No, I need to talk to him now. Will you put the call through to his room, please?"

"Very well. Please hold."

Chance listened to the music that came over the line. She waited quite a while before her father answered. "Chance? Why in the world are you calling at this ungodly hour? Is something wrong?"

She ignored his questions. "Father, have you heard from Wyatt?"

"What?" Irritation was clear in his voice. "You call and wake me up to ask if I've heard from Wyatt?"

"Well, have you? I need to talk to him. Do you know where he is?"

"Chance, there's nothing you need to talk to Wyatt about. How many times do I have to tell you that you and Wyatt are from different worlds? Surely by now you realize that he just doesn't belong with our kind of people. He—"

"Don't start!" she interrupted him. "I didn't call for a lecture and I know how you feel. But that's not important right now. All I want is to find out if you know how I can get in touch with him."

"No," came his sharp reply.

"Okay, sorry I bothered you. Bye."

Without waiting for him to say more she hung up the phone. Sometimes her father really annoyed her. All the years Wyatt had lived with them, Maurice had treated him well. Wyatt had been the star of the football and basketball team in high school and Maurice had acted like he was really proud of him, bragging to other parents at the games about Wyatt's skills. Now he acted like he couldn't stand Wyatt and she didn't understand it. She had a suspicion it had something to do with Patricia but no evidence to support it.

Dismissing thoughts of her father, she called long distance directory assistance and asked for the number for Wyatt's father, John Nashoba. As soon as she scribbled the number down she severed the connection and dialed.

It rang many times and she was about to hang up when a man's voice answered. "Hello?"

"Mr. Nashoba? Hi, this is Chance Davenport. How are you?"

"Fine, Chance." His voice was strong and clear. "And you?"

"Just fine. I'm really sorry to bother you, but I'd like to get in touch with Wyatt and I don't know where he's stationed. Do you have a phone number or address for him?"

There was a momentary pause before he replied. "No, Chance. I don't have a number for you. I'm sorry."

She sighed in frustration. "Okay, well, thanks anyway, Mr. Nashoba. If you hear from him will you tell him I called and ask him to get in touch with me?"

“Yes, I’ll do that. Goodbye, Chance.”

“Bye.” She hung up the phone and paced back and forth for a minute. There had to be someone who would know where Wyatt was. The question was, who?

## **Chapter Two**

*Swain County, North Carolina*

What felt like a giant drum pounded in his head, waking Wyatt from a drunken sleep. With a groan he opened his eyes. From the level of light in the room it appeared to be just after dawn.

Sitting up made his head pound harder. The horrible taste in his mouth made him grimace. "Must've drunk a river," he mumbled. He seemed to be doing that a lot lately. Alcohol seemed to be the only way to keep the dream at bay.

He could almost hear Digger's voice in his mind. "Come on, man, you gotta get over this shit. Hell, turn on that woman magnet and find yourself another honey."

"Yeah, that's just what I need," he murmured, making a face as he thought about his nickname. His SEAL team had nicknamed him Magnet a long time ago. It was short for Woman Magnet. Wyatt had never seen himself that way but all his team gave him hell about the way women came on to him.

He could remember overhearing his commander talk about him to another SEAL team leader who was interested in getting Wyatt transferred to his team. "The big Indian? Hell, that's Magnet. Motherfucker's too good-looking for his own good. Attracts women like flies to shit. But you won't talk me out of him, you cocksucker. He's the best scout we got. Can sneak up on anything. Anything. Son of a bitch's so quiet he'll be on your ass before you know he's there. Not only that, the fucker fights like nothing you ever seen before. He's a one-man squad all his own. So you keep your fucking hands off Magnet. He's mine."

When Wyatt had heard that he had felt an odd sense of pride. Not at being considered a woman magnet but at his commanding officer's brusque compliment on his performance. Now he found himself wondering if that was really what he wanted to leave behind – the fact that he was a good killer.

He pushed aside the thoughts as he got off the bed and slowly walked into the bathroom. His reflection in the mirror over the sink seemed to confirm his suspicions. He looked like he had drunk a river. He brushed his teeth then stuck his head under the cold water, sucking in his breath at the chill.

The water cleared the cobwebs in his mind. Draping a towel over his long black hair he went into the den and added a couple of logs to the fire then went to the kitchen. He put on a pot of coffee and sat down at the table. As he dried his hair, he tried to remember the events of the past evening.

He remembered going to Ralph's Bar and having a couple of drinks with Jimmy Martin and Billy Hawkes. They were talking about taking a trip up to West Virginia to ride the Gauley River. A couple of girls came over to the table and asked them to come

to a party the upcoming weekend at Fontana Lake. The girls hung around for a little while and one of them suggested that she and Wyatt take a ride.

He had considered it, but passed. She struck him as the kind of girl who was looking for a husband and he was definitely not in the market. After three wives and far too many live-ins he had decided he was not suited for marriage or long-term relationships.

About nine o'clock, trouble walked in the door in the form of Greg Holling and his cadre of followers. Greg was the son of the richest man in the county, one of the richest in the state. His father, Winston Yale Holling, practically owned the town of Bryson and most of the county. Many of the Cherokee looked to him for their jobs.

Greg was three or four years younger than Wyatt. He was about six feet tall, slim, with blond hair and a perpetually arrogant expression stamped on his handsome face.

Billy nudged Wyatt with his elbow and nodded in Greg's direction. "Looks like the rich boy's come slumming."

"I'd like to stick my fist in that little prick's uppity face," Jimmy barked.

Wyatt put his hand on Jimmy's arm as he started to stand. "Let it go, man. No need to look for trouble."

Unfortunately, trouble did not have to be looked for. Greg strutted over to the table where Wyatt sat. Behind him were his friends, what the Indians called "the country club cubs".

"Don't I know you?" Greg looked down at Wyatt.

Wyatt shrugged and took a drink of his beer. "Do you?"

Greg smirked and looked back at his friends for a moment. "Aren't you Wyatt Nashoba, old man Nashoba's boy?"

Jimmy and Billy both bristled at the way Greg said "boy" but Wyatt just looked up at Greg without expression. "That's right."

"Well, well," Greg sneered. "I hear you're in the Navy—SEALs or something. I guess you think you're some kind of badass, huh, redskin?"

"Nope." Wyatt took another drink of his beer and looked across the room.

"That's not what I hear. The way I hear it you think you're better than everyone else."

Wyatt continued to stare across the room without speaking. Greg leaned over in his face and jeered. "What's the matter, Indian? Chicken? Look at me when I talk to you, boy!"

Wyatt turned his head and pinned Greg with a cold stare. Greg immediately backed up and Wyatt stood. He towered a good four inches over the smaller man. "What is it you have to say?" he asked coldly.

Greg backed up another step. "I don't have shit to say to you, trash. Stay outta my face and outta my town or you're gonna wish you had."



Wyatt's expression didn't change. He simply looked at Greg for a moment then walked over to the bar, got a bottle and left. Anger was seething inside him. He knew that the Holling family had been tormenting the people in the county, just as he knew they had chosen the Indians as their special targets. His father had talked of little else the past week since he had come home. He said it was like history repeating itself all over again.

Wyatt told his father that the people should seek legal recourse to stop the harassment, that was what the law was for. Inside he churned with suppressed anger. He hated people like the Hollings and the way they treated others. They were another example of the way the rich white man stepped all over everyone else. But he had sworn that aside from his duties to the Navy he was not going to fight anymore and he meant to keep that vow, even if it meant he had to feel like something was eating him up from inside.

Wyatt got up and poured a cup of black coffee. He didn't remember much that happened after he left the bar except for cracking open the bottle and tilting it up to his mouth. After that there was a blank.

Taking his coffee upstairs, he put on an old sweat suit and laced up his running shoes. He left the coffee unfinished on the dresser when he went outside. The air was cold and crisp. Icicles sparkled like diamonds and the snow looked soft and pristine.

Taking a deep breath, he started running. He headed north, along the bank of the Tuckasegee River toward Fontana Lake. His thoughts turned to the situation between the Holling family and the Indians. It was not something new. The trouble had started a long time ago, even before he was born.

His eyebrows drew together in a tight frown. Lately he had been drawn to old memories. The memories were not complete, but hazy and fragmented. He could not even consciously call them to mind, but when they did come they filled him with a rage and fear he didn't understand. He started up a steep hill and suddenly his mind carried him back, back to the day his mother died.

*A heavy-set man was laughing as others held Sarah down and ripped her clothes off. Another man watched from the shadow of a thick cedar. Wyatt screamed and struggled against the man who held him immobile.*

*"Get your hands off her! Leave her alone!"*

*The man holding him laughed. "What's the matter, boy? Ain't never seen a real man do it?"*

*Wyatt fought harder to free himself but the man hit him in the side of the head and lights danced in front of his eyes. Sarah was screaming for them to let Wyatt go, but the men only laughed at her pleas.*

*The heavy-set man dropped his pants and knelt down between Sarah's legs. Chills ran down Wyatt's spine at the scream that erupted from his mother. In horror he watched as the men took turns brutalizing her.*

*As the last man stood and zipped his pants, Wyatt was released. He ran to his mother's side. Her face was swollen and covered with blood. Blood ran from her nose and eyes and even dripped from one ear. Her body was battered, crossed with bloody trails. He could not believe this was his mother.*

*He tried to lift her but she was too heavy. "Wake up," he pleaded, gently shaking her. "Mom, wake up. We have to get out of here."*

*But Sarah would never wake up. There was no life left in her body. He screamed and looked around for help. The men watched him with jeers and laughs. No one offered to help. He turned his attention back to his mother, shaking her and pleading with her to wake up. When he realized she was dead he felt like a spear had been shoved through his chest. He screamed in grief and pain, throwing himself across her cold body, and crying.*

*The men left him, still laughing as they started the walk back. Wyatt cried until there were no more tears then lay still, staring blankly at the valley below. "Please help me," he whispered. "Someone, please help me. They killed my mom."*

*A sound like the whispering of the wind reached his ears. He thought he heard words in the wind. He sat up and looked around. His eyes widened as a mist swirled up from the ground. He bolted to his feet and backed away in fear as the mist moved toward him. He could not move fast enough. The mist enveloped him.*

*"Will you take the help that is offered?" The words rang in his mind.*

*"Yes," he answered fearfully.*

*"Then be One," the whisper rose like a roll of thunder. "Merge and become the champion of the People."*

*"How?" Wyatt looked around, trying to see through the white mist that surrounded him.*

*"Believe it to be so."*

*Wyatt closed his eyes tightly. "I believe," he whispered fervently. "I believe, I believe, I—"*

*A disorienting sensation claimed him and he staggered blindly, unable to see or hear anything except the storm that raged in his mind. Abruptly an expanding wave washed through him, swelling until he was filled to overflowing with the sensation. He felt like a giant. Nothing could hurt him.*

Wyatt stopped at the crest of the hill and looked down at the waters of the lake. The memory faded from his mind to be replaced with a black void. He shook his head and tried to recall it. At last he gave up. It was always the same. He would think he could hold on to the memory but it would vanish like mist in the sunlight and he would not be able to remember anything except waking up lying beside his mother, covered in blood and holding a hunting knife. He knew there were missing pieces but he could not find a way to consciously bring them to mind.

"So what happened?" he asked aloud as he turned and headed back the direction he had come. "How did I get the knife and why was I covered in blood?"

A brisk breeze picked up, sending icicles tumbling from the frozen boughs of the evergreens around him and a voice seemed to speak in his mind. *We are One. We are the Warrior.*

Wyatt's pace increased as his anxiety rose. "No!" he shouted as he ran. "I will not fight!" He had no idea why he chose those words. He knew only that the voice in his mind sent icy chills of some unknown fear racing through him.

His speed increased until he was running as hard as he could. He burst into the small clearing at the back of his house, panting with exertion. His father's old truck sat parked in the yard.

Wyatt slowed and walked the rest of the way to the house. John Nashoba was sitting at the kitchen table, drinking coffee. Wyatt grabbed a towel from the counter and mopped his face as he walked past his father.

"Where're you going?" John asked as he turned to watch Wyatt.

"To work out." Wyatt's words were clipped and harsh.

John said nothing but followed Wyatt to the other side of the small house. The back room had been equipped like a mini-gym. Wyatt was already lying on the bench, pressing the heavy, weighted bar up and down when John walked in.

Neither man spoke, and for the next hour Wyatt drove himself like a man possessed. He stripped off his sweatshirt, mopped his face with it and continued. Sweat poured down his chest and back, staining his pants. At last he paused and looked at his father.

"Something you want to talk about?" John asked in a quiet tone.

Wyatt shook his head and wiped his face again. "Ever feel like you were losing your mind?"

John laughed. "Always. So, is that what's wrong with you, son?"

"I don't know, Dad." Wyatt dried his chest and blew out his breath in frustration. "I wish I did. Sometimes I feel like there's something foreign inside me, eating away, and if I don't stop it there's going to be nothing left of me. It makes me full of rage and I don't know at what."

"That's nothing new, now is it? You've been carrying that rage since you were a boy. Maybe it's time to let yourself remember so you can get rid of the poison you've been carrying so long."

Wyatt shook his head. He had no desire to talk about his childhood.

"What brings you here this morning?" he asked as he headed for the kitchen.

"You hear about what happened at Ralph's last night?" his father asked as he reclaimed his seat at the kitchen table.

Wyatt turned and looked at him. "No, what?"

"Seems like the Holling boy and some of his friends decided to redecorate after you left. Jimmy and Billy and a couple of others got in their way and things got ugly."

Wyatt sat down across from his father. "Was anyone hurt?"

"Billy got seven stitches in his head. Few of the others got some pretty good lumps but Jimmy got the worst of it. He's in the hospital. They beat him up pretty bad."

Wyatt stood up and walked to the sink, looking out of the window. He had a gnawing feeling in the pit of his stomach and his muscles tensed without warning.

"We've got to do something about this," John spoke up after a few moments. "This can't continue. Somebody has to do something."

Wyatt turned to him. "I won't get in a fight, Dad. I told you that. I've had my fill of fighting and killing. This has to be settled legally."

John shrugged and looked down at the coffee cup on the table. "I got a call this morning – from Chance Davenport."

Wyatt's eyes widened and he felt his throat tighten. "Chance? What did she want?"

"She wanted to talk to you – or an address or phone number where she could reach you. She sounded upset."

Sudden recollection of the phone call flooded Wyatt's mind. "What'd you tell her?"

"That I didn't have a number for her."

Sitting down again, Wyatt nodded. "Thanks. If she calls again just tell her the same thing."

John was silent for a moment then got up to refill his cup. "What is this thing between you and Chance?"

"There is no thing between us."

"You mean you don't want to admit there is." John took a drink of his coffee. "Well, that's fine, son. You don't have to admit it to me. But at least admit it to yourself." He put his cup in the sink. "I'm going to go and see Jimmy. You want to go?"

Wyatt shook his head. "I'll stop by later."

John nodded and put his hand on Wyatt's shoulder. "I know you don't want to be a part of what's happened, son, but I don't think you can avoid it. You've been a part of it since you were a child and sooner or later you're going to have to acknowledge that. I'll see you."

Wyatt watched his father leave. For a few minutes he stared at the door. He didn't know what had made him call Chance. He had purposely not thought of her for a long time. At least he had tried not to. Pushing her face from his mind, he got up and went into the bathroom, wishing that he could wash the trouble with the Hollings and Chance Davenport down the drain. But cleansing the mind was not nearly as easy as cleaning the body.

\* \* \* \* \*

Chance had called in all her markers to locate Wyatt. She finally had a reason to be thankful that she had attended one of her father's social functions because it was at one

of them last year that she had met the assistant secretary of the Navy, Neil Brown. He had just gone through a divorce but had been single long enough that he was on the prowl and had tried his best to get a date with her. She had not been particularly interested in him romantically, but had gone to a few political dinners with him, giving him bragging rights about having an attractive younger woman on his arm.

It was Neil who had gotten her Wyatt's home address and the information that he was on leave in North Carolina.

She placed a call on her cell phone to her office and started talking as soon as the call was answered. "Dianne? Hi, this is Chance. Listen, I need you to run down an address for me. I need a phone number, directions, and anything else you can get. Got a pen?... Okay, here it is... Wyatt U. Nashoba. The address is Route 1 Box 7, Bryson, North Carolina... Huh?... Yeah, I might be on to something. Call me as you have something... Yeah, I'm on my cell. Thanks!"

She hung up with a new sense of hope. With any luck, by this afternoon she would be on her way to find Wyatt.

\* \* \* \* \*

Wyatt put the finishing touches on the picture he was working on and turned off the lamps over his drawing table. He went into the kitchen, opened the refrigerator, looked inside then closed the door again.

His visit to see Jimmy at the hospital had left him feeling moody and depressed. His father was right, Jimmy was pretty messed up. His nose was broken, his right cheek lacerated to the tune of ten stitches and he had three broken ribs. One of the ribs had just missed puncturing his right lung. To top it off, his left wrist was crushed and the doctors didn't think he would ever regain full use of his hand.

Jimmy had pleaded with Wyatt to go to a meeting that afternoon at the reservation. Some men who were tired of taking the harassment were getting together to talk about fighting back. Wyatt had refused. He told Jimmy the same thing he had told his father. Let the law take care of it.

Now he couldn't seem to get it out of his mind. The Holling boy was getting bolder every day and many of the people were worried about what he would do next.

After learning the success of other tribes who had opened casinos, the Cherokee had decided to give it a go. If they were even half as successful it would mean jobs and security for a great many people. Not to mention the good that could be done for the community as a result of the increased revenues. But with three construction companies already having backed out and Holling and his gang tearing up the town as fast as they could, there was concern over what would happen.

Wyatt ran his hands back through his hair and closed his eyes. He could not get involved. He wasn't sure the casino was such a good thing. He had listened to both sides, and understood that the revenues gambling generated could do a lot of good. But he also had seen firsthand how some of the people from the other tribes were handling

their success. Many of them were now spending all the money they made in the casino, losing much more than they won. Not only that but alcoholism had taken a sharp rise.

He didn't feel it was his place to tell anyone what to do. If everyone wanted to go ahead with the casino, he would not speak against it. But he also would not fight for it. At least not in the physical sense. Fighting was not the way. It only led to bloodshed and death and he had seen more than his share of that.

The house seemed to close in around him and he felt as if he was suffocating. He ran upstairs, stuffed some things into a backpack, grabbed his sleeping bag and threw on his coat and boots.

Wyatt returned downstairs, put a loaf of bread, some cheese and a couple of apples in his backpack and left the house. He needed to be outside, away from everyone and everything. He needed complete silence and isolation and the only place to find that was high in the mountains.

\* \* \* \* \*

Wyatt lay back and stared up at the star-strewn sky, searching out the Seven Dancers. Tsa'lagi legend, as told by those who were forced along the Trail of Tears, tells how the Principle People originated in the star system known as the Pleiades. Remembering the legends, Wyatt drifted off to sleep.

No sooner had sleep taken him, the dream began. Tossing and mumbling, he fought, but could not escape it. Once more he lived the events of the mission. Only this time he didn't awaken when he was diving at the men who were raping the woman. Instead a momentary black void claimed him then he found himself with his team, awaiting transport away from the mission site.

*Rapper took Digger and Pike with him, setting out two red strobe lights and three white ones. They returned to the other men and sat down, waiting for the chopper.*

*Bones slid over beside Wyatt. "You sure you didn't see anything, Magnet?"*

*Wyatt looked at him blankly. "I told you, all I remember is getting to the building and seeing DJ and Fish with the woman. Then...I don't know what happened. Everything went black and the next thing I know I'm awake and trying to stuff DJ's intestines back in his body."*

*Bones looked over at the commander who was watching Wyatt closely. "You're absolutely sure there was only one man in the shed?" the commander asked.*

*"Yes," Wyatt replied. "When we entered he turned with a gun in his hand. The woman was naked, holding a dress over her body. I didn't see anyone else."*

*"But someone else could have been in the room," the commander suggested. "Someone who was hiding maybe."*

*Wyatt shook his head. "I don't know, I guess so. But I swear I didn't see anyone."*

*The commander slapped him on the shoulder. "It's not your fault. Hell, we all know we could buy the farm every time we come out on one of these jaunts. When our time's up, it's up. That's all there is to it."*

*Wyatt looked at the commander for a moment. "How could one man have done that to them? There's no way one person could've handled DJ and Fish at the same time."*

*The commander passed it off. "We'll worry about that later. Right now we're getting the fuck outta Dodge. Digger, grab a light and guide the chopper in."*

*Wyatt fell silent, watching as Digger and Pike guided the chopper using bright neon light sticks. His mind was filled with images of DJ and Fish, seeing their gouged-out eyes and slit throats, their bodies lying torn apart, organs tossed around the shed as if someone had just ripped them out and tossed them aside. A sick feeling formed in his stomach and he had to force the images from his mind.*

*Just as he was boarding the chopper a memory came to him. Something he had overheard DJ and Fish talking about a week or so ago. They had taken a trip down to Mexico and while they were there they had met up with a pretty young woman named Maria. From what Wyatt had heard, they had cut her up pretty bad and raped her, then shot her in the head and dumped her body.*

*He had been furious and stormed in on them. DJ had laughed and told him they knew he was listening and had made it up just to jerk his chain. Wyatt hadn't known whether DJ was telling the truth or not. He wanted to think so, but after what had happened tonight he was not sure.*

*Blackness claimed him once more and a dizzy, disorienting feeling took hold. He felt as if he were in a spinning freefall. Suddenly the darkness vanished and he found himself looking into dark eyes.*

*He took an involuntary step back as he looked at the face the eyes belonged to. A smile formed on the face and Wyatt felt a ripple of fear pass through him.*

*"You know what happened, Wyatt. Inside you know. You're just afraid to remember."*

*"No." Wyatt could barely speak. His throat felt as if giant hands were wrapped around it, squeezing tighter by the moment. "Get away from me!"*

*"Afraid?" The word was spoken in a taunt. "What have you to fear from me? We are One. Or do you still refuse to acknowledge that?"*

*Wyatt backed away then turned and ran. Behind him was only darkness and laughter.*

*His eyes flew open and he looked around wildly. Only the trees, the stars and the moon looked back at him. Shivering despite the sweat that poured from him, he rolled up in his sleeping bag and stared unblinkingly at the sky. He thought he could find peace here, a place to escape the demons of the past and the unremembered fears that haunted him. But even here there was no peace.*

*A gentle breeze picked up, ruffling the leaves on the trees. Follow your heart. It will guide you, a voice seemed to carry in on the wind. Wyatt closed his eyes and took a deep*

breath. How could he follow his heart when he didn't even know how to reach it anymore?

\* \* \* \* \*

Chance pulled the Jeep up in front of the small roadside motel but didn't turn the ignition off. "What am I doing?" she mumbled to herself. "This is crazy!"

She had spent the last two days trying to talk herself out of coming. She had almost convinced herself to forget that Wyatt had called and get on with her life. But she could not. She had to find him, regardless of how much she ended up getting hurt.

Now it dawned on her that once she actually saw him there would be no turning back. With an anxious expression on her face, she turned off the Jeep and got out.

A middle-aged woman stood behind the counter in the motel office. "Can I help you, miss?"

"Yes, I'd like a room. I'm not sure how long I'll be here – maybe a few days."

"If you'll fill this out..." The woman slid a small clipboard toward her with a guest information card.

Chance quickly filled it out and laid her company credit card on top of it. "I understand there's a reservation nearby," she said as the woman ran her card through the old-fashioned imprinter. "Maybe you could tell me some of the attractions."

The woman cut her a look that was not altogether friendly. "There's some brochures on the rack over there. But lots of stuff's closed this time of year. Not the best time for tourists. Too late for skiing and too early for everything else."

Chance looked at the rack of brochures and randomly took a few. "Oh, thanks. I'm sure these will be a big help."

She accepted her key from the woman and started out of the office. At the door she stopped. "Excuse me, but would you happen to know a man named Wyatt Nashoba?"

The woman jerked around to look at her and Chance was sure by the look on her face she knew Wyatt. But she shook her head. "Never heard of him."

Chance looked at her for a moment then smiled. "Thanks anyway."

She went out to the Jeep and got her things then went to her room. It was small but clean. There was a bathroom with fresh but thin towels, an old television and an even older phone. She tossed her luggage on the bed and pulled her cell phone from her purse. She dialed the number Dianne had given her as Wyatt's. When he hadn't answered by the tenth ring, she hung up.

Not knowing what else to do, she decided she might as well explore around the town and the surrounding area, see if she could locate Wyatt's house. Her exploration did not net her directions to his house. Everyone she spoke to from Gatlinburg to the reservation and on down to Maggie Valley claimed they had never heard of him. Chance was sure they were lying.



By seven that evening she was discouraged and hungry. She returned to the motel, showered and changed into jeans, a knit pullover shirt, boots and a light jacket. She found a small diner near the boundary of the reservation and went in to get something to eat. The diner was full so she took a table off to one side, listening to the conversation around her as she ate. What she heard made her curious. The talk was about someone by the name of Holling. From what she could make out this Holling person was being pretty nasty, harassing the Indians and tearing up their stores and businesses.

She paid for her dinner and returned to the motel to call her office. As she waited on her call to be answered she pulled a notepad from her shoulder bag and started scribbling a list.

"Who's this?" she asked as the call was answered. "Oh, Steve, hi! It's Chance. Listen, I think I'm on to something. I need you to have the research department check some things for me. You ready?... Okay, first of all I want everything they can find on someone named Holling—I don't have a first name but apparently this is some bigwig in Bryson, North Carolina... Yes, North Carolina... What? Well, to begin with the Cherokee have decided to take Uncle Sam up on the legislation that was passed permitting gambling on the reservation... So? So, I think there's someone here who wants to make sure things don't work out... No, I don't have anything concrete but I'm going to get started finding out. I'll be in and out so if you find anything and can't get me on the cell, leave it on my voicemail at the office... Sure thing, thanks, Steve. Talk to you soon."

She hung up and leaned back against the headboard, trying to decide what to do next. If there was trouble on the reservation, maybe that was what had Wyatt upset. But where could she go to get information? After a look at her watch she decided she would call it a day and start fresh in the morning. Maybe if she returned to the diner she could overhear something that would give her a clue.

\* \* \* \* \*

Wyatt watched the moon rise higher in the sky. Aside from the wind in the trees there was no noise to disturb the silence. Spreading out his sleeping bag, he rolled up in it and closed his eyes. Within a few minutes he was falling into the land of dreams. Tonight there were no dreams of mutilated men on missions. These dreams took him far back to another point in time.

He saw the same familiar landscape before him and knew he was at Clingman's Dome. But instead of a silvery moon above him the sky was blue and the sun was just past its midday journey across the sky.

He looked beside him and saw Chance. She was only eight years old. Her hair, the color of summer wheat, blew in the breeze around her slim body and her eyes, only a shade darker than her hair, glistened as she smiled at him.

Wyatt knew he was in the past. He felt like a man but knew that in this dream world he was but thirteen, a boy trying to evolve into a man.

Chance pointed out a bird that circled high about them. "Is that a hawk?"

Wyatt nodded and pointed off to one side. "See, over there? That's her young. She's teaching them."

They watched the mother hawk and the two young, swooping and diving. Chance looked from the bird to Wyatt. "Does the mother teach them to do everything?"

"Sure," he replied. "She has to or they wouldn't survive."

"So she teaches the little girl hawks how to grow up and be mommy hawks?"

"Yeah, I guess so."

"Then who teaches the boy hawk how to be a daddy hawk?" Chance asked very seriously.

Wyatt looked at her for a moment. Chance was always so full of questions. She could find a question about anything. "I don't know. Maybe they don't have to be taught."

"Why? Boys are different?"

Wyatt laughed with the arrogant superiority of a thirteen-year-old boy. "Man, do you have a lot to learn. Of course boys are different. You're really dumb, you know that?"

"I am not!" She crossed her arms and gave him an indignant look. "I know boys and girls are different. Boys have a penis and girls have a vagina."

Wyatt almost choked in surprise. "Who told you that?" He tried to hide the embarrassment the words caused.

"Nobody." She looked away.

"Chance..." He leaned over and looked at her. "Who told you?"

"Nobody! I found it out all by myself."

"You're lying."

"No, I'm not! I know it, Wyatt. And I know boys play with their penis, too."

Wyatt felt heat rise to his face. "Don't be stupid!"

"I'm not stupid! It's the truth. I saw you playing with yours in the barn. You were in Baron's stall and you had it in your hand doing this—" She moved her closed fist up and down.

Wyatt was embarrassed and pushed her over. "That's a lie!"

"It is not." She straightened up and faced him with a curious look on her face. "Why do you play with your penis?"

Wyatt didn't know what to say. He was embarrassed she had seen him in the barn and mad that she had come right out and talked about it. She was such a stupid girl sometimes.

"Because it feels good!" he finally snapped at her. "Okay? You happy?"

"What does it feel like?" she asked as she got up on her knees and faced him.

"I don't know!" He looked away. "Stop talking about it." He was red with embarrassment, did not hear the man come up behind them.

"Well, well, looky here," the man sneered at them.

Wyatt scrambled to his feet and Chance stared up at the man with wide, frightened eyes. The man reached out and grabbed her arm, hauling her to her feet.

"You're a purty little thing, now ain't you?" he laughed. "And you want to know about peckers, do you? Well, now, I just happen to have a nice one right here just for you, little honey."

Chance screamed as the man picked her up in one arm and jerked down her pants. Wyatt stared in horror, afraid to move yet knowing that he had to stop the man from hurting Chance.

He rushed at the man. "Stop it! Leave her alone!"

The man's fist met the side of his head and sent him tumbling. Suddenly scenes of his mother being raped and beaten flooded his mind. He felt a fire ignite in his brain and bounded to his feet.

The man was trying to get his pants down and hold Chance still at the same time. Only a moment ago he had seemed big and intimidating. Now he appeared small and weak. Wyatt felt like he, on the other hand, was a giant. The man looked at him and his eyes grew round.

Wyatt took a step toward him and the man's face turned pale. He dropped Chance and backed up. "Stay away from me!" His voice was shaking with fear. "You hear me, stay away!"

Wyatt felt his hands wrap around the man's throat. He saw the man's face redden as he struggled to get away, gasping for air. Then he felt his fingers puncture the skin on the man's throat. The warm blood washed over his hands, spraying his face and chest. It smelled coppery and sweet.

The man's eyes rolled back in his head and Wyatt suddenly heard the sound of Chance screaming. He dropped the dead man and turned to her. She looked up at him with eyes full of fear as he reached for her.

Wyatt sat up. His heart was pounding in his chest and his breath was ragged, sending small bursts of steam into the cold night air.

"My god!" He lowered his head into his hands. "It isn't possible!"

But something inside told him that it was more than possible. Something told him what he had just dreamed was the truth. The truth that had been hidden for nineteen years. He looked up at the moon, thinking back. The summer he turned thirteen, Maurice and his wife had gone on holiday in Europe. Adeola, the woman who took care of Chance and Wyatt, arranged for them to go stay with Wyatt's father, John, under the condition that they not mention it to Maurice. Neither child had a problem with that.

Maurice paid them scant attention, only bringing Chance out to show her off at social affairs.

Wyatt had no idea what Maurice's interest in him had ever been. The only times they ever spoke was when Maurice would question Wyatt about the stories Wyatt's grandfather had told him, and whether Wyatt thought there was any truth to the old tales. As a child, Wyatt had believed his grandfather without question and had told Maurice that his grandfather would not have lied. There were times when Maurice challenged him to prove the stories were true, to produce one piece of physical evidence that validated any of the tales.

Wyatt had not known how to prove the truth of the tales and had often wished he did have something he could flaunt at Maurice.

While he and Chance were visiting that summer with John, they snuck off one afternoon. Wyatt borrowed a dirt bike from one of the older boys who lived near his dad. He took Chance up to Clingman's Dome to show her the place where the enchanted lake was supposed to be.

He had never remembered what had happened while they were there. All he remembered was going to the Dome, then being wakened in the forest near his dad's house. He and Chance were both covered with blood and she was in shock. They were taken to the hospital and released after a couple of hours. That afternoon a man's body was found on the Dome. The dirt bike he and Chance had taken was found near the body. Aside from that there were no clues. No one had ever discovered who had killed the man. Both he and Chance were questioned but the memory of that day was erased from both their minds so there was nothing they could tell the reservation police.

Thanks to Wyatt's grandfather's position on the reservation council, Chance's father was not informed of the event and both children were returned to Chance's home.

"Could I have killed that man?" he whispered to the sky. "Is that why I couldn't remember – because I didn't want to?"

There was no answer from the moon or the stars. There was only the reply of the whispering wind, "We are One." Wyatt shivered and curled up in his sleeping bag. The stars twinkled overhead and the moon made its leisurely journey across the velvet sky. But his mind was not on the beauty of the night. It was on the horror he had seen in his own mind.

\* \* \* \* \*

Chance was up early. After showering and dressing she called her office. Dianne, her assistant, told her that Steve from the research department was working on her request and should have something by the end of the day.

She hung up and went outside. She returned to the diner where she had eaten the previous night. Lingered over breakfast, she tried to overhear the conversations of the people around her. Talk today was centered on someone named Jimmy who was in the hospital and about a meeting some men had about the casino.

Chance paid for her breakfast and got in the Wrangler. She drove to the reservation where she spent the day looking around and asking questions about the new casino. The people were polite but distant, answering her questions in as few words as possible.

By the end of the afternoon it was clear that she was not going to get any answers. She drove to the small town of Whittier. There was one small restaurant open. She went in and sat at the counter. A friendly older woman served her.

Chance asked the woman about the new casino and what the people thought about it. The woman immediately began a lecture on the sins of gambling and drinking. It took Chance over an hour to get out of the restaurant. She wandered around town for a while then got in the Jeep and returned to her motel.

There was a message on her voicemail to call the office. She returned the call and was put through to Rich Lange, her boss.

"What the hell are you doing in Bryson? And where the hell is Bryson, anyway?"

"Rich, I think I may have stumbled onto something. Something to do with the plans for a new gambling casino the Cherokee are trying to build. I think there's some trouble with the locals and from what I hear it's getting worse."

There was a moment's silence on the phone. "Okay." Rich's voice sounded resigned but also grudging. "Let me know what turns up. In the meantime, Steve said to give him a call in the morning."

"Thanks, Rich," she replied and hung up.

*Now if I could just find a way to get someone to talk to me!* she thought to herself. But who and where?

Something occurred to her. She had heard several of the men saying something about Ralph's. She threw on her coat and went to the motel office.

"Mrs. Carter?"

The woman walked out of the back room. "Could you tell me how to get to Ralph's?"

Mrs. Carter hesitated a moment before giving her directions. Chance thanked her and went outside to her Jeep.

Ralph's Bar was on the reservation. It was a weathered, wooden structure that looked like it had been there forever. There were a great many trucks and cars parked around the building. Chance found a place to park, stuffed her keys and billfold in her coat pocket and went inside.

Cigarette smoke hung like a blue haze in the air and the smell of sweat and alcohol assaulted her senses. She looked around for an empty table but didn't see one. Spotting an empty stool at the bar, she went over and sat down, aware of the eyes that watched her as she passed.

"What'll it be?" the bartender, a big heavysset man with a long graying braid, asked.

"Beer. Whatever you have on draft."

The man filled a mug and set it down in front of her. "Two bucks."

She pulled a ten from her billfold and handed it to him. "I'm looking for someone – a man named Wyatt Nashoba. You know him?"

"Why're you looking for him? He run out on you or he owe you money?"

"Neither. He's an old friend and I was passing through so I thought I'd look him up."

"Sorry," the man said and made change for her ten.

"Thanks anyway, and keep that."

"It's your nickel," he replied and moved to the other end of the bar.

Chance turned her stool and looked at the people. There were several couples dancing on the small wooden dance floor to a tune on the jukebox but most of the people were just drinking and talking.

One table caught her eye. At it sat three men who appeared to be in their early to mid-thirties. They were casting sly glances at her. She watched until one of them looked over at her again and smiled at him.

The man's eyes widened slightly and he turned away with an embarrassed look on his face. Chance continued to stare and after a few moments he looked at her again. She raised her glass and smiled once more. He returned the smile then turned away said something to the other men. A moment later he got up.

"Hi," she said as he walked over to her.

"Hi to you. You visiting or just passing through?"

"Little of both. You from around here?"

"All my life. Name's Billy Hawkes."

"Well, hello, Billy Hawkes." She extended her right hand. "Nice to meet you. I'm Daven Porter," she said, giving him the name she had given the lady at the motel – the name she used when she was on assignment.

"Porter?" He gave her a funny look. "That name sounds kinda familiar. Any relation to Cole Porter?"

"No," she laughed. "Afraid not. So, tell me, Billy Hawkes, what do you do in this beautiful place?"

"Why don't you join me and my friends? We're just throwing back a few brews."

"Sure," she hopped down off the stool, "I'd like that."

Billy introduced her to the other two men at the table, Joe Whiteside and Ben Hunter. "Nice to meet you," she said as she sat down in the chair they offered, with her back to the door.

"What brings you here?" Billy asked her as he signaled the bartender for another round of drinks.

"Actually, I'm looking for an old friend. Maybe you know him. Wyatt Nashoba."

"Wyatt?" Billy blurted then stammered nervously. "Uh, no. You sure your friend lives around here?"

"I know he's from here," she said, thinking that if she kept at Billy he would break down and tell her where Wyatt was. Because as sure as sunrise, he did know Wyatt. "We've been out of touch for a few years and the last thing I heard he'd bought some land up here."

Billy looked at his friends as the bartender delivered the drinks. He stuck his hand in his pocket but Chance stopped him. "Let me get this round. You can get the next one."

She paid the bartender then turned her attention to Billy again. "You never did tell me what you do."

"Well, you know." He smiled shyly. "This and that. How 'bout you?"

Chance decided to play a hunch. "I work for CNN."

"CNN?" Joe spoke up. "You mean you're a reporter?"

"No, actually I'm a producer. They save the on-camera stuff for the pretty people."

"Well, you're prettier than any of those other babes I've seen," Billy said earnestly.

"Thanks." Chance smiled at him. "That's sweet of you to say. But I like working behind the scenes just fine."

"What does a producer do?" Ben Hunter asked.

"Well, we decide what stories we want to do then we have our research department get all the facts. Once that's done we verify everything they've come up with. Next we send a camera crew and a reporter out to the site, do interviews and get some video footage. The next step is putting it all together and then ta-da—a news story. The producer's job is to oversee all phases of the project, sort of like a supervisor but with a little more control. I get to decide the slant of the story. You know, sort of like who I want to be the good guy and the bad guy."

"That's pretty interesting," Ben said and stood. "Excuse me a minute. Nature calls."

Chance smiled and turned her attention back to Billy. He was tapping his foot in time with the music as he watched her. She looked down at his foot then up at his face. "You like to dance, don't you?"

He nodded as she finished her beer. "You want to dance with me, Billy Hawkes?" she asked with a smile.

"You bet." He grinned and stood, taking her hand.

Chance thought he would go to the dance floor but instead he swung her around right there beside the table. The music was not particularly slow but Billy pulled her up against him anyway. She pushed against him gently and backed up. Billy didn't seem to take offense. He grinned at her as they danced.

He looked up at something over her shoulder and his grin disappeared. Before Chance could turn around she heard a voice behind her. "Well, Billy, what've you got here?"

Chance broke free of Billy and whirled around. Time seemed to come to a standstill. The music and voices faded away and all she could hear was the pounding of her heart.

Wyatt looked bigger, more muscular and powerful. His hair was longer than the last time she'd seen him. It brushed the back of his collar. But the biggest change was his face. Not that his features were different. Just that they appeared so hard, like he was made of stone instead of flesh and blood. His black eyes bored into hers and she felt an ache in her heart.

"Wyatt!"

Wyatt was so caught up in his own thoughts that he barely heard her speak. He never expected her to show up, but here she was. No longer under his conscious control, his eyes took in her appearance. She had changed. Her hair was still the color of summer wheat, but longer with a fringe of bangs framing her eyes. She was a startlingly beautiful woman, with high cheekbones and full lips. She was still slim, but the shirt she wore displayed her full firm breasts.

He looked down into her eyes. Her eyes hadn't changed. No one had eyes like her. Only a shade darker than her hair, they seemed more gold than brown, the inner portion of the iris dotted with gold flecks and the rims a deeper hue. Long dark lashes framed her eyes, seeming incongruous with the light hair. She wore no makeup to accent her features and he realized she didn't need it. She was more beautiful without it than other women were with it.

"Wyatt?" her voice cut into his scrutiny.

"What are you doing here?"

She looked up at him with hurt in her eyes. "I—" Casting a look at Billy who stood behind her and Joe sitting at the table staring, she paused. Then stepping close to Wyatt, she looked up at him.

"I had to see you," she whispered.

"You shouldn't have come."

"I had to. Can we talk?"

"No."

"Wyatt!" She grabbed his arm as he turned away from her. "Wait!"

"I said no." His voice was filled with bitterness. "Go home. Go back to your rich friends—your Mercedes and country clubs. Just get the hell away from me."

Chance dropped her hands and he walked away from her. She took a look at Billy Hawkes. He smiled in an embarrassed fashion and shrugged. "You wanna have another beer...dance or something?"

"No, thanks, Billy." She tried to smile. "How about a rain check?"

"Sure, anytime."



"Okay, I'll see you."

She returned to the motel and lay down across the bed. Wyatt's behavior had both hurt and confused her. He acted like he hated her, like he couldn't stand the sight of her. She thought about it and realized that he'd acted that way toward her ever since her high-school graduation. Which made her angry as well as hurt.

"Where does he get off comparing me to Maurice and his cronies?" she said to the dark screen of the television set. "Just who the hell does he think he is acting like that? What did I ever do to him?"

There were no answers to her questions. Only more questions.

\* \* \* \* \*

Wyatt woke up to find himself on the couch. Groaning as he sat up, he threw the quilt aside and rubbed his eyes. Of all the people he would have expected to run into at Ralph's, Chance was the last one.

Seeing her was a shock, one he was not prepared for. Even now he could see her in his mind – her long blonde hair streaming down her back like a shining wave and her golden eyes turned up to him.

"Stop it!" he scolded himself. "Just forget her."

But he couldn't help himself. Images of Chance floated through even as he tried to stop them. With a curse he rose and went upstairs to change clothes. After washing his face and brushing his teeth, he went outside and stretched in preparation for a long run. Sometimes that was the only way to get rid of the tension – just exhaust himself.

*There's not enough miles*, he thought as he started running. Chance Davenport had haunted him for a long time, and not fighting, drinking, fucking or running could exorcise her from his mind.

Chance stopped in front of John Nashoba's house and sat looking at it for a few minutes. Coming to see Wyatt's father might not be wise. But she had to find out what was going on with Wyatt and his father would know better than anyone.

She got out of the Jeep and walked across the yard toward the front door. Just as she reached the steps, John Nashoba walked out. His eyes widened in surprise and he stopped. "Chance? What are you doing here?"

"I came to see Wyatt."

"And did you?"

"Sort of." She looked down at her feet for a moment. "He wasn't particularly happy to see me."

"Does that surprise you?"

"Yes!" She looked up at him. "It does."

"What can I do for you?"

"I was hoping you could tell me what's going on with him. Why does he...why does he hate me so much?"

John looked at her for a moment then pulled open the screen door. "Come on in."

Chance followed him inside and took a seat at the kitchen table. "Coffee?" he asked, as he picked up the pot.

"Yes, thank you."

He poured two cups and handed her one as he took a seat across from her. Neither one of them spoke for a few seconds. Finally John heaved a sigh. "Chance, you have to understand, Wyatt's a complicated man. Things have happened in his life, things that would be hard for anyone to deal with."

"You mean your wife. I'm sorry, I don't really know what else to say. I know it had to be horrible for both of you."

"Yes." John nodded. "It was. Do you know what happened that day?"

"I think so. Adeola, the lady who raised me, told me what she knew."

"What exactly did she say?"

Chance repeated what Adeola had told her and John stood up to look out the back door with his hands in the pockets of his faded jeans. A minute or so passed then he turned to her. "There's a little more to that story."

Her eyes widened as he reclaimed his seat and started to talk.

\* \* \* \* \*

Chance stood in front of the mirror in the motel bathroom, combing out her hair with a distant expression on her face. The things John Nashoba had told her were disturbing, to say the least. She could not stop thinking about it.

She put the comb down and went into the bedroom. She dressed in a long-sleeved bodysuit and jeans, pulled on a pair of sneakers and picked up a denim jacket from the chair. Hopefully she would find Wyatt at Ralph's. If not, then she didn't know what she would do. She didn't feel that she could go to his house. He would probably throw her out if she did, so her best bet was to camp out at Ralph's and hoped he showed up.

She found a place to park beside the bar and went inside. As soon as she walked in, Billy Hawkes came up to her. "Hey, you come back to collect on that beer and dance?"

Chance smiled. Billy was cute in a childlike kind of way. "Well, actually, I was hoping to talk to Wyatt. Have you seen him?" Billy pointed across the bar to a table in the back. Wyatt sat alone with an almost empty bottle and a shot glass on the table in front of him.

"Thanks, Billy." She gave his arm a squeeze.

"Hey!" He grabbed her hand as she started away from him. "I don't think it'd be a good idea for you to talk to him right now. He's kinda in one of his moods."

Chance pried her fingers from his. "He seems to always be in one of his moods around me. Don't worry, I'm used to it."

She walked over to Wyatt's table and sat down beside him. He looked at her without comment and refilled his glass, setting the empty bottle down.

"Can we talk?"

"Nothing to talk about," he said and stood.

Chance watched him go to the bar and get another bottle. She crossed the room and sat down at the table with Billy and Joe. Billy got her a beer and she took a sip, keeping her eye on Wyatt.

After a half-hour of strained silence, Joe and Billy excused themselves to move to another table. Chance sat silently, watching Wyatt. For two hours she didn't move. He never turned or looked in her direction as he drank and talked with the men at the bar. She saw him finish the bottle and get another, then he turned and walked over to her.

"You wanna talk, let's talk," he said, his words slightly slurred.

"Here?"

"Good a place as any," he said as he sat down.

Chance didn't know where to start. After a few minutes of uncomfortable silence she spoke up. "How long have you been back?"

"'Bout a week or so."

"Is Ashley here with you?"

"We split up a year or so ago."

"I'm sorry."

"I'm not," he growled. "Found the bitch in bed with one of my friends. Glad to get rid of her."

Chance watched as he tilted the bottle up once more. "Wyatt, why didn't you let me know? I mean, Adeola's really missed you. It would've been nice to hear from you now and then."

"I was busy," he replied and leveled his eyes at her. "Why're you here?"

She looked at him for a moment. "Because of your call. I was worried."

"You shouldn't be," he said and took another drink.

"Wyatt, don't you think you've had enough?" She reached for the bottle.

"Don't!" he barked loudly. "Don't ever try to tell me what to do – you got it?"

"Yes," she whispered, embarrassed by his outburst and all the curious eyes that watched them. Afraid of angering him, she remained silent. Eventually he began to sink in his seat.

She watched as his eyes began to close and slowly removed the bottle from his hand. Looking around, she spotted Billy and motioned him over to the table.

"Will you help me get him outside? I think I should take him home."

"Sure." He nodded and motioned to Joe. Between the two of them they got Wyatt loaded into his old Jeep.

"Listen, I don't know how to get to his house," Chance said as she got behind the wheel. "Would one of you mind showing me the way? You can take my car. It's that black Wrangler right over there. Here are the keys."

They both agreed to help. She waited as they started her Jeep and pulled out onto the road. She followed them to Wyatt's house, glancing over at Wyatt every now and then. He never moved or opened his eyes.

"You want us to help you get him inside?" Billy asked as she stopped and turned off the ignition.

"No, thanks, I can manage, but I appreciate your help. Take my car. I'll catch up with you tomorrow, okay?"

"Sure thing." Billy smiled. "See ya."

Chance watched the taillights disappear then turned to Wyatt who was slumped against the door. "Wyatt, Wyatt, wake up!"

He pushed her hand away as she shook him and opened his eyes. "What're you doing here?"

"I brought you home." She inclined her head in the direction of his house.

He rubbed his face and opened the door, almost falling out. Chance got out and ran around the Jeep to him but he pushed her away as she tried to steady him.

"I'm just trying to help!"

"I don't need your help!" he barked and weaved his way to the front door.

She followed him inside since he left the door standing open, and looked around at the small but cozy den. Wyatt staggered into the kitchen and emerged with another bottle. Taking a spread from the back of the couch, he walked past her and went outside. For a few moments Chance just stood there, not knowing what to do. Then she followed him outside. He wandered out of sight and she ran to catch up with him.

She saw him sit down on a small rise overlooking the river in the distance. Without speaking she walked up and sat down beside him. He opened the bottle and took a drink then looked at her and extended the bottle. She took it and tilted it up, gasping as the fiery liquid burned down her throat.

"Thanks," she croaked and cleared her throat. "Wyatt, why do you hate me so much?"

"Never said I did," he replied without looking at her.

"Then why do you act like you do?"

He didn't answer and she put her hand on his arm. "Will you please talk to me?"

Wyatt turned and looked into her eyes. "What do you want me to say, Chance?"

"I don't know. Maybe that you're glad to see me? I'm glad to see you. I've missed you, Wyatt."

He opened his mouth as if to reply then closed it and shook his head. Turning away, he looked out over the water. When at last he started to sway as if he was going to topple over, Chance took the bottle and stood. "Come on." She extended her hand to him.

He looked up and after a moment took her hand. With his arm draped over her shoulder they made their way to the house. Chance thought she was going to collapse under his weight but she finally got him in the house and upstairs.

Wyatt fell face first on the bed and was out cold before he hit the mattress. Chance took off his shoes and spread a blanket over him then went downstairs. Wrapping up in a thick quilt, she lay down on the couch. After a very long time she drifted off to sleep.

## Chapter Three

The first rays of sun were streaking across the sky when Chance awoke. The room was chilly as the fire had long since died down. Taking a couple of logs from the rack beside the fireplace, she stirred the glowing embers and placed the wood on top of the coals.

She quietly tiptoed upstairs. Wyatt was still asleep with one arm thrown across his face. Chance went back downstairs to the kitchen. She looked around and found the coffee. She prepared a pot then wandered around the house.

It wasn't a big place. Aside from the den and kitchen downstairs there was a bathroom beneath the loft area and a small sitting area piled with books.

In the rear of the house on the opposite side of the kitchen were two doors. She opened the first one and saw the room was crammed with weights and exercise equipment. She closed that door and she walked down the short hall to the last room.

Her eyes widened in surprise as she opened the door and looked around. One wall was dominated with a big picture window. Beneath the window sat a large drawing table on which a completed picture lay.

Chance looked at the picture and realized it was an illustration for a book cover. She had known all her life that Wyatt liked to doodle and draw but she never imagined he was that good. She studied the illustration for a few minutes and realized that the style was familiar.

Turning from the drawing table she looked around at the pictures that were tacked on the opposite wall. They were all excellent, but some were disturbing—scenes of violence and darkness. As she admired his work, she sat down at the chair in front of the drawing table. After a little while she turned the chair and looked around the room.

An old two-drawer file cabinet in the corner drew her attention. She went to it and knelt down, opening the top drawer. It was crammed full of sketchbooks. At first she was hesitant to look inside them. But with Wyatt asleep upstairs he would never know. And her curiosity was in control. Lifting out a stack she sat down on the floor and started looking through them.

The first couple were of scenes he had apparently sketched while in the Navy. There were faces of people from Africa to Alaska. In each picture the eyes of the people seemed to be alive. Wyatt had the ability to capture the soul of his subject in his work. Chance could almost feel the hearts of the people she saw in the drawings.

When she opened the next pad, a gasp of surprise escaped her lips. The book was filled with sketches and drawings of her. She flipped through the pages, marveling at

what she saw. There were images of her at all ages. It was like seeing an album of her childhood.

She reached the last page and stopped to stare in complete amazement. The face was hers but she didn't think she could ever look that sensual. It showed the form of a woman lying on her back on a large, slightly curved rock. The woman's hair cascaded down over the stone in a shining wave. Her face was turned forward and there was a look of such sensuality in the eyes they seemed to call like a siren, drawing the viewer inside the picture.

The woman's arms were crossed over her breasts, pushing the full mounds up together. Sunlight filtered down through the trees that towered overhead, dappling her body with sun and shadow. She seemed to be as much a part of nature as the trees and rocks. Chance stared at the picture, wondering why Wyatt would have drawn it.

"What are you doing?" His angry voice behind her made her jump.

"I was...I was...just looking around," she explained, stumbling over the words in embarrassment.

"You mean you were snooping."

"I didn't mean to. I was just looking around and I found this room. I didn't know you were such a talented artist. That picture on the drawing board—it's for a book cover, isn't it? I recognize the style. You've done a lot of them, haven't you?"

Wyatt stared at her stoically without reply and she looked down at the sketchpad still in her hand. "Why did you do these, Wyatt?"

He snatched it from her and put it on the drawing table. Then he shoved her out of the room and closed the door. "That's private and I don't appreciate you going through my things."

Chance stumbled as he pushed her again farther down the hall. She reached out to steady herself against the wall. He walked by her and disappeared into the kitchen. She started after him then stopped. She was getting nowhere. So far he had not had a kind word to say to her and it was just getting worse. The way things were going, she wasn't going to find out what was bothering him. Until he got over his anger there was no point in even trying to talk to him.

Resisting the urge to try and get through to him, she ran into the den and snatched up the keys to his Jeep from the coffee table. She didn't bother to tell him she was leaving. She felt if she did he would only tell her how he hoped she never came back.

She ran outside, climbed into the Jeep and started it. She had no doubt that he heard the engine but he didn't come outside. She drove back to Ralph's bar. Her Wrangler was parked in the back lot. She stopped and went over to it. The doors were locked and the keys were not in the ignition. She had no idea how to get in touch with Billy Hawkes so she decided to just leave the Wrangler where it was and come back later that night and hope that Billy showed up.

As soon as she arrived at the motel she took a long, hot shower then checked her messages. There was a message from her father, demanding that she call him

immediately. She almost decided against it, but then changed her mind. Abbott answered the phone at the estate.

"Davenport residence. How may I help you?"

"Hi, Abbott, it's Chance. Is my father around?"

"One moment, Miss Chance."

She pulled her attaché case over closer as she waited for her father to pick up. He came on the line a moment later. "Do you mind telling me just where the hell you are?"

"On assignment," she lied without hesitation.

"Assignment?" He sounded as if he didn't believe her. "What assignment?"

She didn't answer his question. "Is there something you wanted to talk to me about?"

"I want to know why you went to see Neil Brown!"

"Not that it's any of your business, but it's for a piece I'm putting together."

"What piece?"

"Look, I really don't have time for this right now. When the piece airs you can watch it. But right now I have a lot to do. So unless there's something else—"

"I want you to quit that goddamn job!" he shouted. "I've have had enough of your foolishness. It's high time you settled down and started a family. I spoke with Walter Stillwell just yesterday, and even though you treated him abominably he would still take you back. And you couldn't find a more suitable husband, I might say. Why, Walter is worth at least—"

"He's ancient," Chance interrupted. "And I'm not interested."

"Ancient?" Maurice's voice rose even higher. "What kind of remark is that? He's a year younger than I, and I hardly consider myself ancient. Besides, you need someone more mature and—"

"I have to go," she cut him off. "Bye."

She hung up the phone before he could say any more, grabbed a pillow from the bed and clamped it over her face. After a long scream she let the pillow fall away from her face. She wondered what it would be like to have a father who genuinely cared for her, instead of one who only cared for furthering the family fortune.

Pushing thoughts of Maurice aside, she dialed her office number. When her production assistant, Steve answered he began listing the things they needed to do to get information on the situation with the proposed casino and the trouble the Cherokee were having trying to get and keep a contractor. Her conversation lasted more than two hours and by the time she was finished, she realized she was hungry.

She left the motel and drove around, looking for a place to eat besides the diner.

\* \* \* \* \*



Wyatt added wood to the fire and sat down on the couch. There were still vestiges of anger left from his argument with Chance. He knew that part of his anger stemmed from the embarrassment he felt at her discovering the sketches and drawings he had done of her.

Picking up the sketchbook that contained the drawings from the coffee table, he opened it again. The pictures seemed to possess life to him. But then he saw them through the eyes of memory. They were part of him. He should have thrown them away a long time ago. Several times he had started to, but something always stopped him. Maybe his masochistic need to punish himself for ever caring about her in the first place.

Closing the pad, he tossed it back on the table. He had to get out of there. The memories and old feelings she had stirred were too painful and too filled with anger. They ate at his soul and he couldn't take it anymore.

Grabbing his coat, he left the house and started walking. He had no idea where he was going. At that point it didn't matter.

\* \* \* \* \*

Chance spent the day driving around, trying to get a feel of the place. Everywhere she went she got the impression that people were nervous about something, but no one wanted to talk to her. She stopped around six in the evening, had a salad and coffee at the small diner then returned to her motel.

She went over her notes then watched television for a couple of hours, but paid no attention to what was on. She was battling with herself. She'd come there expressly to see Wyatt and now she was stalling. There was no need to ask why. Seeing him had fanned embers of love and desire that had never died into a steady burn. The more she saw him, the hotter that fire rose and she was afraid that she wouldn't be able to stand the heat. But she could not be a coward. Something was wrong, and she had to find out what it was. Even if it meant getting hurt, she had to help Wyatt whether he wanted her help or not. If he hated her for it, then better she learn to accept it and more on. At half-past nine she changed clothes and left. When she got to Ralph's Bar, the parking lot was packed. She understood why when she got inside. There was a pool tournament in progress.

Making her way through the people, she went to the bar and ordered a beer. Just as she was stuffing her change into her pocket, someone tapped her on the shoulder.

She turned and smiled at Billy Hawkes. "Hi! Want a beer?"

"Sure," he agreed enthusiastically. "And I guess you want these."

She took her keys from him. "Thanks." She motioned for the bartender. As soon as she paid for the second beer she turned back to Billy. "So, are you in the tournament?"

"Naw, don't have the fifty dollars' entrance fee."

"If you did could you win?"

"Are you kidding? I could clean house."

"Oh?" She arched her eyebrows. "You want to put your money where your mouth is on that?"

"Whadda you mean?"

"I mean I'll put up the entry fee. But, if you win, we split the purse and if you lose—let's see, if you lose then you have to tell me all about the trouble with the casino and these Holling people I keep hearing about. Deal?"

Billy's smile faded to be replaced with a look of anxious indecision. For a few moments Chance thought he was going to turn her down. Then he grinned at her. "What the hell. I'm not gonna lose. Deal."

She dug the money out of her pocket and gave it to him, then watched as he set off to the other side of the bar. He disappeared into the crowd and she walked over toward the door where there were less people. As she neared the door, Wyatt walked in.

Both of them stopped cold and stared at one another. Finally he walked over to her. "I'd like to have my Jeep back, if you don't mind."

She pulled the keys from her pocket and handed them to him. "Can I buy you a drink?"

"I can buy my own."

"Fine." She was determined not to let him make her mad. "See you around."

She walked away but turned and looked back as she reached the bar. Wyatt was watching her with a dark scowl on his face. He saw her look at him and abruptly turned and left. Chance started to go after him but stopped when Billy walked up to her. "Okay, I'm up next. You gonna be my cheering section?"

"Sure." She couldn't turn him down, he looked so excited.

He grabbed her hand and pulled her along with him toward the pool table. She waited with him until it was his turn to play, then gave him a hug. "Good luck."

Billy won his game quickly and she congratulated him. "Well, I guess I won't be getting any information from you," she teased. "If the rest of the games are like that one. Unfortunately, I can't hang around to watch. There's some things I have to do."

"What about your cut of the prize?" he asked, clearly disappointed that she was leaving.

"I'll catch up with you later to collect," she promised. "See ya."

"Yeah, okay." He gave her a smile. "Later."

Chance went outside, got in the Wrangler and started it. If she had any sense she would just go back to the motel and get a good night's sleep then get up and go home first thing in the morning. The trouble was, when it came to Wyatt, not only did she not have good sense, she had no sense at all. She couldn't help it. Despite everything, she loved him, and she had come this far so she might as well give it one more try. Pulling out onto the road, she headed in the direction of his house.

\* \* \* \* \*

Wyatt pulled up in his drive and stopped the Jeep but did not turn off the engine. At that moment the thought of an empty silent house was as distasteful as a root canal. He needed to be somewhere there was noise, somewhere loud enough to drown out his own thoughts. But Chance was at Ralph's and he did not want to be around her.

"So you're going to let her run you out of your own hangout?" he asked himself. "Hell no. Let her leave."

Backing out of the driveway, he headed back the way he'd come.

\* \* \* \* \*

Wyatt's Jeep was not in the drive when Chance arrived at his house. For a few minutes she sat in the Wrangler, trying to decide what to do.

"Well, he's bound to come home sometime," she spoke to herself.

Turning off the engine, she got out and walked to the house. The door was unlocked so she went inside. The den was chilly but there were live coals in the fireplace. Stirring the coals, she added wood then took a seat on the couch. Wrapping the quilt that was thrown across the back of the sofa around her, she lay down and propped her head on a throw pillow.

Her eyes fell on the sketchpad on the coffee table. She wondered why Wyatt had brought it in there. More than that, she wondered why he had even drawn those pictures of her in the first place.

There were so many questions she would have liked to ask him. If only she could find a way to talk to him without making him angry. But how to do that was a mystery. Closing her eyes, she snuggled under the quilts and watched the flames from the fire. Her thoughts wandered, carrying her back in time. She remembered how it had been when she and Wyatt were children. Despite the normal bickering and childishness they had been close.

Things changed as they matured. She closed her eyes and without warning a memory surfaced. It was of her high school graduation...

She filled with immediate excitement when she looked out in the auditorium and saw Wyatt sitting beside her father. He was wearing his dress uniform and he looked so handsome. But there was a woman with him. Several girls close by her also noticed and started whispering to her about wanting to come over to her house and meet him. Chance didn't even hear them. Her heart had plummeted the moment her eyes fell on the woman with Wyatt. The rest of the graduation ceremony passed in a haze. All she was conscious of was the woman who was holding Wyatt's hand and smiling up at him.

Afterwards, Maurice had a party at the estate. As always, the guest list consisted of his friends rather than her own. Wyatt came and brought the woman, introducing her as his fiancée, Cheryl Thompson. Chance immediately disliked Cheryl. She hated her

bleached hair and red lips and the way she rubbed all over Wyatt yet batted her eyes and flirted with all the other men. Chance was careful not to let anyone know. She smiled and was polite but kept her distance, wishing she could leave.

As the party was winding down, a boy Chance had known from school stopped by. He had graduated a couple of years earlier and she had dated him once or twice. His name was Mark Woods and his father was an acquaintance of Maurice's from the country club.

Mark asked her to go out and since she didn't want to hang around and watch Cheryl crawl all over Wyatt, she agreed. To her dismay, Cheryl overheard her tell Maurice that she was going out with Mark and insisted that she and Wyatt join them. Chance insisted they take separate cars and they met at a local bar that many of the kids went to because they were lenient on enforcing the legal age limits.

Chance wasn't a big drinker but her date was. He drank one beer after the other as the rest of them made an awkward attempt at conversation. By eleven he was staggering drunk. Wyatt suggested that he drive Mark home but Chance was not about to get stuck riding with Cheryl so she said she would drive Mark herself.

As Wyatt and Cheryl left to return to the estate, she helped Mark into his car. They left the bar and headed for Mark's house which was about ten miles from the Davenport estate. They were less than a mile from his house when Mark suddenly started groaning and saying that he was going to throw up. Chance found a gravel road and pulled off the pavement so he could get out. But instead of getting sick he started grabbing her and trying to pull her pants down.

She was terrified. She did not want to have sex with Mark. She screamed at him to stop but he just laughed, saying it was time someone heated up the ice in her veins. He taunted her as they struggled, calling her frigid and cold. She fought him harder and broke away. Throwing the door open she tried to get out of the car but he grabbed her hair and yanked her back. The jerk caused her to hit her head on the car frame and the last thing she remembered was blackness closing in...

Chance sighed and snuggled deeper under the quilt. She would just as soon not remember that night but the memory demanded attention...

She woke up and looked around fearfully. The sight of her own room gave her a feeling of relief mixed with confusion. "How did I get here?" she asked aloud.

She got up and started downstairs. Abbott met her at the foot of the stairs. "Miss Chance." He nodded, averting his eyes.

"Where is everyone?" she asked, realizing that she was not properly dressed, wearing only a T-shirt and her underwear.

"Your father had a meeting and Mrs. Davenport took Miss Thompson into the city to do some shopping."

"Oh, okay." Chance started back upstairs then stopped. "Where's Wyatt?"

"I believe he is in his room," Abbott replied. "Shall I have Cook prepare you something to eat?"

"No, I'm not hungry," she said with a strained smile. "Thanks anyway."

Running upstairs she passed her room and continued to the end of the hall. She knocked on the door and waited for a response.

"What?"

"Can I come in?"

"Sure."

She opened the door and looked inside. Wyatt was lying on the bed, wearing only a pair of fatigues. Chance felt the heat rush to her face as she looked at his bare chest and hastily looked away.

"What's up?" He tossed aside the book he was reading and averted his eyes from her bare thighs.

"Nothing," she mumbled, wandering around the room and letting her hands trail over the furniture. "I mean...well, it's... Wyatt, can I...can I talk to you?"

"Sure," he said as he sat up. "Something wrong?"

"That's just it." She pulled the chair out from the desk and sat down. "I don't know. See, I...well, I don't remember how I got home last night."

"What do you remember?"

"I remember leaving the bar around twelve-thirty. We were riding along and Mark said he was going to throw up so I pulled over. Then he—"

"He what?" Wyatt asked when she didn't finish.

Chance twisted her hands in her lap nervously for a moment then jumped up and paced across the room. "Well, he started...you know...trying to make it with me."

"And?" Wyatt stood up.

"And that's it." She looked up at him as he stepped in front of her. "I tried to get out of the car and he grabbed my hair and the last thing I remember was this pain in the back of my head then everything went black."

"And you don't remember anything else?"

"Nothing." She put her hands to her temples, squeezing her head as if she could force herself to remember. "It's like...like nothing's there and it scares me."

Wyatt took her hand and led her over to sit on the bed. "I brought you home."

"You?" She looked up at him in disbelief.

"Yeah, me. Cheryl and I got back around midnight and you weren't here. She went on to bed and I waited up. When you hadn't shown up by one I went looking for you and found both of you passed out in the front seat of his car. So, I put you in my car and left him asleep on the seat with his doors locked."

"Why?" She frowned up at him.

"Why what?"

"Why would you go looking for me?"

"Is there some reason I shouldn't?"

"No, I guess not." Both of them were silent for a few minutes.

Chance's attention was on something besides him bringing her home. It was something that Mark had said to her, something she had heard a great many times.

When the silence continued to stretch, Wyatt spoke up. "Is there something else?"

Chance stared at him for a long time, trying to decide if she really wanted to talk to him about it. When they were growing up he had always been the one she had turned to, the one she confided in. But since he had left to join the Navy she had become accustomed to keeping everything to herself. "Mark said there was something wrong with me."

"Like what?"

She blushed and looked down, speaking without answering his question. "He's not the only one. Lot's of guys have said it. Even my girlfriends think I'm some kind of a freak."

Wyatt gave her a puzzled look. "I'm not following you."

She laughed in embarrassment. "You remember when you graduated from the community college and were getting ready to leave for the Navy?"

He nodded without speaking. "Remember what happened that night before you left?" Her face flushed as she remembered. "How I wanted you to...well, you know."

"Yes." His voice sounded lower and deeper. "You wanted to have sex."

"Why wouldn't you?" She looked up at him. "Am I too ugly or what?"

Wyatt stared into her eyes for a moment then reached over to run his hand along the side of her face and into her long hair, letting the silky strands run through his fingers as he smoothed it down her back. "There's nothing ugly about you, Chance. You're beautiful. Always have been. But you were just a kid."

"Lots of my friends were doing it," she said defensively, thinking that he was using her age as an excuse.

"But you hadn't. And you weren't ready."

"But if I had been older," she said in a shaky voice, "like, say, I am now. Would you have stopped?"

Wyatt's hand stilled its motion and dropped away. "Maybe. Maybe not. I don't know. What difference does it make?"

She was silent for a moment, trying to marshal her courage. She had loved Wyatt as long as she could remember and when he had left to join the service it had broken her heart. Part of her was afraid that when he left this time he would be gone from her life for good and she didn't know if she could face that. She had a secret dream that if they

could just be together once, that he would realize that he really did love her and would not want to leave her behind. The problem was that she was so afraid that it was all just a silly dream, that in reality he would reject her, she was scared to make an overture. But she also knew that she if she didn't do it then she might never find the courage, or have the opportunity again. Taking a deep breath she turned to him. "Will you now?"

Wyatt's eyes widened and his mouth dropped open. "What?"

"I said will you now. I don't want to be a virgin anymore."

Wyatt stood up and shoved his hands in his pockets, staring at her with his eyebrows drawn together. "Chance, this isn't...you can't just ask me...look, your first time should be special. You don't do it just because you don't want to be a virgin anymore. You should do it because...well, because it's something you want to share with someone...someone you have feelings for, someone you care about."

"I know!" She jumped up and walked to him. "That's why I'm asking you. Wyatt, I care more about you than I do anyone. I always have. And you're the one who's always been there for me. You were the one who taught me to ride a bike and saddle a horse. You were the one who helped me with algebra and came to see me at dance recitals. It was even you who explained what was happening the first time I had a period and thought I was dying. There isn't anyone I have deeper feelings for. I know the first time should be special and I want it to be. That's why I want it to be with you."

Wyatt stared at her for a long time without moving or speaking. Chance was afraid he was going to say no. She reached out hesitantly and placed her palm against his warm skin. "Please, Wyatt," she whispered, moving closer to him.

He still didn't answer, but he didn't say no. But his heart started beating faster. Chance was so nervous she couldn't stop trembling but she was not going to back down. She put her hands on his shoulders and stood up on her toes to kiss him lightly. The action caused their bodies to press against one another.

The soft kiss was brief. Still on her toes she looked up into his eyes. For a long moment they merely stared into one another's eyes then Wyatt suddenly groaned and wrapped his arms around her. His lips parted against hers and she clung to him. After a moment he pushed her to arm's length. "This isn't right." His voice seemed deeper and raspy, but sexy, making Chance want him even more.

"Yes, it is," she argued, wanting him to kiss her again. "Please, I want to."

He didn't respond in words but after a moment he reached down and pulled her T-shirt over her head. Chance started to cross her arms over her breasts but stopped. She took a deep breath and remained immobile as his eyes traveled down her body.

Wyatt's hands moved to her breasts, cupping them gently. Chance sucked in her breath as his fingers began to circle her nipples, making them tingle and burn. "God, you're beautiful," he breathed softly, "so soft, so sexy."

He moved closer and his hand slid down her body, disappearing into her underwear. She gasped lightly as his fingers found her entrance. He paused. "You can say no, Chance. I don't want to hurt you."

“No, I want it – you – this. Wyatt, please.”

He took her face in both his hands and looked into her eyes for a long time. Chance couldn't remember ever seeing such tenderness on his face. His lips met hers, tongue tracing her lips then dipping inside her mouth to explore gently. Chance wound her arms around his neck and pressed as tightly as she could get against him. Wyatt made a sound like a moan in his throat which strangely excited her. For several long minutes they remained locked in place, lips and tongues touching, caressing and experimenting. He slid her panties down and gently pushed her back on the bed.

She almost backed out when he knelt down beside the bed and pulled her to him, spreading her legs. His tongue touched her clit and it was like fire. She had never felt anything like it. It made her skin burn and her muscles tense.

A feeling like something swelling simultaneously in her mind and abdomen began to consume her. Moments later the dam burst and she was overwhelmed by sensation. Wyatt rose and unfastened his trousers.

Chance's eyes grew wide as she looked at his naked body. He was beautiful. “Are you sure?” he asked.

“Positive.”

He lowered himself on her and gently guided his erection between her legs into the wetness. She cried out as he pushed through the thin membrane and he paused, looking at her with a question on his face.

“Don't stop,” she whispered.

He kissed her gently and she could taste herself on his lips. Her tongue licked at his lips and they parted. Wyatt moved against her and after a few moments she began to feel another buildup of sensation.

She moaned as the feeling claimed her, and clung to him. He slowed and moved his mouth to her breasts, exciting her with his tongue. Then he thrust harder against her. She met his thrusts, arching up against him.

She forgot about the soreness and about the embarrassment and the time slipped away. When some time later Wyatt tensed and groaned slightly she cried out once more. A few moments later he withdrew and rolled over on the damp sheets beside her.

Chance didn't know what to do or say. She had no idea how one was supposed to act after making love. After a few minutes she turned to look at him. He was staring at the ceiling and she could have sworn there were tears glistening in his eyes.

“Wyatt?”

“Christ, Chance!” He swiped his hands over his face and turned toward her. “What the fuck am I doing?”

“What?” She was confused. “Did I do something wrong? I can try –”

“No.” He got up and went into the bathroom. She heard water running and a few minutes later he came back into the room with a wet towel.



She took the towel as he handed it to her and looked at him questioningly. "You should clean up," he said as he reached for his pants.

Chance looked down and saw the blood that smeared the inside of her thighs and stained the bedspread. She grabbed her shirt and went into the bathroom. After cleaning up and dressing she returned to the bedroom to find Wyatt stripping the bed.

"Wyatt?"

He turned to her and his face looked like it was carved from stone. "What's wrong?" She went to him.

He pulled away from her touch. "What's wrong?" she asked again. "Did I do something wrong? Are you mad?"

"Not at you," he finally replied as he stuffed the stained bedclothes into the laundry chute. "Chance, you've turned into a beautiful young woman and there're gonna be lots of men who'll give anything to be with you. But I'm not one of them."

"What did I do?" She felt tears spill onto her face. "Wyatt, I love you. I always have. I don't want any other men. I just want —"

"Chance, listen to me!" He grabbed her arms roughly. "You don't love me. You can't. You might be eighteen but you're still a kid. You don't know anything about living yet. More importantly, we're from two different worlds. You belong to this world—the one of mansions and fancy cars and country clubs. I don't and I don't want to. Don't you get it? I don't like this...this white man's world. I don't like any part of it. But you—you belong here."

"You don't like any part of it?" She looked up at him. "You mean, me included."

"Chance—" He suddenly released her and turned away. "Find someone who fits in your world. Someone who'll give you the life you want."

Chance suddenly felt angry that Wyatt was lumping her into the same class as Patricia and Maurice and their snobby friends. "How do you know what I want, Wyatt? You're so busy being mad at the world that you can't see what's in front of your nose! You don't want me to be part of your world? Fine! Then you go off and marry that bleached blonde you brought here. See if she fits into your world."

She ran for the door and jerked it open but stopped and looked back at him. "You look everywhere, Wyatt, as hard as you can. But you can take this to the bank. You won't find anyone else who cares about you the way I do. Not ever!"

Turning away she closed the door behind her and ran to her room.

Swiping at her eyes, Chance pushed back the feelings the memory brought with it. Even now, after so many years, it still hurt. She tried to make herself think of other things, but there was something else about that time that demanded her attention. It was something she had never considered until now.

Later that day, after she had cried herself out, she had gone downstairs to the kitchen. Beda Johns, the Jamaican cook, had been sitting at the table reading the paper.

Chance had looked over her shoulder at the paper. There was a picture of Mark Woods on the front page and a caption reading, "Family Mourns Death of Son".

Chance felt a sickness take hold in her stomach. According to the news story Mark had been found dead in his car around half-past three in the morning. His eyes had been gouged out, his throat slit and his fingers cut off. There was mention of other mutilation but no details.

She'd run from the kitchen back upstairs to her room and thrown herself across the bed. She hadn't liked Mark all that much but she certainly wouldn't have wished that on him.

Now, in hindsight, she wondered what had happened to him that night. The police came to her house and questioned her and for some reason she lied. She told them the story that Wyatt had told her. That she and Mark had both had too much to drink and pulled over off the road and passed out. She said Wyatt had come and taken her home and when they left Mark was asleep in the car. The police then questioned Wyatt and he told them that when he got to the car, Chance and Mark were both passed-out drunk so he locked the car doors, left Mark asleep and took Chance home. Apparently the police believed them because nothing else was ever said. But no one had ever found out who had killed Mark.

"Come on, Chance," she chastised herself. "You don't really think Wyatt had anything to do with Mark's death!"

She told herself she was just letting her imagination run away with her. That was a long time ago and it had nothing to do with what was happening today. She should concentrate on how to find out what was going on with Wyatt now. Closing her eyes she tried to come up with an idea. Without meaning to, she fell asleep.

\* \* \* \* \*

Wyatt made it to his Jeep, but just barely. He had drunk way too much and knew there was no way he was going to make it home. Pulling around behind Ralph's, he pulled an old blanket from the backseat of the Jeep and wrapped up in it. He would grab a couple of hours' sleep then head on home. He had no more closed his eyes than he was out cold.

When he woke up, the sky was beginning to lighten, making him realize that he had slept much longer than he had intended. There was a horrible taste in his mouth and his head felt like there was a marching band inside it. Grimacing, he threw off the blanket and started the Jeep.

His head was just starting to clear when he turned onto his drive. What he saw made it start to pound again. Chance's black Wrangler was parked in front of the house. Pulling up beside it, he got out and walked to the front door. It was not locked when he turned the knob. He entered and looked around. The fire had burned down to coals, making the room cold. He started over toward the fireplace. It was then he saw Chance curled up asleep on the couch.

He stopped and looked at her. She had thrown the quilt back from her chest and he could see the steady rise and fall of her full breasts. Her knit top did little to hide the fact that she wasn't wearing anything beneath it. Tearing his eyes away from her breasts, he looked at her face. Even asleep she was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen. He wished the beauty outside was matched inside, but it was not. She was no different now than she had been then and he was not about to let her use him again. Once was more than enough.

"What are you doing here?" he spoke loud enough to wake her.

She blinked and looked up at him. "Wyatt." Her voice was soft and mellow from sleep. She sounded like a woman waking to find her lover standing before her.

"What are you doing here?" he repeated, this time harsher to cover the effect her presence had on him.

Chance heard the anger in his voice but tried not to let it affect her. She was tired of the arguing and fighting. All she wanted was to have one conversation with him—to find out what was going on. "I wanted to talk to you," she said as she sat up. "I came over from Ralph's and when you weren't here I waited for you."

"We don't have anything to talk about," he said shortly and knelt down to replenish the wood in the fireplace.

"How about these?"

He turned and looked at the sketchpad in her hand. "We've covered that." He reached over and grabbed it away from her.

"Have we?"

He didn't answer, but stared at her stoically.

"Wyatt, why did you draw those?"

"Like I said, it's none of your business!"

"I think it is." She tried to keep her voice calm and soft in an attempt to keep from angering him further.

Unfortunately her attempt seemed to be ineffective. He jumped to his feet and slung the pad aside. "And because you think so, that makes it so, right? When a Davenport speaks, everyone jumps. Isn't that the drill? Well, here's a newsflash for you, sweetheart. I don't give a shit what you or any other Davenport thinks or wants. You're all a bunch of arrogant, overbearing—"

Chance's anger erupted and she dived at him. "Dammit, Wyatt, stop being such a shit!"

He pushed her off him and started to turn away but she jumped in front of him and shoved him. "What's wrong with you? I don't get it! You call me sounding like you're scared to death and I run all over hell and high water trying to find you and when I do you act like I've got the plague or something. Then I find a whole book of pictures

you've drawn of me which would seem to indicate that we were at least friends and yet you treat me like I'm some kind of leper. What the hell's the matter with you?"

"Get out of my way," he growled, giving her a slight nudge.

"Or what?" She faced him stubbornly.

He made a move toward her. She dodged, punched him in the stomach and jumped to one side. He grunted and scowled at her. "Come on, like the old days," she taunted, letting the anger and frustration rob her of her better judgment. "Like when we were kids. Remember all those karate lessons with Akira when you beat the shit outta me? Try it now. I don't go down so easy these days."

His eyes were like those of a great beast staring back at her and she wondered if she might not be pushing him too far. But the damage was already done. Before she had time to react, he grabbed her by the throat with one hand and lifted her up. Chance gagged and brought both her fists down as hard as she could on his wrist. The blow loosened his grip and she broke free, but before she could get away he grabbed her by the arm and slung her around. She crashed over the coffee table and landed awkwardly on the couch but bounded up as he moved toward her.

Wyatt evaded her hands, blocking her punches easily. As if tiring of the game he grabbed her by both arms. Both of them were breathing hard as he jerked her up close to his face.

Chance's anger turned to fear. Something in his eyes scared her. His breath was warm in her face as they stared at one another. The fear started to transform into another emotion, just as primitive and strong and she felt as if she were locked in a cage—one she had never been able to escape and one she was not at all sure she wanted to.

"Wyatt..." His name was a soft breath from her lips.

His fingers tightened on her arms and his jaw clenched. Chance didn't know what to expect. Suddenly he pushed her from him and turned away. "Not this time." His voice sounded tight and constricted. "Not again."

She fell back on the couch and looked up at him. "What do you mean?"

"You know what I mean!" he shouted at the top of his lungs. "Don't play dumb! You did this to me once already, remember?"

She looked at him in bewilderment. "What? What did I do?"

His eyes narrowed as he sat down across from her. "What did you do? Come off it, Chance! Surely you remember graduation?"

She felt a flush rise on her face but would not look away. She had spent the better part of the night remembering what had happened between them. "Yes, you're right, I do remember. I remember something I thought was the most beautiful moment of my life suddenly turning into the most humiliating and painful. I remember you telling me that I didn't have a place in your life. I knew what you meant, Wyatt. I'm not a complete idiot. I know you didn't feel the same way I did and I've done my damndest

to honor your feelings. You were the one who turned away, so where do you get off acting like I did something to you?"

He stared at her for a long time. She started to think he was not going to speak at all. Finally he stood and ran his hands through his hair. "Do you remember what happened that summer before you entered college?"

She looked at him in complete confusion and shook her head slowly. "Well, you left and married Cheryl and I spent the summer feeling sorry for myself."

"Oh?" He arched his eyebrows. "Aren't you leaving out something?"

"What?"

Wyatt blew out his breath and gave her a hard look. "Let's cut the crap and just be honest. You do remember what happened."

She shook her head, looking at him in bewilderment. "I don't know what you want me to say. If something else important happened then I don't know what it was."

"How about your abortion?"

Chance looked at him like he had lost his mind. "Abortion? Are you insane? I never had an abortion!"

Again, Wyatt fell silent. After staring at her for a moment he left the room and went into the bathroom. Chance heard the water start in the shower and leaned back against the couch cushions. "Abortion?" she whispered to herself. "Where did he get a crazy idea like that?"

In the shower, Wyatt was lost in his own thoughts. Chance had honestly seemed surprised when he mentioned the abortion. *Is it possible that she really doesn't remember?* he asked himself.

Memory of the dream he had in the mountains rushed into his mind. If the dream told the truth of what had happened then maybe she didn't remember. Chance had never remembered anything about what happened that day on Clingman's Dome. In fact, as far as he knew she had never remembered the entire trip. Maybe the abortion was like that. Maybe she had somehow blocked it out of her mind.

*But how do I find out the truth?* he wondered as he finished showering. An idea occurred to him as he turned off the water and reached for a towel. After drying off he combed out his hair and wrapped the towel around his waist. Chance was still sitting on the couch when he walked out of the bathroom. She turned to look at him as he started for the stairs and he could see her skin tint as she took in his state of undress.

"Why would you think I had an abortion?" she asked after a moment.

"Your stepmother told me."

"Patricia told you? But why would she tell you something like that?"

Wyatt turned from the stairs and walked to the couch. "She called my dad around the end of August. You had just left for college. He got in touch with me and told me

that she wanted to talk to me. I called and she told me. Dad confirmed it with Maurice. That conversation put an end to their friendship.”

“And you believed what they said? You actually believed Patricia and Maurice?”

Sitting down beside her, he considered his idea then nodded. “Yes, I did.”

Her eyes suddenly widened as realization dawned. “And you think...” she hesitated. “Oh, god! You think you were the father?”

He nodded again and she looked away as tears started to gather in her eyes. Swiping at them, she looked at him once more. “Please believe me, I would never have killed a child that belonged to you. I don’t know anything about an abortion. God as my witness, I don’t.”

“What do you remember?” he asked as he studied her face.

“I remember you leaving,” she said in almost a whisper. “And how miserable I felt. After that I went to the beach for a couple of weeks and then I came home and we went on a cruise to the islands. We got back around the middle of July and then—”

She stopped and looked at him anxiously. “Then...I don’t know. I remember riding the new stallion one day after we got back and...and I don’t remember anything else until the week I left for school. Isn’t that odd? I lost all those weeks. Do you think—”

Wyatt was silent for a few moments, staring across the room. When he turned to her his expression had softened somewhat but there was still a good deal of suspicion apparent. “Chance, do you remember anything about the trip we took up here when you were eight?”

She looked at him with an odd expression. “What’re you talking about? We never came up here when I was eight.”

He stood up. “I want you to do something.”

“What?”

“Just tell me. Will you do what I ask?”

She hesitated a moment then nodded. “Yes.”

“Good.” He started for the stairs. “I’ll be down in a minute. I want you to go with me to see someone.”

“Who?” she called up to him.

“You’ll see,” his reply came back to her. “Trust me, it’s important.”

Chance turned around and put her head in her hands. *Trust you?* she thought. *Damn, Wyatt, I don’t even know who you are anymore.*

\* \* \* \* \*

Winston Holling puffed on his cigar as he adjusted his position in the big leather chair behind his massive desk. “I agree completely,” he said into the phone. “And I can assure you things will be taken care of... Don’t worry. My boy can handle that lot... Sure thing, old buddy. I’ll talk to you soon.”

He hung up the phone and leaned back in his chair. Lacing his fingers together over his broad belly, he sighed and looked out of the picture window at the green landscape that stretched as far as he could see.

The door of his study opened and his son Greg entered. "Hey, Pop, what's happening?"

"I just spoke with an associate," Winston spoke around the cigar in his mouth. "I think it's time to turn up the heat on these redskin bastards, son."

Greg grinned as he took a seat in the leather wingchair positioned in front of the desk. "So what'd you have in mind?"

Winston puffed a couple of times then leaned forward, placing his fat elbows on the desk in front of him. "I think we better move to phase two. Picking fights and breaking barstools doesn't seem to be having much effect. I think we need to be a little sterner."

Greg laughed and propped his feet on Winston's desk. "That'd be my pleasure. You want me to blow up the whole fucking mess?"

Winston chuckled but shook his head. "No, I think we can be a tad more inventive than that. Besides, we're going to take it one step at a time, just like we discussed. But we're definitely ready for the next step. You think you can handle it?"

"No problem." Greg smiled smugly.

"Then call the boys and tell them to get over here," Winston said, leaning back again in his chair. "We'll lay it all out."

Greg smiled and rose from his seat. "This is going to be fun. I can't wait to plant that Nashoba bastard six feet under."

Winston removed his cigar and straightened up suddenly. "Wyatt doesn't get taken out until he's seen everyone else suffer. And no one touches him but me, you got it? He's mine."

"Sure, Pop." Greg shrugged. "Whatever you say. But I'd still like to know why you have it in for him."

"Let's just say we go way back. You just do like I say."

Greg shrugged. "Sure, just remember this. I want to be there when you do him."

Winston grinned and shoved his cigar back in his mouth as Greg left the room. For a moment he reveled in the thought of how much his son was like him. Then the grin disappeared as thoughts of Wyatt entered. Viciously stubbing the cigar in an ashtray on his desk, Winston got up and poured himself a drink. He downed it in one gulp then refilled the glass.

He supposed that one day he would tell Greg just why he hated John Nashoba and his son so much. But not until he was sure Greg would understand. If it hadn't been for John Nashoba, his life would have been much different. Instead of sharing his bed all these years with that cold bitch Clara, his wife, he could have been warming himself in beautiful, sweet Sarah. But Nashoba had ruined his plans, stealing Sarah from him and siring that whelp, Wyatt.

"That's okay, you redskin bastard," he whispered to himself. "Your day's coming and this time my father won't be around to stop me. I'll make you pay, you and that goddamn son of yours. Oh, yeah, I'll make you pay in spades. All of you."

\* \* \* \* \*

Chance climbed into the Jeep beside Wyatt. "Where're we going?"

"To see someone," he replied without further explanation.

She didn't speak for a few minutes but watched his profile as he drove. "Wyatt, do you think we can just talk? I mean, without getting mad and yelling at each other?"

"About what?"

"A lot of things. Like for instance, what happened between you and Ashley. I thought you and she were happy together."

He shook his head. "Ashley and I got married for all the wrong reasons. It couldn't have worked."

"What wrong reasons? You loved each other, didn't you?"

Wyatt looked at her for a moment then turned away. "Ashley was a spoiled woman who thought it was very romantic and rebellious to marry a Native American. Her ideas didn't match up with reality and she wasn't prepared for life as a military wife."

"But you loved her."

Again he shook his head. "Not really. She was fun for a while but the newness wore off fast and then she was just demanding and spoiled."

Chance didn't say anything for a few minutes. "So what about the others, Cheryl and Joan? Adeola told me that Joan charged you with abuse and even claimed that you raped her."

Wyatt jerked around and gave her a hard look. "Adeola told you that?"

She nodded and he blew out his breath. "Yeah, Joan said all that stuff. And maybe it was even true in a weird kind of way. But it was what she was into, you know? At least at first. It was like foreplay. But after a while the play turned serious. She came at me one night with a knife and I hit her. She had me locked up and said a bunch of shit, but she recanted and dropped the charges."

Chance studied his face for a long time. "Then why did you marry them if you didn't really love them?"

"People do lots of funny things when they're running from themselves," he said in a low tone then looked at her. "Haven't you ever gotten into something then realized it was all wrong?"

"Kind of, I guess. I almost got married once."

He looked at her in surprise. "You did? When?"

"The year after I got out of grad school. Dad introduced me to some guy—an attorney who had political aspirations. Everyone thought he was just perfect for me. We



dated a couple of months and he wanted to get married. For a while I put him off but he kept pushing and finally I agreed. I still don't know why I said yes, but I did."

"What happened?"

She shook her head and laughed. "It was a scene right out of a movie. Maurice walked me down the aisle in my long white dress – the church was filled to overflowing and everyone was watching me. Maurice put my hand in Jim's and the minister asked if I took Jim to be my husband. I looked over at him, standing there all arrogant and pompous, brimming with pretentiousness and I knew there was no way I could marry him. So I said no and turned around and walked out. I made the limo driver take me to the airport and I got a flight to Atlanta. You should have seen the looks I got, all alone in a wedding gown. Anyway, when I got to Atlanta, I bought a change of clothes at the airport, stuffed the wedding gown into a trash can and started a new life. I got a job, found a condo and moved all my things out of Maurice's townhouse."

Wyatt looked surprised. "You just walked out? In the middle of the ceremony?"

She nodded and he shook his head. "You ever regret it?"

"Never. It would've been an awful mistake. I didn't love Jim. Hell, I'd never even had an –"

"Even had a what?" he asked when her voice trailed off.

Chance blushed and looked away. "I never enjoyed sex with him," she said almost too softly to be heard. "We tried a couple of times and it was awful."

Wyatt's eyes widened for a moment. "Why?"

Chance wouldn't face him. "I couldn't. I – something was missing." She turned and looked at him. "He thought I was frigid. Most men do. Maybe I am."

Wyatt's brows drew together in a frown and he didn't comment. Chance was embarrassed by her confession and turned away to look out the window. As they turned onto the highway leading into the reservation, Wyatt broke the silence. "Maybe you were just with the wrong men."

Chance turned and looked at him. "I guess so," she whispered.

Wyatt gave her a quick look then turned his attention to the road. After a few miles he pulled over in front of a small, weathered wooden house.

"Wait here," he said as he got out.

She waited until he returned. "We've got somewhere else to go and we'll be there overnight. You want to shower and change?"

"Yeah. I'm checked into a motel near Bryson. Could you take me there?"

"I need to get some things taken care of before we go. You take the Jeep and meet me back here."

"Okay," she agreed and slid over into the driver's seat. "See you in a little while."

She backed up and turned around, headed in the direction they had come. Making note of landmarks so she wouldn't get lost on the way back, she turned onto the highway and headed for Bryson.

The first thing she did when she got to her motel room was call her office. Her assistant told her to hold on and put Steve on the phone.

"Got some news for you," he said as he picked up.

"Hold on!" She put the phone down and rumbled through her suitcase. Finding a miniature recorder, she picked up the phone. "I want to tape this, go ahead."

She set up the machine so she could record and listen. It took Steve a few minutes to relay everything he had found. When he finished she turned off the recorder. "And you have documentation to back all this up?"

"Not yet. But we will. Should have it in forty-eight hours, tops. You ready to move on this?"

"Not quite. I need to speak with some people here, get their cooperation, and that might take a while. Sit on everything 'til I get back to you."

"Will do. Later."

Chance hung up the phone and stripped off her clothes. While she was showering she thought about the things Steve had found out. If what he said was true then there was a very good chance the casino the reservation was planning on would never be a reality. And that would mean a lot more people out of work and unable to take care of their families.

"But why would anyone spend so much time and money just to torment the Indians?" she asked aloud. "It doesn't make sense. There has to be something else. They can't take the Indian lands so what is it they want?"

She dried off, combed her hair and dressed. Cramming a couple of things into a duffel bag, she stuck the recorder inside the waterproof pouch on the side and threw it over her shoulder. Grabbing the keys, she left and headed back to where she had left Wyatt.

He was waiting in the front yard. She parked the Jeep and slid over into the passenger seat as he loaded two old sleeping bags and an old worn canvas duffel bag into the back. He climbed in behind the wheel and pulled off.

"Can you tell me where we're going?"

"In the Deep Creek area. We're meeting someone there."

"Who?"

"Tsa'li."

"Tsa'li?"

"Charley, if you prefer," he clarified without elaborating and she sat back, watching the passing scenery. After a few miles they saw several trucks parked alongside the road. Men with guns stood clustered around one vehicle.

One of the men looked up and pointed toward them. All the men turned to look. Chance cut a look at Wyatt and saw his face set in a hard mask, his jaw clenched tight.

As they drew near the group of men, two of them heaved something at the Jeep. Another waved something furry at them. Chance gasped as an animal's body hit the front windshield. Blood splattered the glass as the wolf's body tumbled off the hood.

Chance shuddered at the sight. "God, why would someone do something like that? Isn't it against the law to hunt on the reservation? And what was that man waving at us?"

"A wolf tail." Wyatt's voice was almost a growl.

"The tail?" Chance's revulsion had her choking on the words. "Why did they cut off its tail?"

"As a trophy."

"Someone should do something about people like that," she murmured then screamed. "Wyatt, look out!"

He slammed on the brakes and the Jeep slid off the shoulder of the road. Chance was out by the time it came to a stop, running toward a small creature that was cowering in the road. Wyatt jumped out and followed her.

"It's just a baby!" she exclaimed as she reached for the wolf pup.

"Chance, they don't like to be—" He stopped as she scooped the pup up and cradled it against her face, cooing to it.

"Huh?" she asked as she walked up to him. "Look, it's so tiny. Why do you think it's out here all alone?"

"Probably because those men killed its mother," he replied then looked around, talking to himself. "This is odd."

"What?" she asked, still rubbing her face against the soft fur and letting the wolf lick her.

"Wolves mate in early winter," he said. "And give birth in late winter or early spring. It's still a little early for pups this age."

"Well, maybe his mom and dad couldn't wait," she chuckled as the pup licked her face enthusiastically. "I think it's hungry. We have to find something to feed it with."

"Chance, it won't live," he said, reaching out to stroke the pup's soft fur.

"Yes, it will!" Her eyes blazed as she looked at him. "I won't let it die. Now, we have to find some milk and a doll's bottle or something so we can feed it."

Wyatt stared at her a moment then gave in. "Okay, fine. We'll go see what we can find." They got back in the Jeep. Chance cuddled the pup in her arms, talking to it and stroking it. Wyatt found a store at the edge of town and stopped. He went in and when he returned he handed her a paper bag. Inside was a plastic doll with a little bottle attached to it by a rubber band. There was also a container of milk.

She set the milk down in the floorboard and turned the heat up to warm it. "Thank you," she said gratefully as Wyatt started the Jeep and pulled back out onto the road.

He nodded without comment and they rode in silence. After twenty minutes Chance opened the milk and stuck her finger in it. "It's still too cold."

"We'll warm it up when we get there."

They traveled a few more miles and turned off the road onto what could best be described a path. After a couple of miles the path ended. Wyatt turned off the Jeep and got out. As he started unloading their gear, she put the pup inside her coat and stuffed the doll bottle and milk in her backpack. Throwing the strap of the bag over her shoulder, she followed Wyatt into the woods.

They walked about a half mile and came to what looked like two intersecting trails. Wyatt turned left and the trail grew steeper. They climbed for at least another mile and Chance began to hear the sound of water.

"Is that the falls?"

"Right through there about a hundred yards." He pointed to one side. "We're going to cut across at the base."

She didn't say anything more as she followed him. They emerged at the base of the falls and she looked up. Layers, or shelves of horizontal rocks, worked their way up the falls. Water cascaded down the middle of the rock with a smaller stream to the left. The top appeared to be smaller, maybe twenty-five feet or so, but it widened as it descended. The base was at least forty feet. A log at the base of the fall acted as a dam. A small pool rippled at the base and a stream led from the pool to disappear in the forest.

Chance looked at the water and the immersed log then at her boots. They weren't exactly made for walking in ice-cold water.

"We're going to cross here?" she asked, shifting her backpack on her shoulder.

"Unless you want to climb up and find another way."

She grimaced but said nothing, cautiously stepping from the soft soil to the log as Wyatt started across like he was walking on pavement. She made it to the middle of the expanse without incident. Her legs and feet were soaked and felt like chunks of ice. The pup worked its way up to the neck of her coat and started trying to squirm out. She tried to get a hold of it and lost her balance. One moment she was on the log and the next she was chest deep in freezing water, holding the pup above her head.

Wyatt dropped the gear he was carrying and waded out into the pool to help her. They made it to the bank and she put the pup back inside her coat as her teeth clattered and she shook with cold.

"Come on, we've got to get you dry." Wyatt grabbed her wet pack.

Chance thought she was going to freeze to death by the time Wyatt stopped. She looked around him and saw what looked like a hollow in the side of the hill. In front of the opening stood an old man. With long, flowing white hair and a face lined and

weathered by time, he looked as old as the mountains themselves. Except for his eyes – they seemed ageless.

He nodded to Wyatt as Wyatt took her arm and led her forward. "Tsa'li Eaglefoot, this is Chance Davenport. Chance, Tsa'li."

"Ni-ni-nice to me-meet you," she chattered.

"Come, I have a fire." He gestured toward the cave.

Chance followed Wyatt inside. Sure enough, a fire burned brightly in the center of the surprisingly large cave. She wondered why the interior wasn't full of smoke from the fire and asked Wyatt. He pointed up and she saw a small opening in the rock ceiling. The fissure acted as a chimney.

"Let's get you out of those clothes." Wyatt dumped the gear and unzipped her coat.

Chance held on to the pup as Wyatt took off her wet boots and socks. When he reached to unfasten her jeans, she backed up a step. "You'll freeze if you don't get out of them."

Knowing he was right did nothing to ease her uneasiness. "Okay, you hold the baby. I can do it."

She handed him the pup. "What am I supposed to wear? All my clothes were in the backpack and it's soaked."

He took off his coat and flannel shirt and held out the shirt to her. She motioned for him to turn around. As he did she quickly took off her wet clothes and put the shirt on. It hung almost to her knees and the sleeves were about ten inches too long. But at least it was dry.

Wyatt handed her the pup and she picked up the wet backpack. Digging the doll bottle out and the plastic carton of milk, she filled the bottle and knelt down, holding it over the coals and stroking the pup as she warmed the milk.

Wyatt spread one of the sleeping bags beside the fire for her. She smiled her thanks then turned her attention to the pup.

He pulled on his coat and walked outside to where Tsa'li Eaglefoot stood. "This is the one." Tsa'li nodded his head thoughtfully. "She has the eyes of a wolf."

Wyatt nodded and shoved his hands in his coat pockets. "Can you help her remember?"

"A better question is, have you remembered?" Tsa'li asked.

Wyatt looked at the old man somberly. "Some. But I'm not sure I understand it."

"Then perhaps she can help trigger your memories. But it will require time. Does she understand?"

"No."

"Then we will explain." Tsa'li turned to enter the cave.

Wyatt followed him inside and they found Chance feeding the pup. "Look, he likes it!" She smiled then looked anxiously at the pup. "He will live, Wyatt. He has to."

Wyatt didn't reply, but spread his sleeping bag next to hers and sat down. Taking off his coat he laid it aside and stared into the flames.

Tsa'li squatted down in front of Chance. "Do you know why you are here?"

"Because Wyatt asked me to come."

Tsa'li looked at Wyatt then back at her. "I have been asked to help you remember things from the past, things you have pushed from your mind. Are you willing?"

"I guess so," she replied nervously. "What do I have to do?"

"First you must fast and pray. You will stay here and you will drink only water for twenty-four hours. You will not sleep or eat. There should be no words spoken and you must pray for your heart and mind to be freed from all evil. When that has been done we will begin."

Chance thought about it for a few seconds. "Are you and Wyatt going to stay with me?"

"Wyatt will stay. I will return when it is time."

She looked over at Wyatt then nodded. "Okay."

Tsa'li stood and motioned to Wyatt to follow him. "She cannot eat or sleep," he said as they walked outside. "And you should not speak with her."

"I understand."

"And she is not to be touched," Tsa'li added. "Not in the way a man touches a woman."

"There's no danger of that," Wyatt assured him.

"I will return when it is time," Tsa'li said and walked away.

Wyatt watched him disappear down the hill then turned and entered the cave. Chance looked up at him as he walked in. "So what do we do for the next twenty-four hours?"

"Nothing." His reply was more of a bark.

"Nothing? We just sit here?"

"That's right." He moved his sleeping bag on the opposite side of the fire and sat down to stare into the flames.

Chance made a face then looked down at the wolf pup. It was going to be a very long twenty-four hours.

\* \* \* \* \*

Chance was beginning to get irritable from lack of sleep and the gnawing hunger in her stomach. To make things worse, Wyatt had refused to speak to her since Tsa'li left the cave twenty-three hours ago. She had never imagined that a day could be so long, but she was finding out that it could seem like an eternity. She had spent most of her time thinking about Wyatt, and wondering what he hoped to accomplish by having her there. She had no idea what was supposed to happen once Tsa'li returned, other than

what little she had been told—that Tsa'li would help her remember things she had forgotten.

Chance was not sure she believed what Wyatt had said. If she had undergone an abortion she was sure she would remember it. Especially if she had been pregnant with his child. The thought of being pregnant with Wyatt's baby was something she had never even dared to dream. Considering the possibility made her yearn for something she was sure she would never have.

Stealing a glance at Wyatt, who sat immobile, staring into the fire, she wondered if she would be the same with him she was with other men. Would she be as cold and incapable of feeling, or would she experience what she had the first time with him?

She pushed the thoughts from her mind. The way things stood right now, she would be lucky to get a cordial handshake goodbye when she left. She had no doubt that once this thing with Tsa'li was over, Wyatt would turn his back on her, and she would have to give up and leave. There would be no point in staying.

The wolf pup whimpered, drawing her attention. Pouring the last of the milk into the plastic doll's bottle, she began to feed it.

Wyatt cut his eyes over at Chance as she administered to the needs of the pup. He had watched her covertly the past twenty-four hours and many questions had risen in his mind. She had seemed genuinely surprised when he mentioned the abortion. Just as she seemed to be telling the truth when she said that she had never come to the mountains when she was eight years old. If she had blocked the memory of what happened to them on Clingman's Dome from her mind then it was within the realm of possibility that she had also blocked all memory of the pregnancy and abortion from her mind as well.

Part of him balked at the notion of giving her the benefit of the doubt, the part of him that was locked behind the walls he had built around his emotions to protect himself from the pain. But another part, the part that still harbored deep feelings for her, hoped that she was being honest. What that would change, he could not see. Things were as they were between them. If she had ever really cared about him, then she sure had not shown it. Since the day he left after her graduation until now, she hadn't tried to contact him. That didn't seem like someone who cared.

Hearing a noise at the entrance of the cave, Wyatt saw her look up. Their eyes met briefly before he stood. Tsa'li entered and nodded to him. Chance looked at Tsa'li with an anxious expression on her face.

Tsa'li took a seat in front of the fire and motioned for Wyatt to move his things aside. Gathering his sleeping bag, Wyatt spread it beside Chance and sat down, watching as Tsa'li laid the canvas bag he carried on the ground in front of him, and looked at Chance.

"Did you sleep?"

"No."

"No food?"

"No."

Tsa'li nodded in approval. "How do you feel?"

"Sleepy and hungry and a little afraid," she admitted.

"That will pass," he replied and picked up the canvas bag to take a tin cup from it. From a leather bag slung across his body he took a smaller pouch and sprinkled some dry brown powder into the cup. Then he poured water from an old canteen and gently rotated the cup around.

Chance looked up at him as the pup moved its mouth away from the bottle and closed its eyes. "What's that?" She indicated the cup.

Tsa'li moved to squat beside her. "I am what you whites call a medicine man. I learned from my father, who learned from his father, who learned from his father. The history and wisdom of the People has been passed through the generations to me. Wyatt has asked for my help. There are things in your past that you have buried. I will help you bring them once more into the light, if you are willing."

Chance looked from him to Wyatt. His dark eyes met hers and he nodded his head slowly. She swallowed nervously and laid the pup down beside her. "Okay." She looked at Tsa'li. "What do I do?"

"Drink only half of this." He handed her the cup.

"What's in it?"

"Something that will help you breach the barriers of time. Do not fear. No harm will come to you. However, the choice is yours. Trust in me and remember or do not and remain as you are, an outcast to your own past."

Chance looked up at him for a moment, studying his face and eyes then took the cup and turned it up to her lips before she had time to back out. The liquid was bitter and made her want to gag but she choked back the nausea and drank half the contents. Tsa'li nodded to her then took the cup and handed it to Wyatt. "You must join her in the journey."

Wyatt didn't argue. Drinking the rest of the contents, he then returned the cup to Tsa'li who sat down across the fire from Chance once more. There was silence in the cave. Tsa'li and Wyatt were watching Chance and she was focused on the wolf pup.

After several minutes Tsa'li removed a large, multifaceted crystal from his pouch. Firelight danced on its surface, reflecting the light while at the same time seeming to absorb it into its center so that it glowed with a strange energy. Holding it between both hands he began a low chant, rhythmic and slow. His words were too low to be understood at first, but they gradually increased in volume. His eyes were riveted on Chance.

Wyatt saw her eyes begin to look heavy, as if she were tired or sleepy. Her posture sagged slightly and an expression came over her face as if she were dazed. He looked at



Tsa'li and saw the old man watching Chance closely as well. Tsa'li turned to meet his gaze and nodded. "It is time."

Turning his attention once more to Chance, he spoke in the tongue of his people. "Look at Wyatt, Chance Davenport."

Wyatt was surprised when she turned and looked into his eyes. He didn't know how she had understood Tsa'li's words, but he had accepted long ago that there were many things he didn't understand so he didn't waste energy thinking more about it. Sitting very still, he looked into Chance's golden eyes, seeing the pupils grow larger with each passing moment until the black almost eclipsed the gold.

He had no way of knowing that Chance was completely lost in the darkness of his own eyes. If he could have seen himself through her eyes he would have known that at that moment his eyes seemed blacker than the darkest night and the reflection from the dancing flames was growing steadily in their depths.

Tsa'li's voice seemed to come from inside Wyatt's mind. He knew that Chance could also hear the words.

"Let go of this time and place. Put yourself in the hands of the spirits and ride the wind of time. Go back, Chance Davenport. Join with Wyatt and travel back, back to a time long ago, to the time you first came with him to the mountains of the People."

Wyatt's throat tightened. He could feel what Chance felt. He experienced the dizzying feeling that took hold of her. He could feel her thoughts, knowing that as she looked into his eyes, she saw some inner fire burning within them and she was drawn deeper into their depths. Suddenly she was sucked inside the darkness. Tumbling and spiraling she fell through the endless blackness. Wyatt mentally reached for her, wrapping his essence around her as they plunged into the void.

Abruptly the descent ceased. Wyatt shook his head as she blinked her eyes. "I can't see." Her voice sounded afraid. "Where am I?"

"On Clingman's Dome," Wyatt answered softly as he looked around in astonishment at the old memory that suddenly came to life before him. "Don't you remember?"

She cried out in surprise. "Yes! I'm eight years old." Her voice was that of a child. "I can see you, Wyatt. You're almost thirteen. You're so big and strong and handsome. All the girls at school like you. They tell me. That's why they're nice to me, you know. They want me to ask them over so they can see you. I know they don't really like me. It's you they want. I don't want them to hate me but I don't like asking them over. I don't want them to have you."

"Do you remember coming here to Clingman's Dome?"

"That's not its name, silly. That's what the whites call it. This is the place of the enchanted lake."

"Yes," he agreed softly. "Then you remember coming here?"

"Oh, yes!" she nodded excitedly. "We rode on a motorcycle and you drove very fast. It was fun."

"Tell me about that day."

Chance drew her knees up to her chest and rested her chin on top of her knees, wrapping her arms around her legs. "How come boy birds don't have to be taught to be daddies but girl birds have to be taught how to be mommy birds? Girls aren't so dumb."

Wyatt didn't know what to say. Then he realized that while he was seeing the event through the eyes of an adult, Chance seemed to be reliving it as if she really were eight years old again. "What do I do?" he asked, knowing that somehow Tsa'li was watching over them.

Tsa'li's voice was low. "She is now one with the past. She must tell in her own way. You are seeing through the eyes of a man. She lives the time through the eyes of the child she was. You are with her as protector and guide."

Wyatt nodded and looked at Chance who was staring up above her. "I know boys and girls are different," she said, turning to look at him. "Boys have a penis and girls have a vagina."

There was a few moment of silence. Chance's expression changed from indignant to angry to dazed. Wyatt watched her closely. He could feel the emotions racing through her and knew that she was reliving that day, seeing and feeling everything as if it were real.

"Can I see?" she asked softly. "Can I, Wyatt?"

Wyatt cleared his throat. "Yes."

Chance moved onto her knees and reached toward him. Suddenly she looked up past him with a terrified look on her face. A scream tore loose from her throat and she started hitting at the air, twisting and struggling. "Nooooo!" she screamed. "Wyatt! Help!"

She continued to scream and thrash around. Wyatt took hold of her arms to keep her from getting burned on the fire. She cried and yelled in fear and then abruptly stopped. Wyatt released her and she scrambled back away from him, staring over his head with wide eyes.

Her eyes moved to him and a scream of complete horror ripped loose from her throat. Her eyes bore the look of someone who has seen the ultimate terror and she cowered in fear.

"No, please," she said and held up her hands in front of her. "Don't. Don't hurt me. Please, Wyatt, please, don't hurt me."

She moved back in jerky movements. "Wyatt, don't! Noooo! Stop! Don't touch me!"

All at once she jerked and stopped screaming. She looked up at some unseen sight before her. "Wyatt? You're not going to kill me, too, are you? I won't tell, I promise. Please don't—"

Chance suddenly stopped, kneeling on the ground and shaking violently. Wyatt moved to her and put his arms around her. She held him tightly, running her fingers back and forth along his back. "I'll protect you, Wyatt, I promise." she whispered as the trembling lessened. "Don't be afraid. No one will find out. I'll take care of you – always, I will. I'll protect you."

She stopped talking and remained where she was, rubbing her hand back and forth as if consoling him. Wyatt was still for a moment then he heard Tsa'li's voice.

"She will be cold away from the fire. Bring her back to the warmth and move on from this place. She has not been harmed."

Wyatt lifted her up in his arms. She snuggled up against his chest, rubbing her hand back and forth over his shoulder as he carried her back and placed her on the sleeping bag in front of the fire.

"Chance?" he whispered, sitting down beside her.

"Wyatt?" She turned and smiled.

"Chance, I want you to do something for me, okay?"

"You know I will," she replied without hesitation as a loving smile took hold on her face.

"I want you to leave this place. We need to go forward now. To the summer you graduated from high school. Will you go with me there?"

The pleasant expression on her face changed to a frown. "I don't want to go there. It's dark and full of pain."

"We need to. Please, Chance. I need you to go there with me."

She sighed and lowered her head. "You left me, Wyatt. I loved you and you left me."

Tears swelled in her eyes and spilled out onto her face. "I thought if we made love you would realize—I never loved anyone but you, Wyatt. That's why I was a virgin. I...but you didn't love me. You made it ugly and then you left."

"Chance, I—" Wyatt stopped as Tsa'li's voice spoke in his mind.

"This is important to her. Do nothing to prevent her from experiencing what she needs to."

Chance wiped at the tears on her face. "When you left it felt like there wasn't a sun in the sky anymore, you know? Everything was just shades of gray. Father made me go to the beach but I didn't have fun. I walked along the shore for hours, staring at the water and wondering what I was supposed to do. You were all that ever mattered to me and you were gone—gone to marry that girl with the bleached hair and red lipstick. Father got mad because I wasn't being the way he wanted me to be so we came home. Then Patricia decided we should go on a cruise. It was horrible. I stayed on deck staring at the water. My stomach hurt and I couldn't eat. I just kept throwing up. My breasts hurt and I didn't have my period."

She put her hand on her abdomen and fresh tears streamed down her face. "When we got home I told Adeola and she asked me if I had been with a man. I told her I had but I didn't tell her who it was. I never imagined she would go to Father and Patricia but she did. She said it was for the best. Patricia made me go to the doctor. I hated going—it's so humiliating the way they feel your insides and the nurses stand there watching. The doctor said I was pregnant. God, I was so happy! I was going to have your baby. For several days all I could do was think about it, how it would look, how it would feel in my arms. I couldn't wait. But the doctor called and told Patricia and she told Father."

Chance's fists clenched tightly and her entire body tensed. Wyatt felt the darkness they were locked in shimmer and suddenly he saw the familiar sight of Chance's house take shape around them. As if watching a play being enacted before him he saw Chance sitting on the couch in her father's study, clenching her hands in her lap, looking pale and very small and alone.

Maurice and Patricia walked in and Maurice went to stand in front of Chance as Patricia took a seat on a chair adjacent to the couch.

"I believe you have some explaining to do, young lady."

Chance looked up at her father but didn't speak. Maurice stared at her with an angry expression. Patricia spoke up, filling the tense silence. "Your father gave you an order, Chance. Tell him."

Chance turned to Patricia, staring unblinkingly. Patricia's face reddened and she jumped up, grabbing Chance's arm. "I said tell him, goddammit! Tell him how you fucked around with god only knows who and got yourself pregnant!"

Chance jerked her arm away and glared at Patricia. "Don't ever touch me again." Her voice was low but firm. "I mean it, Patricia. Don't even come near me."

Maurice took Patricia's arm and held up his hand to silence her as she started to speak. She reclaimed her seat and Maurice turned to Chance. "Do you have any idea how damaging this could be to my reputation if it should get out? I can't believe you would do this to me. For god's sakes, Chance, I've given you everything! How could you do this to me—not to mention Patricia!"

Chance jumped up and faced her father. "Just stop! This has nothing to do with you—or her either. I'm pregnant, that's all there is to it. You're just going to have to live with it. Now, if I may be excused—"

Maurice grabbed her arm and jerked her around as she tried to walk past him. "You traitorous little slut!" he shouted and backhanded her.

She fell against the couch. Wiping at the trickle of blood at the corner of her mouth she stared up at her father. "Who's the father of this bastard?" he yelled, reaching for her. "Who?"

Chance screamed and tried to evade his grasp but he pulled her up and slapped her again. "Tell me, damn you! Who did this?"

She pushed at him and broke away. Maurice was breathing hard, and red in the face. She backed up toward the door. "I'll never tell you! Leave me alone!" she cried as she ran out the door.

Adeola was waiting in her room. Chance ran in and locked the door behind her. She threw herself in Adeola's arms and cried. After a while Adeola dried her face and made her sit up. "Now, Chance, you have to listen to me. Your father won't give up until he knows who the father is. You have to tell him. Just like you have to tell the father. He deserves to know."

Chance's eyes grew round and she jumped up. "Yes! You're right! Oh, Adeola, I have to find him right away. I have to talk to him!"

"Then Wyatt is the father."

Chance turned to look at her in surprise. "Why do you say that?"

"Child, you can't hide the way you feel about him from me. Love's been shining in your eyes for that boy since you were five years old. But Chance, Wyatt's engaged to be married. He may not want to change those plans."

Chance looked down at the floor. "I know. But he does have to know, Adeola. It's his baby."

"Are you sure?"

"He's the only one. It couldn't be anyone else."

"Then maybe you should call him."

Chance grabbed her address book. "I found his phone number in Maurice's Rolodex," she said as she sat down on the bed and dialed. "Is this Wyatt Wolf's residence?... Oh, hi, Cheryl. This is Chance Davenport. Is Wyatt there?... Oh, well, when he gets back would you tell him to call me. It's very important... Yes, I'll tell her you said hi. Thanks, bye."

She hung up and looked at Adeola. "She said she'd have him call."

Adeola nodded but said nothing. Chance went into the bathroom and washed her face then picked up a book and flipped through it. The phone rang and she snatched it up. "Hello? What do you want?... Fine."

"Patricia wants you to go to Father's study." She looked at Adeola.

Adeola nodded and left the room. Chance paced the floor, keeping her eyes glued on the clock. An hour passed and she started to feel like a time bomb whose counter was approaching the moment of detonation. Then her door opened and Patricia walked in.

"Get out!" Chance demanded. "I don't want you here."

"That's just too bad." Patricia locked the door and leaned back against it. "You and I are going to get some things settled right now."

"I don't have anything to say to you." Chance turned her back to Patricia.

"You don't have to talk. In fact, I'd prefer that you just keep your mouth shut and listen. I know who the father is and I'm going to tell Maurice. When he finds out he'll have Wyatt arrested for rape."

Chance whirled around. "It wasn't rape! He didn't force me. In fact he tried to talk me out of it. I was the one who wanted to so if you want to blame someone, then blame me."

"I won't have you bringing a bastard half-breed into this house. Accept that, Chance. Also, you might as well accept that Wyatt doesn't want you. You won't ever have him and you won't have his bastard child either. I've made sure of that."

"Go to hell. And get out of my room!"

Patricia left and Chance turned to look at the phone. After a moment she snatched it up and dialed Wyatt's number. "Cheryl? Hi, it's Chance again. Listen, would you—"

Her eyes widened and her mouth fell open. Speechlessly she let the phone fall from her fingers. Her face wore a look of a trapped animal. She sank down on the bed and stared mutely across the room, not knowing what to do.

Snapping to as she made up her mind, she frantically grabbed a suitcase out of the closet and stuffed clothes in it at random. Snatching up her purse and keys she opened the door and looked out into the hall. Seeing no one, she ran to the stairs and looked over the banister. There was no one in sight.

She ran down the stairs and headed across the foyer. Flinging the door open, she ran right into Maurice. He grabbed her by both arms and pushed her back inside. She dropped the suitcase with a scream and fought at him but he would not release her. She saw two men dressed in white enter.

"We'll take it from here, Mr. Davenport," one of the men said then looked at Chance. "Now, let's just calm down, Miss Davenport. Everything's going to be just fine. Just come with us."

Chance looked from the men to her father. "Who are these people? Why are they here?"

"They're going to take you to the hospital," Patricia's voice came from behind her. "You're going to get rid of this...this abomination you're carrying."

"No!" Chance screamed and kicked Maurice in the knee. His leg buckled and he let go of her. She eyed the two men in white. "Get away from me. I'm not going to abort this baby and none of you can make me. Get out of my way."

Patricia grabbed her arm from behind and Chance turned, punching her in the face. Blood spurted from Patricia's nose and she started screaming. One of the men in white grabbed Chance and pinned her arms to her sides. She kicked and screamed and he stumbled around, trying to hang on to her. "Get off me! Let me go! Noooo! You're not taking my baby! Damn you, stop!"

The other man rushed over and stabbed something in the side of Chance's neck. She thrashed around, trying to free herself but her efforts became weaker as the drug took effect. Eventually the man loosened his hold on her and she sagged in his arms.

"Please don't do this," she begged, reaching out to Maurice. "Please, Father, please. If you love me, don't kill my baby. Please, I'll do anything you say just don't hurt my baby."

He hobbled over to her and looked at the men who supported her. "Get her out of here."

Chance screamed and cried, pleading with the men to let her go as they took her out and put her in the ambulance. They strapped her down and put a needle in her arm. Her eyes rolled back and unconsciousness claimed her.

Her body went limp and for a long time she didn't speak or move. Wyatt felt tears fall from his own eyes. For years he had carried a burning rage inside him for what she had done. Now the truth was finally revealed. She had not betrayed him and killed his unborn child. She had tried to save it.

Chance's breath quickened and she turned her head, looking toward the fire. "I hate you. You killed my baby," she said in a cold, emotionless tone. "One day you'll pay for this, Father." Then she closed her eyes.

Wyatt sat silently, mentally pulling away from her and her pain. He could not take any more and didn't think she could either. There had been more than enough hidden truths revealed this night. Touching the side of her face he spoke gently. "Chance? Can you hear me?"

For a long time she didn't respond. Wyatt felt a jolt of fear and without warning he was sucked down a long well of darkness, spinning out of control. Abruptly he found himself sitting by the fire. He turned and looked to Tsa'li for help. "What's wrong with her?"

Tsa'li went to his side. He put his hand on Chance's chest then gently lifted her eyelids. "She is locked in a memory that is not to be shared. Give her time to pass through the remembrance. She will return."

Wyatt sat down beside her and waited. After several long minutes she moved slightly.

"Wyatt?" she whispered, moving her hands over her abdomen. "Can you hear me? I'm your mother. Your father's name is Wyatt, too. I love you, Wyatt. I always will, even if we can't be together. You have to know that I didn't kill you. It was my father and Patricia. I tried to stop them, but they drugged me so they could kill you. They called me names and said bad things about your father. But he's not a bad man, he's good. The best. I know he would have loved you if he'd had the chance. I'm sorry. I tried, I really did."

Wyatt lifted her up, supporting her in his arms. "You must bring her back now," Tsa'li directed. "She cannot stand the strain of any more. There is too much pain. Bring her back."

Wyatt settled her before the fire again and put his hands on either side of her face. "Chance, listen to me. You have to leave that place. You have to come back. Leave the pain behind and come back."

"Wyatt?" Her eyes stared straight ahead without blinking. "Why – how did you get here?"

"I'm here to take you back. You have to leave this place."

"There's nothing to come back to. They took it all away from me."

"No, you're wrong. Chance, please, come back. Do it for me."

She smiled and closed her eyes. "I have never been able to say no to you, Wyatt. That's going to be my undoing."

A moment later her eyes opened. As soon as she saw Wyatt she closed them tightly and lay rigidly in his arms, quivering like she was cold. Wyatt looked to Tsa'li for guidance. "What should I do?"

Tsa'li shook his head. "Do nothing. She requires time."

For over an hour Wyatt sat holding her. The tension didn't lessen or leave. She continued to shake but at last she opened her eyes and looked at him. He saw the tears welling in her eyes. Her voice was choked with emotion when she spoke. "My god, Wyatt, he killed my child."

He nodded and continued to look into her eyes. "I'm so sorry," she whispered miserably.

Wyatt pulled her up against him and held her close. Chance cried for a long time, then dried her face and sat up. "Tsa'li Eaglefoot, I don't know how you made all this happen and I'm not sure I'd believe it if you told me. Part of me wishes you'd never helped me remember but I know it's for the best. And I also know that I owe you a debt of thanks I have no idea how to repay. You helped me see the truth about things. My life hasn't been at all what I thought it was. I've been living a lie and didn't even know it. Thanks to you, I know, and whatever you ask of me in payment is yours."

Tsa'li nodded and stood up. He walked to her and took her hands in his. "Look at me," he said, his voice soft yet commanding. Their eyes met and Chance felt reality as she knew it slip away. Falling into another realm, she was filled with answers to questions she had not thought to ask.

After a minute or so she blinked and came back to her own reality. Tsa'li nodded and smiled. "I will name my payment. You will help Wyatt discover his destiny. He must know what lies in his heart if he is to fulfill that destiny. You, Chance Davenport – your past is tied to his. Your blood has mingled and been spilled. You, the white woman with the eyes of the wolf, will help him find his way."



Chance nodded solemnly. Picking up the wolf pup, she snuggled it against her face for a moment. Then retrieving the doll's bottle she handed them to Tsa'li. "He needs a good home."

Tsa'li took the pup and stroked the soft fur along its back. "He will have one."

With a parting nod to Wyatt, he left the cave. Chance watched him leave then looked at Wyatt as he turned to face her. "Wyatt, did that really happen? It felt like you were with me...like we went back... Is it really possible?"

"Yes," he said softly. "And we both learned a lot. And I do believe it. So do you."

"I guess you're right," she said softly and took a seat by the fire. "The question is, where do we go from here?"

Wyatt sat down beside her. "Maybe it's time we talked, really talked."

"Yes, I think you're right."

## Chapter Four

*Jackson County, North Carolina*

Billy Hawkes was sitting at the bar in Ralph's when Greg Holling and a dozen of his men walked in. Billy looked at Ralph behind the bar. Ralph finished drawing a beer from the tap then moved over next to the register where an old shotgun was hidden.

Greg Holling looked around at the people in the bar and smirked. "Well, boys, looks like we can take our pick tonight. Which one of these red bastards should we skin first?"

His friends laughed and Greg opened his coat to display a handgun stuck in the top of his pants. People in the bar muttered uneasily among themselves, unsure whether to try and leave or just sit still and hope there would not be trouble.

But Greg Holling was there to make trouble. Pulling a long-bladed hunting knife from his coat, he grabbed the waitress's arm as she tried to get by him to the back of the bar.

"Looks like this little honey's ripe for pickin', boys," he laughed as he ran the tip of the blade down the side of the girl's face, drawing blood.

The sight caused more than a few of the men in the bar to rise from their seats, including Billy Hawkes. "Let her go!" he demanded loudly, starting toward Greg.

"Who's gonna make me?" Greg laughed. "You, Red Boy? Or should I call you Yellow? That is what you people are, isn't it? Yellow?"

Billy took another step closer. "I said let her go!"

Behind the bar, Ralph pulled the old shotgun from beneath the counter. He hadn't even raised it above bar level when the sound of a shot rang out. Ralph grunted as a bullet passed through his left shoulder and embedded in the wall behind him. A look of shock spread over his face as he stumbled back and fell, blood drenching the left side of his chest.

Greg Holling shoved the girl to the floor and leveled the gun at Billy. "You next, Billy Hero? Ready to meet that Great Spirit in the Sky?"

Billy's eyes darted nervously from Greg to his men. He could hear nervous whispers behind him, people urging him to back down and not get himself shot. After a moment he dropped his eyes. Greg laughed and kicked out, catching Billy in the chest and sending him reeling backward into a table. Greg's men fanned out, barring the exit as Greg walked over and picked up a bottle from behind the bar.

While everyone watched in apprehension he pulled a white handkerchief from his pocket, doused it with liquor then stuffed it down into the liquor bottle. Setting the bottle down on the bar he took a lighter from his shirt and lit the cloth.

The whispers and mutterings grew in volume as people started to get up from their seats. "Hold it right there." Greg waved his gun as he walked toward the door. "First one to move dies."

Everyone in the bar froze in place, watching in fear as Holling's men backed out the door. Greg was the last to leave. Before he did he threw the burning bottle across the room. It hit the back wall and exploded. The alcohol was like gasoline, fueling the flames. Tongues of fire crept like tendrils along the floor and up the walls.

People began screaming and running for the door. Ralph was trampled by the mob as he tried to reach the fire and put it out. The first person through the door made it no farther than the steps before gunfire erupted. Blood spurted from the man's legs in three different places before he fell.

That created more chaos. The bar was burning and there was no escape. Billy made his way over to Ralph and helped him up from the floor as men began knocking the glass out of the windows and climbing out. He was coughing and choking from the smoke by the time he made it to the window.

The sounds of guns being fired and the screams made it seem like a nightmare. Billy shoved Ralph out of the window then dove out behind him. As he hit the ground something pressed against his back. He looked around and saw one of Holling's men, holding a hunting rifle.

"Looks like we get to have us a hunt tonight." Greg Holling laughed as he sauntered over to where Billy lay. "Load him in the truck, boys."

Billy fought against the men but there were too many. They put him in the back of Holling's black pickup and piled in around him.

He saw people watching from the parking lot as the truck pulled onto the road. Soon their figures were just silhouettes against a backdrop of fire.

\* \* \* \* \*

*Deep Creek*

Wyatt sat down by the fire and stared at the flames for a long time. Chance didn't know what he was feeling and was afraid to be the first to speak but eventually the silence was too much. "Wyatt, do you remember killing that man on Clingman's Dome?"

He turned and looked at her. "I think so, it's all still kind of mixed up in my head. I didn't remember anything about it for a long time. In fact, I had no idea I was involved in his death until recently. I went up to the Dome and camped out and I had a dream about it."

"You dreamed about what happened?"

"Yeah." He looked into the flames. "It was like I was there again."

He got up and put a couple of branches on the fire. "I always knew there was something I should remember about that time but I just couldn't get it to come into focus, you know? But when Tsa'li sent us back I saw it. Only when that man showed up it made me think about those men who killed my mother. This rage started boiling in my stomach and all of a sudden it was like I was ten feet tall and not afraid of anything."

He sat down beside her again. "The visions of my mother's death faded and I saw that man trying to rape you and something snapped inside me. I had to stop him from hurting you. I started toward him and saw him look at me like he was seeing some kind of monster. And I saw my hands wrap around his throat, stab into his neck. I felt myself kill him, Chance. Then I looked at you and you were scared half to death. The last thing I remember was reaching for you."

Chance searched his face, putting her hand on his arm. "I was afraid, Wyatt. You didn't look like you anymore. To me you looked like...like someone I didn't know. Your eyes were...I don't know, wild or something...like an animal, and you were covered with blood. I thought you were going to hurt me. But then you touched me and I knew you wouldn't hurt me. You fell down on your knees and put your arms around my waist and buried your head against me and I could feel you shaking. I don't know why, but I knew I had to protect you. It's strange, isn't it, how we both blocked that out. I guess that was the only way we could protect ourselves."

"You realize that what you really did was protect a murderer?"

"No." She shook her head. "That's not true. You saved me from being raped and possibly killed, Wyatt. That's not murder."

He looked down for a moment. "Chance, I am a killer. That man wasn't the first. There are other things I've remembered. Like the men who killed my mother."

"I don't know about that. I never really knew all the details about how your mother died."

"She died at the Dome," Wyatt said in a low voice. "We had gone to try and see the enchanted lake. Some men showed up. They raped and beat her and forced me to watch. She died in front of my eyes. Then they left us there. For a long time I thought I just stayed there with her body until my dad found us. But that's not what happened. I followed those men and killed all but two of them."

Chance thought about what Adeola had told her. "Wyatt, I have a hard time believing that a ten-year-old boy could have killed a grown man."

Wyatt didn't say anything and Chance leaned over to look at his face. "And even if you did kill them, it wouldn't change anything."

He looked surprised and Chance smiled. "Regardless of what happened, I know the person you are inside. You're not a cold-blooded killer. You're compassionate and caring and you wouldn't indiscriminately take a life. You don't enjoy inflicting pain. That's not who you are."

"I know of at least three women and a whole lot of men who would disagree with you," he said harshly.

"What they think doesn't matter. They don't know you the way I do. Wyatt, I've known you almost all my life and I know you aren't that kind of man."

"You're so wrong," he said in a grim voice. "You don't know what I'm capable of."

"Yes, I do. I remember what happened graduation night. I know what you did to Mark."

Wyatt's eyes grew round and his face paled. Chance thought he was going to pass out when he started gasping like he couldn't breathe.

"Wyatt!" She grabbed his shoulders. "What's wrong?"

He tore away from her and jumped up, smashing his hand into the rock wall of the cave. Chance jumped in alarm as he threw back his head and a sound like an animal's roar emerged from his lips. When the sound finally died down, Wyatt put his hands over his face and sagged against the wall. Chance got up and hesitantly approached him. She reached out to touch him then withdrew her hand, afraid of what his reaction would be.

He didn't move and neither did she. The only sound was the crackling of the fire and the sound of his harsh breathing. Chance didn't know what to do but felt she had to do something. Taking a deep breath she reached out and put her hand on his arm. "Wyatt, please, come sit down."

After a few moments he dropped his hands and looked at her. "Why didn't you tell me?"

"Tell you what?"

"That it was me that – that I killed that boy."

Chance took his hand and pulled him. "Come on, sit down with me."

He complied and they took a seat by the fire. "I didn't know for sure it was you until tonight," she said. "I remembered while I was in that trance or whatever it was."

"Then how can you say I'm not a killer?" he asked in a voice filled with despair.

"Because you were saving me," she said without hesitation. "If you hadn't shown up he would have raped me. And I couldn't defend myself. I was too dazed from hitting my head on the car. Just like the first time, you were rescuing me. If you want to lay blame on someone, lay it on me. If you hadn't spent your life watching out for me then none of this would have happened."

"What kind of man am I?" he asked in a strained whisper. "Do you think my parents knew I would turn out like this when I was born? They must have."

"What makes you say that?" Chance was confused by his statement.

"My name," he rasped harshly. "Why else would they name me that?"

"Wyatt?" she asked. "What's wrong with Wyatt?"

"No." He shook his head. "My other name – Une'ga-dihi."

“Une’ga-dihi,” Chance repeated the name softly. “That’s beautiful. What does it mean?”

“White-men killer.” Wyatt’s voice rose in volume angrily. “So, you tell me—did they know I would be this way? Could they have possibly known back then what kind of man I’d turn out to be?”

Chance wondered if she could adequately answer that question. Since she had arrived there reality had taken on a new perspective, a twist had developed in the plot of her life. She had been given knowledge that she honestly didn’t know how to believe or explain. But she did know that she had to help Wyatt. There was nothing else she could do.

“Wyatt, you say you remember the day your mother died?” she asked softly, changing the subject from his name.

“What does that have to do with anything? I already told you what I remembered.”

“Did you? Isn’t there something else? Think, Wyatt. After the men killed her what did you do?”

He frowned at her fiercely. “I threw myself across her and cried then I went after them.”

Chance nodded. “Yes, you went after them. But didn’t something happen before that?”

“No! I told you! She was dead and I was lying there with her and—”

His voice stopped suddenly and he looked at her in shock. “And I was begging for someone to help me.”

Raking his hands through his hair, he closed his eyes. “I heard something. The wind...no...not the wind...but like the wind. It was a voice. It was speaking to me. I looked around for the source of the voice but there was no one there. There was nothing—”

His eyes flew open and his words came faster and faster. “There was nothing but a mist. It rose up out of the ground and moved toward me, like it was alive. It came for me. I jumped up and backed away...afraid of the strange mist. But it grew bigger, and swirled all around me. Then I heard the voice again. Only this time I could understand. It asked me if I would take the help that was offered, if I dared to, and I didn’t know why but I said yes. The voice sounded like the boom of thunder in my mind. It said I was One and that I was the Warrior. That I should join and become the Champion of the People. I didn’t understand but the voice told me how. It said I had only to believe it. So I did. I made myself believe it with all my heart. The voice and the mist instantly vanished and I felt like I was in the middle of a tornado, spinning around and around. Suddenly something swelled up in my mind, like my head being filled with too much at once. When the feeling stopped I felt like a giant. Like there was something stronger than me inside of me and nothing could ever hurt me.”

He looked at Chance with astonishment on his face. “That’s when I went after the men.”

She nodded and took his hand. "Remember when we were kids and you would tell me your 'Wolf Tales'?"

He smiled. The Wolf Tales were something his father had started when Wyatt was a child. As is the case with all children, Wyatt was curious about his family, and why they had such an odd family name. No one else on the reservation had a name like Nashoba. His father had explained that the name came from his own father who was Choctaw. Nashoba meant "wolf" in the Choctaw language. They decided to call the stories the Wolf Tales. No one else would ever equate that with their name but the two of them and that made it special.

Later, when he'd ended up with Chance and her family, Wyatt had introduced her to the Wolf Tales and had explained about his mixed heritage and the origin of his name. She'd teased him ever since by calling him the Big Bad Wolf.

Wyatt pulled himself back to the moment and gave her a slight nod. "Well, you remember the one about the children of Star Woman? How one was Brother of Light Face and the other was Brother of Dark Face?"

"It's only a legend," he said.

"But what if it's not?" she asked then paused to consider her words before speaking. "What if that's what happened to you? What if your spirit joined with the spirit of another, some opposite being—different from you in every way? Negative to your positive, evil to your good? Maybe a spirit that remembered the bloodshed and wars your people endured? What if that's what happens to you when you're in danger or trying to protect someone? What if that spirit becomes dominant and that's why you can't remember?"

Wyatt shook his head. "Chance, that's crazy."

"Is it?" She raised her eyebrows. "I don't think so."

"Why?" He turned and put his hands on her shoulders. "Why would you want to believe something like that? Why can't you just accept that there's something wrong with me? That I'm violently insane."

"I can't—I won't believe that," she argued. "You might be hard inside and even capable of causing pain, but you're not insane and you're not a cold-blooded killer."

"Hard? Capable of causing pain? I guess you mean to you."

"Yes." She met his eyes. "All these years since...well, since the baby...every time I saw you, you acted like you could barely stand to be in the same room with me. You brought those women around and rubbed it in my face that you were with them. It hurt, Wyatt."

"I was hurt, too," he said defensively. "As far as I knew you had killed my child—acted like all the rich white people I'd ever known. Used me then moved on to something better."

Chance's eyes flashed and her face flushed as her anger rose. "You really piss me off sometimes!"

Wyatt looked at her with his mouth hanging open in surprise, and she socked him in the chest with her fist. "You know me better than that, dammit! You knew, you've always known that I love you. You couldn't possibly have believed that I'd do something like that."

"That is what I thought!" he argued in a rising tone. "Cheryl told me—"

"Cheryl? God, how stupid could you be, believing her? For Christ's sake, she and Patricia were thick as thieves! Or were you so dammed dense that you thought Cheryl had found the money for your little wedding trip lying on the sidewalk? Oh, don't look so shocked. I heard Adeola and Beda talking about how Patricia and Maurice had given you and Cheryl ten thousand dollars for some lavish honeymoon."

"What? She told me her grandparents gave her the money."

"Well then, you're a bigger fool than I thought." Chance pushed him. "Anyone who would believe that, I'd like to talk to about some swampland I own."

Wyatt's eyes narrowed. "Can we change the subject?"

She snorted and tossed her hair. "Why? Does the truth hurt?"

"Chance, just drop it." His voice was tight and she could tell he was beginning to get angry. But at that moment she didn't care. Everything was crashing in on her at once and she felt like she was going to explode.

"No, let's not!" she snapped. "I'm tired of being treated like some old rug you can walk on and not give it a second thought. You have no idea what I've felt, do you? How it's been to go through life loving someone so much that you hurt inside and having him treat you as if you were nothing. So do me one gigantic favor and don't give me any more of your pathetic excuses or arrogant orders. If you don't care about me then just have the balls to say it and we'll wish each other well and go our separate ways. But at least be man enough to—"

"Shut up!" he barked.

"You shut up!" She drew back and hit him in the jaw.

Wyatt grabbed her fist as she started to hit him again. "That's enough!"

"Let go of me!" she shouted and tried to free her hand. But he would not release her. In fact, he grabbed her other hand and held both of them immobile.

Chance screamed and kicked at him. Wyatt stayed out of range and moved in as she readjusted to get more leverage. Shoving her backward he sat on her stomach and pinned her hands together over her head. "Dammit, Chance, stop!"

She struggled until she realized she was not going to get away then stilled. Her eyes were flashing as she looked up at him. His eyes were dark as night and his jaw was clenched. Chance took in his appearance, the powerful muscles of his arms and chest and the smooth dark skin dusted with even darker hair that traced a path down his body to disappear into the top of his jeans.

She looked up at his face, seeing the beauty and strength, the long ebony hair framing it like a dark halo. Anger disappeared and in its place were feelings that



terrified her. She had never felt about a man the way she felt about Wyatt. Everything about him excited her and she wanted him more than she had ever wanted anything.

"Wyatt, get away from me," she whispered urgently, afraid of her own feelings.

"What? Get away from you? What's this? One minute you think I'm the reincarnated savior of the people, the next you want to kill me and now you want me to get away? What is it? Afraid?"

"Not of you," she admitted softly, lowering her eyes.

"Then what?"

Chance was silent for a little while, trying to gather her courage. At last she looked up at him. "I'm afraid of how I feel about you. If you don't move away from me I'm afraid I'll do something that'll make you push me away and I don't know if I can take that. Not again."

Wyatt didn't move, and anger flashed again in her eyes, anger at herself for feeling the way she did and at him for forcing her to admit her true feelings. "Don't you get it? I love you. I've loved you since I was five years old and I don't know how to love anyone else. I look at you and it's all I can do not to throw myself at you. So, please—get off me. I really don't want to make a bigger a fool of myself than I already have."

He opened his mouth to speak but she wouldn't let him. "No, don't say it. I don't want to hear it again. You made yourself clear a long time ago. I know you don't feel that way about me. But it doesn't change anything. I can't stop the way I feel. All I can do is try to deal with it. Just don't make it tougher than it already is."

"Can I get a word in?" he asked when she finally stopped talking.

She looked up at him and nodded. "I never said I didn't care about you. For the love of god! Do you think I would've been so filled with rage about losing the child if I didn't care? I thought you had deliberately aborted the baby and that only confirmed what I thought about rich white people. That they just used other people and tossed them aside when they found something better to amuse them. I spent years trying to hate you and what you did. And I took it out on everyone around me. I carried that fury with me every moment of every day."

"But I didn't kill the baby! I would have died before I did that."

"I know," he said softly. "At least I do now. But there's something you have to accept. I've spent years trying not to love you. I knew how you felt and yes, I did use it against you. I wanted to hurt you—the way I hurt. So, I flaunted my relationships in your face. But those women were victims. I used them. You see, I'm not the gentle, romantic figure you think I am. There's not much gentle about me or my feelings. I can't be the tender, sweet lover you want. There's nothing gentle about the way I feel...or the way I want you."

"Want...you want me?" she asked in surprise.

"Yes," he replied without hesitation. "But like I said, I may not be what you really want. I'm not smooth and polished. I don't say all the right things and—"

"What makes you think that's what I want?" she interrupted. "Why do you assume that I need some prissy little executive in a three-piece Brooks Brothers' suit whose idea of exercise is a stirring round of golf and who thinks romance is a Frank Sinatra album, caviar and champagne?"

"But I thought—" He gave her a puzzled look. "Isn't that what all—"

"Rich white girls want?" she finished the sentence irritably. "Wyatt, you've been reading too many romance novels. And I'm not like all those other rich white girls."

"Then what are you?" he asked in a slightly teasing tone.

Chance looked up at him seriously. "I'm the same person I've always been. I don't want some Don Juan who's going to say pretty words and treat me like a fragile flower who might break at any moment. And I don't want to be nothing more than something to decorate a man's arm at social events. I want...I want a man who has real feelings and needs and isn't afraid of them. I want—oh, damn it all, I want you, Wyatt, just like you are. That's what I've always wanted."

His eyes gleamed in the firelight. "I'm not the young boy you remember. Life—the way I lived, the things I've done—it's changed me."

"Maybe. You're older and you've experienced things that have affected the way you look at life." She pulled one hand free to reach out and place her palm against his chest, over his heart. "But in here you're still the same."

"And what if I'm not? What if you find someone you don't like in there?"

"Then I'll tell you to get lost." Her words held no real conviction.

Wyatt stared at her for a moment then moved off her. She sat up and after a few moments she moved onto her knees in front of him. Tentatively she touched him, letting her hands move over his skin lightly.

"You're the most perfectly beautiful man I've ever seen," she whispered, tracing her fingers over the muscles of his chest.

He watched her face as her eyes moved over his body. "I'm nowhere near perfect," he argued in a husky voice.

"You are to me," she whispered as her hands moved down his chest and abdomen, stopping at the top of his jeans. She looked up at him as she unfastened the button then slowly unzipped them.

"May I?"

Wyatt nodded and rose up so she could slide his pants down. He pulled them off and tossed them aside. Chance's eyes were dilated as they traveled over his naked body. She ran her fingertips up the inside of his thighs, brushing against his manhood then moving away. He shivered slightly at the featherlight caress and she repeated the stroke. But this time her hand wrapped around him, squeezing and stroking firmly.

Wyatt's eyes closed as she stroked him. A groan accompanied his eyes abruptly opening as she took him in her mouth. His body tensed at the movements of her mouth and tongue and he wound his hands in her long hair, stilling her actions.

She looked up at him and he tugged on her hair, bringing her face to his. His tongue flicked out, licking at her lips and she captured it within them. The kiss was unhurried yet filled with need.

Wyatt pushed her back. She knelt on her knees facing him, their eyes locked together. He unbuttoned the shirt she wore and pushed it off her shoulders. His gaze was almost tangible on her skin. She felt burned by his eyes as they moved down her body.

"You are so beautiful," he whispered. "More than I remembered."

She felt a thrill race through her as his hands cupped her breasts. "Wyatt," she breathed as his lips touched her neck.

His fingers moved to her nipples, stroking and squeezing and she exhaled with a trace of a moan in the breath, arching her neck back in pleasure.

Wyatt's lips moved from her neck to her breasts, holding them firmly in his hands and moving his tongue from one to the other, teasing the hardened nipples.

Chance's breath quickened as his hand moved down her body, his fingers raking through the soft hair at the mound of her sex.

She was wet when his fingers penetrated her and gasped at the wash of longing his touch evoked in her. "I want you," she whispered huskily.

His answer was to push her back onto the sleeping bag. He moved from her breasts as he put his hands under her thighs and lifted her hips up. Chance felt a moment of uneasiness as he spread her legs, feeling vulnerable under his wolfish scrutiny.

Before she could struggle, he lowered his mouth to her. His tongue lapped at her sensitive erect clit, sending tremors of erotic sensation rippling through her. She reached for him, running her hands through his hair. The sensations increased in intensity and her fingers tightened in his hair as her breath became pants of need. Wyatt's hands moved her legs apart even more, his tongue taking her ever closer to release.

Chance cried out as a pulsing climax engulfed her. Wyatt released her and knelt on his hands and knees above her, looking down into her eyes.

She pulled his face to hers, biting and licking at his lips and tongue, and he responded. His kiss was one of controlled passion at the onset but as she writhed sensuously against him it turned rough and hungry. She responded to his hunger eagerly.

"Please," she whispered when he pulled back from her lips.

His eyes seemed to gleam like coals from the reflection of the fire. Still kneeling between her parted thighs he grabbed her arm and flipped her over. Chance grunted as his hand clenched into a tight knot in her hair, pulling her head back. She complied with his unspoken demand. As she moved onto her knees he rammed inside her.

She screamed in pleasure and his hand moved from her hair to her breast. He lifted her up, impaling her with the length of him and she moaned, moving against him. His

hands cupped her breasts as his lips moved down the side of her neck. She wound one arm behind her head to grab his hair. Turning her head she pulled his face to hers and bit his bottom lip.

Wyatt groaned and crushed her against him in a lusty kiss. His fingers tangled in her hair, pulling her head back to expose her long creamy neck. He bit at her ear, the tender flesh at its base and moved lower to the junction of her shoulder.

Chance pressed back more firmly against him, wiggling her ass in slow erotic circles as she rose and fell on his hard, slick cock. Wyatt's lips continued their exploration of her neck and shoulders, feeling the rapid beat of her pulse beneath his lips and tongue. The sensuous movements of her firm ass against his groin and her tight pussy squeezing him as she rode the length of him slowly increased his excitement to a fevered pitch.

His lips sought hers again but this time he was neither gentle nor in control. He wanted nothing more than to devour her, to taste every part of her and have her quivering with need. She responded to his hunger with matching fire of her own. The kiss became a conquest for dominance, each needing to fill their own desperate urge.

Chance moved forward onto her hands and knees, pulling Wyatt with her, then twisted in an almost feline liveness so that she was facing him, never once releasing his engorged dick from her tight channel. Her legs circled his waist and she pulled herself up to press against him.

Wyatt's hand moved under her ass, pressing her closer. She undulated against him, threatening to rob him of all control. Her golden eyes were hooded and dark with desire, and her skin flushed with the heat of her need.

Wyatt wound his hand in her long hair and pulled her lips to his, holding her captive as he ravaged her mouth. She surrendered only briefly before she became the dominant, fisting both hands in his hair to hold him hostage to a searing kiss that made his dick pulse.

Chance's breath hitched as he began to stroke even deeper inside her, gripping her ass tightly to drive her down the length of him. She arched back, offering her breasts. His tongue moved between them and then beneath her right breast, nipping at the soft underside before moving up to take the nipple in his mouth. She screamed as a climax ripped through her, bucking against him in waves.

"Slow down, baby." He slowed their pace as she began to pump him again. "We have all night." He slid free from her hot pussy and knelt between her legs, sliding his hands to her hips, stroking slowly up her sides. As his hands cupped her breasts and pushed them together, he ran his tongue into the crease then up to circle and tease one peaked nipple. Chance clung to his shoulders, arching toward the delicious sensations and he took her nipple in his mouth, feasting on it.

Chance's body writhed against him and she pressed closer, wanting more. Wyatt released her breasts and slid his hands down to her thighs then up, barely brushing the sides of her pussy. His hands traveled up her body, across her breasts, his thumbs

brushing over the sensitive nipples. As his hands moved steadily upward his body lowered inch by delicious inch until he was stretched over her, his hot flesh barely in contact with hers, his weight on one strong arm. He growled a sexy sound as her nipples brushed his skin and her mons pressed up against his erection, sandwiching it between their bodies.

"Christ, you feel good," he murmured against the side of her neck, licking and nipping his way to her earlobe. "I can't get enough of you." His lips moved to hers and seared her with a kiss so passionate she nearly came then and there. His tongue plundered her mouth, tasting her, feeding off her.

His body moved against hers, both of them pressing and grinding against one another in increasing fervor. His hard cock rubbed against her belly, throbbing with as much intensity as the pulse-pounding thrum of her pussy.

There was no other awareness except for their locked mouths and writhing bodies for some time. When their lips parted, Wyatt rose up to gaze down into her eyes. He saw what he wanted within their golden depths. She was his, body and soul. His woman, his mate. She would take and match all he could give.

That knowledge fueled a fire so deep within him that his body burned with need. When he slid his hands to her hips and pulled her to him, impaling her on the length of his cock, she raised her arms above her head, arched up and surrendered to his need.

Their passion burned brighter than the flames that lit the cave, lasting long after the last embers of the fire had died away.

\* \* \* \* \*

Wyatt woke to find the fire had long since burned out. Only a few embers glowed dimly. He covered Chance then got up and went to the entrance of the cave where wood was stacked in a pile. Within minutes flames licked up through the dry wood, lighting the cave.

Chance immediately snuggled over to him as he lay down beside her. She threw her arm across him as she put her head on his chest and pressed against his side. Wyatt put his arm around her, holding her close as he looked down at her.

He had never imagined there would come a time when the anger and resentment he had been carrying for so long would cease. In some odd way, it left him feeling empty. It had been a part of him for so long that its absence was almost like losing part of himself. That didn't frighten him. He was relieved to be rid of it. But there was something that did make him feel nervous and that was the feelings that Chance had rekindled in him.

He traced his fingers over her face, thinking how beautiful she was. She had always been beautiful, but now he saw her in a new light. He realized that while she may have come from the rich white world, she was nothing like the others he had met in his life. He also realized that he could no longer deny the way he felt about her. He supposed he had loved her as long as he could remember. That time long ago, the first time they

made love, had been etched indelibly on his mind. Even though he had tried to forget, he could still remember every moment. The way she looked and felt and tasted. He'd often thought that the memory was some kind of personal hell for him.

Now that he knew she hadn't betrayed him, he didn't have to deny his feelings. Yet he was anxious. Was love enough? He couldn't give her the kind of life she was accustomed to. Nor did he want to. He had no desire to live in the rich white man's world. He had been trained to be a killing machine, that was the life he knew, one filled with danger at every turn and uncertainty as to whether the next mission would be his last. Anyone who chose to be part of his life would be forced to live with that uncertainty as well.

Chance wasn't used to that kind of life. Even though she no longer lived with Maurice, she still lived a completely different kind of life. Could those two lifestyles blend into one? He didn't know.

Chance stirred and opened her eyes. Wyatt smiled at her as she kissed his chest. "I was afraid to open my eyes," she whispered.

He raised his eyebrows in silent question and she looked up at him. "I was afraid I'd wake up and find out it was all just a dream."

"It's no dream."

"But we can pretend it is," she whispered against his skin.

"Huh?"

"Pretend." She nipped her way down his body. "Pretend we're in a dream. A dream where we can do anything we've ever fantasized of."

Wyatt sucked in his breath as her tongue flicked at the head of his cock. "Baby, you might not want to be in my fantasies."

"Don't bet on it." She took him in her mouth just long enough to have his balls tingle. "Tell me. No, better yet, show me."

"And what if you can't take it?" he asked, succumbing to the ministrations of her mouth on his dick.

"Won't know 'til we try, will we?" she challenged him.

"I guess not." He took hold of the back of her hair and pulled her mouth from his dick. "You want my fantasy, baby? Then lay back."

She did as he said. "Now bend your knees and spread your legs. Wider. That's my girl."

He positioned himself between her spread legs and spread the lips of her sex with his tongue then licked at her clit. Chance's hips shifted, pressing toward his tongue and he buried it as far as it would go in her wet pussy. Chance groaned and grabbed his hair, pulling him in more. He applied himself to the task of driving her mad, taking her to the edge of release only to slow and start again.

"Hmmm." He came up for air. "You're so sweet, so wet."

"Then don't stop," she pleaded, hungry for more.

He gave her a wickedly sexy smile. "In time. Right now, I want you to turn over and get on your hands and knees."

Chance hesitated and Wyatt took initiative. He flipped her over and lifted her hips up on the air to bury his tongue in her pussy again. Just as the first contractions of a climax began, he withdrew his tongue.

"No, no, no!" she complained.

Wyatt chuckled and spread her cream from pussy to anus then plunged two fingers into her pussy and his thumb up her ass. Chance nearly came off the ground. "Wyatt...no...I don't think..." Having her ass invaded was not something she was experienced in at all.

"Just relax and go with it, baby. You're so fucking hot and having your ass up in front of me is making my dick so hard it hurts."

"Oh god, Wyatt, it's..." She couldn't even finish. Her ass was definitely responding and he wasn't even sunk in to the first knuckle. Her pussy was creaming like mad and her clit felt as big as a basketball. As if its own accord her body began to move, her hips lifting and rocking back to meet the invasion.

"That's it, baby," he crooned in a voice rough with lust, his free hand moving to stroke himself.

Just his voice had her pussy clenching, as well as her ass. "Oh, god, oh god, oh god!" was all she could scream as an orgasm ripped through her. Wyatt's fingers slipped free from her pussy, long enough to press his cock into the opening of her wet channel. He pushed his thumb deeper in her ass at the same moment he penetrated her fully.

Chance screamed at the overwhelming sensations rocketing through her. With his free hand Wyatt gripped her hip, pulling her harder against him. Her breath came faster with each stroke, wanting more and at the same time feeling as if she couldn't take it. It was a feeling that was unique and wholly new to her.

Wyatt felt the need humming through her and it woke a yearning so primal that it robbed him of all conscious thought save their joined bodies. "Give it to me," he growled. "All of you. Now."

A moan that was primitive preceded her body moving faster and harder against him. "Fuck me, Wyatt. God, fuck me hard."

Her voice, rough with need, was the catalyst he needed to lose touch entirely with the world around him. He rode her hard, sinking in as deep as was possible, over and over, the slap of flesh against flesh punctuating his harsh breaths and her whimpers and moans.

When he felt her pussy begin to contract around him, it sent him over the edge. Spasms racked his body as he shot inside her. When at last reality began to reassert itself, they collapsed in a heap on the ground.

For several minutes the only sound was that of their breathing and the crackling of the fire. At length, Chance rolled over to face him. She took his face in her hands and kissed him long and deep. "Some dream," she teased in a whisper.

He laughed. "That was just a preview, baby."

"Preview?" She drew back to look at him and he grinned provocatively at her.

Chance watched as he fumbled around on the ground and picked up both of their discarded shirts. "Lie on your back and raise your arms up," he instructed.

Chance was game until he started lashing one wrist to the other with her shirt. "Uh, Wyatt, I'm not so sure about this." She had never been bound and while it stirred something new and wanton in her belly, she was a little uncertain.

"Trust me, baby." He finished tying her then sat back on his heels again and spread her legs wide, exposing her completely.

The feel of the binding and the total vulnerability excited her in an entirely unfamiliar fashion. Wyatt leaned forward over her, running his hands down her arms, along the soft flesh of the inside and down her body to her hips, then back up until he had her wrists pinned to the ground and was crouched over her, running his tongue down the side of her neck to the hollow of her throat.

Chance arched her neck back, drinking in the feel of his mouth on her skin as it traveled down from her neck, between her breasts and then to suckle one erect peak. She undulated against him as his mouth continued its journey downward. His hands slid down her body as he kissed and licked her stomach, her hips and her thighs.

She tilted her pelvis up as his tongue neared her pussy and her body jerked at the electric pulse that shot through her when he raised her hips up and lapped at her. "God, you're sweet," he muttered just before his tongue slid in between her lips and probed inside her wet channel.

She moaned as he went deeper, his tongue probing and flicking inside her. Wyatt gripper her tighter and raised her hips higher so that her body weight was on her upper back. He lapped at the sweet cream that poured from her, laving her pussy and clit. She squirmed, moaned and panted under his attention. The seductive abandon of her body drove him nearly mad with the need to plunge his hard dick into her as deep as it would go.

But he wanted her to be so hungry for him, so hot that she was incoherent with need before he took her. He felt the vibrations begin in her and lowered her hips back to the ground and stretched out on her, capturing her lips with his.

Chance could taste herself on his tongue and it excited her even more. Their tongues circled and danced as his cock pressed and rubbed against her swollen pussy, making her weak with need.

"Please," she begged against his mouth. "I need you in me."



Wyatt thought to say no, to push her to the edge of her limits, but her plea called to the need that hummed inside him and he could deny neither. With one swift move, he seated himself in her tight pussy.

Chance cried out at the initial penetration, her pussy stretching to accommodate all of him, then moaned as he began to stroke slowly in and out, withdrawing almost completely before sinking into her again as deeply as he could go. Her body matched his pace and time ceased for both of them as they danced to a rhythm as old as man, the song of need and mating carrying them both into a realm where nothing existed but the sensations of their joined bodies.

When at last Wyatt could contain it no longer, he groaned, shooting his seed deep into her womb. Chance wound her legs around his firm waist, gripping him without and within, milking the last of his juice. Together they rode the wave of sensation that left them limp, panting and sweaty, lying on the floor of the cave.

Chance didn't realize she had drifted off to sleep until Wyatt removed her bonds and hugged her tight up against him. She wound her arms around him, reveling in the feel of his body pressed against hers. "Are you sorry?" she whispered, suddenly seized with insecurity.

"About what?"

"About us. Are you sorry it happened?"

"No," he answered and hugged her closer. "Never."

"Me either." She smiled happily. "So, can I ask you a very personal question?"

"Sure."

"What happens now?"

"I'm not sure I know what you're asking," he answered, even though he was pretty sure she was referring to them.

Chance sat up and looked at him. Wyatt looked at her, sitting in front of the fire with her hair tangled and the light playing off the golden strands like liquid fire. She made no move to cover her nakedness, seeming natural and uninhibited.

Wyatt's eyes moved over her, and despite his resolve not to become excited again, his desire for her rose. Chance's fingers played on his skin as she looked at him. "What happens to us?" she finally asked. "Is this it? Do you want me to go away now and leave you alone or what?"

"No, I definitely don't want you to leave," he replied, twining one long strand of her hair around his hand. "But I don't know the answer to your question. I don't know where we go from here. I do know that I can't go back to the rich white man's world. I've tried that and it doesn't work for me. I belong where I am, in the SEALs. But you, you have to decide for yourself what's right for you."

Chance looked at him for a few moments before speaking. "I understand and I wouldn't ask you to leave the service. I just want to know if you...well, if you want me to be in your life. Do you want me to stay with you?"

Wyatt's hand stopped its motion in her hair. He wanted tell her that he wanted her to stay with him more than anything. But he wanted her to reach that decision because it was what she wanted, not because she wanted to please him.

"Do you want to stay?"

She smiled and ran her hand along the stubble of beard on his face. "More than anything."

Wyatt felt like a weight had been lifted off his chest. "What about your job?"

She stiffened slightly. "I forgot! Wyatt, I found out something!"

She jumped up to grab her backpack and pulled out the tape recorder. Returning to the fire, she sat down beside him again. "When I first got here I heard some talk about some trouble that's been going on. I figured maybe it had something to do with the new casino that's being built. It wouldn't be the first time a community has gotten their knickers in a knot over something like this. Ever since the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act was signed in 1988, one group or another has been bitching about it. When the Mashantucket Pequot opened their casino near Ledyard, Connecticut, in September 1993, the locals started making noises about it. Despite the fact that the tribe was going to provide hundreds of new jobs, becoming one of the state's largest employers and adding somewhere in the neighborhood of a hundred million dollars to the state coffers by the end of the year, the locals spent their time griping about their concerns that the Pequot would buy up more land to expand their operations."

"That's no surprise. Whites don't want to give up anything they consider theirs. It's always been that way. They take and take and take until the Indians have nothing. Then they're happy."

"You're right. But this time the law's on our side. And it's proving to be a good thing. Why, by 1993, gambling had already become a major source of revenue. It allowed previously impoverished tribes to build schools and hospitals. The people could afford to build homes and provide their children with a good life. It virtually eliminates unemployment. In short, it gives back some of the power the government has stolen from them over the years. I mean, it doesn't replace all their lands or anything like that, but it does give them something they haven't had up until now – financial independence and power. We both know that money is power, and with power comes the ability to be heard. That's what the casinos are doing for the Indians."

"And power is something a lot of people don't want the red man to have," he said in a harsh tone.

"Only people who profit from keeping others oppressed and at their mercy," she corrected him. "Wyatt, is that what's going on here? Is there some local bigwig who's in a lather over the casino?"

Wyatt looked at her for a few moments then shook his head and sighed. "Yeah, I guess that's about the size of it. There's a man in the area, a very rich man. I guess he's responsible for providing jobs to a great many Indians. And he isn't at all happy about the casino. In fact, he's downright mad."

"That's what I thought. You do know that I work for CNN, don't you?"

Wyatt shook his head. "I don't know what you do, exactly."

"I'm a producer. And like I said, after I overheard some people talking around here I started thinking something was going on. So I called my office and had my assistant and someone from research do some checking. Wyatt, someone is trying to make sure the casino never gets off the ground. There've been three major contractors so far that have signed contracts to do the work and all three have backed out—paying hefty fines I might add, for doing so. We don't know why, but I suspect someone's behind their change of mind. Someone with a lot of clout and a lot of money."

Wyatt nodded and stared silently into the fire. Chance had managed to piece together a lot in the short time she'd been there. "So, what?"

"So I want to do a piece on it! If you can convince people to open up and talk to me, we can blow this thing wide open, expose the people who are causing the trouble. I'll get a team down here and we'll tape it. Wyatt, this'll get national attention."

Wyatt considered her suggestion. If it worked then it would certainly solve the problems the people had been having. And it would settle it without any killing. That part particularly appealed to him.

He smiled at her and nodded. "You're right and I'll help you all I can."

"Thank you!" She threw herself on him, kissing him all over the face and hugging him.

Wyatt laughed and wrapped his arms around her. "I should be thanking you. After all these are my people."

Chance pulled back and looked at him. "That reminds me, we never quite settled things. I said I wanted to stay with you but you didn't tell me what you wanted. So?"

Wyatt smiled and pulled her back down on him. "I want you to stay forever."

"With you?"

"Only me."

Chance smiled brightly. "I love you, Wyatt. More than life."

"And I love you," he said softly. "With my life."

Chance's eyes filled with tears and he brushed them away. She sighed as he kissed her eyelids, her cheeks, chin and worked his way lower.

"You think we should get back?" she whispered as he rolled her over on her back and propped on one elbow beside her.

"Later," he whispered huskily. He began a slow assault on her body, starting with her breasts. He started circling the areola of one nipple slowly with his tongue, while his fingers performed the same action on the other. Chance closed her eyes and arched her breasts up, eager for his touch.

His tongue licked at the hard nipple, circled and flicked, making her long for him to take it in his warm mouth and suck it. He teased her that way for several long minutes,

his tongue and fingers torturing the sensitive buds until the pleasure had an edge of minute pain attached that had Chance moaning and writhing.

"Please," she groaned, when she couldn't take it anymore. "Suck it."

Wyatt complied, fastening his mouth onto her hard nipple and sucking it slow and hard, elongating the nipple then allowing it to diminish briefly before he stretched it again. While his mouth was occupied, one hand worked on her other breast, pinching and stretching the nipple then easing off and circling it softly.

Chance wound her hands in his long hair and pulled his head against her breast, at the same time dipping one hand between her own legs to stroke her engorged clit.

He raised his head long enough to move her hand from her sex. "Not yet, baby."

"Wyatt, please," she crooned, running her hand down to his hard shaft to squeeze and stroke. "I want you – now."

He breathed a slight groan of pleasure but didn't give in, even when she pushed him onto his back, slithered down his body and took his stiff shaft in her mouth. She grabbed his tight ass and pulled him more deeply into her mouth, pumping his cock in and out, then pausing to lave the head and lick down the length of it.

"Jesus, but you make it hard on a man, Chance."

She paused long enough to give him a sexy smile then returned her attention to his cock. Minutes passed, and with each second Wyatt's body grew more tense as he struggled to hold back the orgasm that threatened. He pushed her gently to stop her, but she hung on, gripping his ass and pumping his cock faster with her tight, wet mouth.

With Chance kneeling above him, his dick in her mouth and her firm ass in the air in a pose that would weaken a priest, Wyatt didn't stand a chance. Throwing his head back, he closed his eyes and groaned as he shot into her mouth.

Chance lifted her head as his cock softened, and licked her way up his body to his lips. Wyatt could taste the salty favor of his cum when her tongue snaked into his mouth. His cock surged to life again and he rolled Chance over, kneeling between her legs.

He pulled her forward, impaling her on his stiff cock. Chance wrapped her legs around his muscled waist, squeezing him deeper inside her. "Give me all of it," she rasped, arching as he drove the full length of his erection inside her. "More, Wyatt, give me more. Oh god...don't...stop."

"Don't worry, baby. I'm not stopping until I've fucked you every way I've ever dreamed of."

## **Chapter Five**

*Swain County, North Carolina*

It was midmorning when Wyatt and Chance returned to where they had left his old Jeep parked. Loading the gear in the back, Wyatt started the engine and headed down the winding trail.

Chance was quiet. Her thoughts were split between the unbelievable night she had shared with Wyatt, and compiling a mental list of the things she needed to do to get her investigation underway. She was so lost in her own thoughts that she paid no attention to the passing scenery as they pulled off the path onto the gravel road. But her attention abruptly shifted as a man stumbled into the path of their Jeep.

Wyatt slammed on brakes. Dirt and gravel flew from the tires as the Jeep turned sideways in the road. Before Chance could do more than gasp, Wyatt was out of the Jeep, running toward the man who staggered toward him.

"Billy! What the hell happened?"

Billy Hawkes was dirty, scratched and bloody. "Holling," he panted as Wyatt looped Billy's arm over his shoulders and helped him to the Jeep.

Chance was waiting outside the Jeep. Wyatt helped Billy into the backseat while Chance fumbled around through their gear for a canteen.

"No time!" Billy's voice was rough with dryness and fear. "Have to get out of here, now!"

Wyatt didn't argue. "Get in!" he barked to Chance as he climbed in and started the engine.

Chance turned around in her seat and looked at Billy. "What happened to you?"

"Holling. They came into Ralph's. Greg grabbed Jenny. He cut her face."

Chance gasped and looked over at Wyatt. His face looked as hard as stone and his jaw was clenched tight as he looked up at Billy in the rearview mirror. Climbing over the seat, she grabbed her backpack and dug out her miniature tape recorder and the canteen.

Giving Billy the canteen, she pulled a clean but damp shirt from her bag and had him wet it. While he drank his fill, she tried to clean his face and hands. Once she finished, she climbed back across the seat. "Just lie back and try to rest," she told Billy. "I'd like to ask you some questions. Would that be all right?"

He nodded and she held up the recorder. "Okay if I tape it?"

Again he nodded. She turned on the machine and held it midway between herself and Billy. "You said you were at Ralph's?"

"Yes."

"That was last night?"

"Yes."

"And what happened while you were there?"

"Greg Holling and about a dozen of his men showed up." His voice was soft but the bitterness and hate was still clear.

"Could you speak a little louder?"

"Sure. I was having a drink and Greg Holling showed up with his men. Holling said they could have their pick of which red bastard they were going to skin. Everyone got real quiet and a couple of guys started to stand up, but then Greg opened his coat and let everyone see he was packing. So no one did anything. We all just sat there."

Billy paused to take another drink from the canteen. "Then Jenny, one of the waitresses, walked by Greg and he grabbed her. She screamed and he pulled a hunting knife from his coat and put the tip against her face, right below her eye. He started to cut her and I yelled at him to let her go. He mouthed off at me about being yellow and that's when Ralph went for his old shotgun from beneath the bar. But Holling shot him before he even had it in his hands good. Ralph fell and everyone was talkin' at once and Jenny was screaming. Then Holling shoved Jenny away from him and pulled his gun on me. He dared me to come at him."

Billy ran his hands over his face and looked at Wyatt's reflection in the mirror. "I wanted to, Wyatt, I swear to God, I wanted to. But I couldn't, I just couldn't. He was holding that gun pointed at my head and I just couldn't."

"You did the right thing," Wyatt said in a tight voice. "Getting yourself killed isn't going to solve anything."

Billy nodded miserably. "Yeah, well, being a coward isn't doing a whole lot either."

Chance waited for a moment as Billy looked out the window in shame then spoke up. "Billy, can you tell us what happened next?"

"Holling kicked me and I fell back over a table. The next thing I knew he had this bottle of liquor with a burning rag in it. People were really getting scared and they were out of their seats and he said that he'd shoot the first one that made a move. Then his men backed out and as he left he threw the bottle against the back wall. It exploded and the fire fanned out over the curtains and pictures and stuff. There was like a stampede for the door. Hal Ross made it to the door but Holling and his men gunned him down. Man, it was like hell! Everyone was trying to find a way out, breaking windows and crawling all over each other. And the fire was getting bigger all the time. I got Ralph up and got him to the window. I shoved him out then climbed out behind him. Soon as I hit the ground Holling was there with a gun on me. His men threw me in the back of a truck. They met another truck loaded with dogs and told me I had a five-minute head start 'fore they'd come after me."

Chance's mouth dropped open. "You mean they were hunting you? Like an animal?"

Billy turned to her with a look of resentment on his face. "You're white— don't you get it? They think we're animals."

Chance looked from him to Wyatt then turned off the recorder. She was silent for a few moments then turned once more to Billy. "Well, they're wrong! And with your help, we're going to put a stop to what they're doing."

He looked at her then tapped Wyatt on the shoulder. "Hey, I think I must've missed something. You wanna tell me what's going on? What's she talking about?"

Wyatt looked up in the mirror. "She's talking about stopping the Hollings, Billy— the legal way. No fighting, no killing. We're going to let the law work for us this time."

Billy threw back his head and laughed harshly, "Yeah, right—the law working for the Indians. It'll be the first time in history."

\* \* \* \* \*

Winston Holling hung up the phone and went to the door of his study. "Manning!"

An elderly man in a dark suit appeared at the end of the hall. "Yes, Mr. Holling?"

"Has Greg come in?"

"He returned just a short time ago. He is upstairs."

"Tell him to get his ass down here," Winston ordered sharply. "Now!"

He slammed the door of his study and poured himself a stiff drink. His glass was half empty when Greg walked into the room.

"Sam just told me he saw that Hawkes boy with Nashoba," Winston barked. "You have anything to say about that?"

Greg shrugged. "Indian was better at running than we thought. So?"

"So?" Winston threw his glass across the room at Greg, barely missing him but drenching him with alcohol. "So, I'm not happy, you stupid prick! Jesus Christ! I'm surrounded by incompetents. Give you a simple little job and what do you do? Fuck it up, that's what!"

Greg swiped at the liquor that wet his face from the glass Winston had thrown. "I didn't fuck anything up. Hal Ross is in the hospital with three slugs in his leg. He'll probably never walk right again, Ralph's is a smoldering pile of wood and Billy Hawkes is scared so shitless he won't have the balls to show his face."

Winston's face was red with anger. "Let me say this one more time, just in case you didn't hear me. Hawkes was seen with Nashoba."

"So?" Greg asked smugly.

"So, Nashoba was last seen with some reporter," Winston said. "The way I hear it some broad from CNN. Now, just what does that say to you, son?"

Greg grinned. "Says I should meet his reporter—straighten her out on all the lies she's been hearing."

Winston studied his son for a few moments. "Just what makes you think you're gonna change her mind about anything?"

Greg's smile widened. "Let's just say I have a way with the ladies."

Winston snorted and turned his back on Greg. "Then you better get to it, boy, 'cause my associates are real pissed off about the way things worked out. More importantly, I'm pissed off."

Greg walked over and put his hand on his father's shoulder. "Don't worry, Dad, I'll take care of everything. You just leave that reporter to me."

Winston turned to look at him. "Fine, but don't put all your eggs in that basket. I want John Nashoba taken care of—and that old man, Eaglefoot. He's the most dangerous. But don't kill him. He has something I need."

"Sure thing," Greg replied arrogantly and gave Winston's shoulder another thump. "But right now I have to get moving. Got a special lady waiting."

"That fancy lawyer woman?" Winston asked.

Greg grinned. "One and the same."

A smile took hold of Winston's face. "Well, give her my regards. That tip she passed along last month really paid off."

"Yeah, I'll bet." Greg's grin widened. "She's incredible, Pop, and a real knockout."

"So when am I going to meet this Venus?" Winston asked.

"Soon." Greg started for the door. "She's thinking about leaving Atlanta and settling somewhere in North Carolina. Listen, I've gotta go. Don't wanna be late. Check you later."

Winston watched his son leave the room then picked up the phone and dialed. "Hey, it's Winston. We're gonna take care of the reporter... Yes, I'll have Eaglefoot soon... No, I'm not sure he has it, but he'll know where it is... Yeah, Nashoba is as good as dead... No, John... Yeah, yeah, I know, you want to be there when Wyatt goes down. Don't worry, I'll save that for dessert... Sure, I'll be in touch."

He hung up the phone and smiled to himself. Soon he would have everything he wanted.

\* \* \* \* \*

John Nashoba helped Billy inside as Wyatt pulled the Jeep around back out of sight. He and Chance unloaded their gear and went in the back door. John was pouring coffee into mugs and Billy was sitting at the kitchen table when they entered the house.

"Hungry?" John asked.

"Yeah," Wyatt replied. "Billy tell you what happened?"



John nodded but didn't speak. Chance walked over beside him and he turned to look down at her. "Mr. Nashoba, I want to help...if you'll let me."

"What you going to do?" he asked shortly.

"Anything I can," she replied. "But to begin with, I'd like to tell you some things I found out."

John nodded and handed her a cup. She smiled and gestured to the table. "Can we sit?"

He took a seat beside Billy. Chance looked up at Wyatt as he picked up a mug from the counter. He gave her a short nod and pulled his chair around close to her.

She saw the look of surprise on his father's face. John turned at him and the two exchanged a look. Chance didn't know what it signified, but after a moment John nodded and looked at her again. This time his expression was one of curiosity.

She quickly filled him in with what she had found out about someone trying to block construction of the casino. She told him what she did for a living and how she wanted to do a story about what was happening.

"What good will that do? Who's gonna believe the Indians over a bunch of rich white men? Already the government's trying to shut down our game rooms, make us stop the video games. This will only make things worse."

"I disagree, I think it'll help. If we can find out who's behind this—and from what Billy said, I think we already have a good idea—then we can press charges. Not only that, we can file a civil suit to recoup the money the reservation is losing by construction being held up."

"And how're we supposed to pay for all this? We're already in too much debt. If we don't get the casino built and running, we're gonna be broke. We can't afford to spend money on some high-priced lawyer."

"Well, I can."

All three of the men looked at her at the same time. She turned to Wyatt, taking his hand. "I inherited a lot of money from my mother. Maurice has never been able to touch it. I'd like to pay for the attorney and whatever else is needed."

Wyatt shook his head. "Chance, we might be talking about a lot of money."

She smiled and squeezed his hand. "As long as we don't go over thirty million I can swing it."

"Thirty million! You have—"

"Wyatt, it doesn't mean anything to me," she interrupted. "I've had access to it for some time and I've never touched it. I work for a living, just like everyone else. I don't care about the money, but I do care about what's happening here, and if that money can make a difference then I want to do it. I need to."

He looked at her for a moment then smiled. "Okay, if that's what you want."

Turning to his father, he regarded him silently for a second. "Dad, let's do this her way. We can't win by fighting and personally, I don't think I can stomach any more killing. So let's try it."

John got up and walked to the window. For a long time he didn't move or speak. Then he turned to Chance. "I appreciate what you offer, but I have to be honest. Having you involved may do more harm than good."

She looked at him with a puzzled and hurt expression. "What do you mean? Because I'm white?"

"No," he replied and walked over to her. "Because you're Maurice Davenport's daughter."

Chance looked from him to Wyatt then back at him. "I don't understand. I told you this money is mine. It's from my mother's estate. None of it comes from Maurice. I haven't taken money from him since the day I graduated college."

John pulled his chair around in front of her and sat down. "What do you know about your father's business interests?"

"Not much. He has interests in a lot of different things. Why?"

John looked down at the floor then ran his hand over his face once. "Your father is partners with Winston Holling."

Chance felt like someone had just kicked her in the stomach. "What? But that's not possible. He doesn't even know Holling."

"Yes, he does. They met when they were boys. You see, Maurice Senior and Winston Senior were big fishermen. They met in college and became good friends. A couple of times a year Maurice Senior would come up and visit old man Winston. That's how I met your dad. My father, Jacob, was friends with your grandfather."

"You knew my grandfather?"

"Since I was a small boy. When your dad got old enough Maurice Senior would bring him along. He and Winston Junior got to be good friends."

"Then why didn't I ever hear about the Hollings?"

John shrugged. "You'd have to ask Maurice about that. But my point is, you're part of the very thing we're against. And once that gets out Maurice will do everything he can to make sure you don't hurt his position."

Chance's eyes flashed. "Well, that's too bad for Maurice. Mr. Nashoba, I've found out a lot of things about my father that aren't very nice. I'm afraid I don't feel the same about him I once did."

John looked at Wyatt. "She had nothing to do with the abortion," Wyatt said. "Maurice had her drugged and taken to a hospital."

"Then why didn't she tell you?"

"She didn't know. She had blocked it out. Just like the time up here when she was eight – and a lot of other things. Tsa'li helped her remember."

After a few moments John reached over and took Chance's hand. "I'm sorry. I guess I was wrong—about a lot of things."

Chance's eyes began to tear as she looked at Wyatt's father. "I'm sorry, too. I wanted the baby."

He nodded and patted her hand. "And now?"

She cut a quick look at Wyatt before answering. "I love Wyatt. I always have."

He smiled and gave her hand a squeeze. "I'm glad. Maybe now Wyatt can quit running from how he feels."

She wiped at her eyes and smiled. "Well, he can run if he wants to. But I'll chase him."

John laughed and released her hand. "You remind me of how you were as a child. Always tagging behind him like he was the greatest thing since chocolate."

Chance laughed as Wyatt's hand moved around her, hugging her against him. "He is."

John picked up his cup and went to the stove to refill it. "Well, I guess it's time you quit calling me Mr. Nashoba."

She turned to look at him. "What shall I call you?"

Wyatt gave her shoulders another squeeze. "I have a suggestion."

Chance looked from Wyatt to John with a bewildered expression as both men smiled. They looked at her and she raised her eyebrows. "Someone want to let me in on the secret?"

Wyatt laughed and pulled her onto his lap. "How 'bout you call him Dad, or Pop, whichever you prefer."

"But he's not—"

"But he could be your father-in-law."

She pulled back and looked at him in surprise. "What are you saying?"

"I'm saying that I think Chance Nashoba sounds good." He smiled. "What do you think?"

"Are you serious?"

"Totally. Unless you're not interested."

"Not interested?" She jumped up and grabbed his arm to pull him to his feet. "Come on!"

"Hey!" Billy called as they started for the door. "Where're you going?"

"To find out who at the council has the authority to perform marriage ceremonies," Chance called out over her shoulder.

John started out after Chance and Wyatt with a gesture to Billy. "Come on."

"Where are we going?" Billy asked.

"To a wedding."

\* \* \* \* \*

Chance turned to her assistant, Dianne. "So, what we have is three construction companies who have all paid heavily due to breach of contract with the Cherokee and no explanation as to why the contracts were breached?"

Dianne jerked around and looked at Chance with a flushed face. Chance smiled to herself. The women in the office had been falling all over Wyatt ever since they arrived at the CNN offices in Atlanta that morning. She could understand their reactions.

"Uh." Dianne shuffled through her notes. "Yeah, that's it. We contacted all three companies. Two referred us to their attorneys. We have the names and numbers. The third just refused to talk to us at all."

"Okay," Chance made a note, "assign someone from legal to talk to the attorneys. If all three situations were settled out of court, we need to talk to the parties involved in the negotiations. Also, bird-dog the big cheese at each of the companies. See if you can wear them down."

"Now," she turned to Steve, "what've you got on Holling?"

Steve cleared his throat nervously. "Chance, this is...well, I don't know how to say this—"

"Just spit it out."

"Well, there's a good possibility that Holling is involved. He has connections with one of the construction companies. The owner and Holling are involved in some kind of wood preservative factory. The other two aren't tied directly to Holling, but they are connected with one of his close business associates."

"You have a name for this associate?"

"Actually..." he cleared his throat again. "Actually, I do. It's Maurice Davenport."

Chance leaned back in her chair and looked over at Wyatt. He didn't speak but his dark eyes made contact with hers. She looked at him for a moment then straightened up. "Okay, fine. I want someone on it. I want to know how connected he and Holling are—if they've had recent contact, the usual. Also, and this is the most important, not to mention the missing element. What's the point? If Holling and Davenport are indeed trying to block construction of the casino, what's in it for them?"

Steve finished jotting down notes and looked up at her. "We had a thought about that. We need to get someone on the inside—in the Holling's camp. Research came up with an interesting bit of information. Seems that Holling's son Greg is a notorious womanizer, sees himself as some sort of world-class ladies' man. If we can play that angle maybe we can get one of the women to get in tight with him—you know, play the role that she's against the Indians and all for good old 'white America' and all that."

"That's a good idea. And I know just the person."

Everyone in the room looked at her and she smiled. "Me."

"No!" Wyatt spoke for the first time.

Chance's boss, Rich, who had until now listened quietly, agreed with Wyatt. "He's right. You're not the one, Chance. Not only are you too close to the situation but there's also a very good possibility that they're already on to you."

"I disagree," she said as she stood up. "All anyone knows is that I'm a reporter who's been nosing around."

"And asking about Wyatt," Rich pointed out.

"That's easy to explain," she argued. "His father is a prominent figure in this scenario. And since Wyatt and I have known each other for a long time I was simply playing on that relationship to get on the inside and get information."

"That's just it." Rich walked over to stand in front of her desk. "You and he have known each other a long time. That's what'll give you away, show where your sympathies lie."

Chance laughed and sat back down. "Oh, I don't think so. And neither will anyone else who happened to witness our little reunion. As far as anyone around there knows, Wyatt's hated the ground I walk on for quite some time. So, you see, I'm in the perfect position to go on the inside. I can play on that antagonism everyone thinks exists."

Rich turned and looked at Wyatt. "If you have any control at all in this, please speak up because I'm not getting anywhere."

Wyatt looked at Chance. "It's too dangerous. If they find out...well, I don't know what they might do."

"What can they do? Don't forget, I'm Maurice Davenport's only daughter. If he and Holling are in bed together there's no way Holling is going to hurt me. Besides, I have to do this."

He opened his mouth to speak but she held up her hand. "I need to, Wyatt. Please don't fight me on this."

After a moment he held up his hands as if in surrender. "Okay, play it your way."

She smiled and turned to Rich. "So? Anything else?"

He shook his head and reclaimed his seat. "All right, we'll move on this. We'll play both sides, interviewing the locals and the Indians—make it look like we're impartial. But we can't drag this out, Chance, so if you're going in then do it fast."

"You got it," she replied, and looked around at the other people. "Okay, you know what needs to be done. Get everyone moving. I want reports in twenty-four hours. Call me on my cell. I'll have the computer with me and you can download what you have. Dianne, get me a schedule printed of when everyone's going to arrive and where they'll be and their individual assignments. If you can't get me on the cell, call Wyatt or his father. I'll leave the numbers on my desk."

Dianne nodded, and giving Wyatt one last smile, left the room. The others followed behind her. Rich stopped at the door and turned back to look at Chance. "You do realize that if you're right this could ruin your father."

She nodded. "Yeah, I know."

"Okay." He shrugged then looked at Wyatt. "Nice to meet you, Mr. Nashoba."

"Same here," Wyatt replied.

Rich left and Wyatt walked over to Chance. "I hope you know what you're doing."

She smiled and kissed his cheek. "Well, if I don't, I always have my guardian angel to fall back on. He's never let anything hurt me yet."

He rolled his eyes and shook his head. "I've been called a lot of things in my life, but never a guardian angel."

She laughed and hugged him. "Well, there's a first time for everything."

\* \* \* \* \*

Iris Waters pulled up in front of the hotel and parked the rented car. Going inside, she stopped at the desk. The clerk looked at her and broke into a wide smile.

"Yes, may I help you?" he asked, giving her figure an appreciative once-over.

"Iris Waters," she said in a deep husky voice. "I believe you have a reservation for me."

The man checked his reservations and beamed at her as he slid a guest information card toward her. "Yes, Miss Waters, if you'll please fill this out."

Iris quickly filled out the card and placed her American Express card on top of it. The clerk ran her card through the machine and returned it to her along with a room key. "Room 201, Miss Waters. May I have someone help you with your luggage?"

"That won't be necessary." Iris gave him a smile. "Thanks all the same."

She turned and walked to the elevator, noticing the clerk still watching her as she stepped inside and turned around. She smiled, more to herself than to him. His reaction was typical. Men were attracted to her like moths to a flame.

Checking her watch as the elevator doors opened on the second floor, she saw that she had plenty of time to bathe and change before her date.

Iris smiled to herself as she thought about the upcoming evening. Greg Holling was handsome, wealthy and most importantly, easy to control. All of that combined to make him an ideal temporary companion.

As soon as she let herself into the room, she tossed her suitcase on the bed and stripped off her clothes, letting them fall randomly to the floor as she made her way into the bathroom.

Her own reflection in the mirror caught her attention. She smiled as she looked at herself. Gone was the tall, gangly teenager with the limp black hair and bushy eyebrows. That girl had vanished years ago. In her place was a striking woman of five-foot eight-inches with dark auburn hair that curled loosely to her shoulders.

She turned one way then the other, admiring herself. Even her own mother would be hard pressed to recognize her. The cosmetic surgeon had done wonders on her nose,

shortening and narrowing it to classic lines. Her breasts were now what men drooled over, the kind of breasts one would see in a pin-up.

Blowing herself a kiss, she turned on the water in the shower. Twenty minutes later she emerged, skin flushed from the hot water and eyes glistening with excitement.

She went into the bedroom to get her cosmetics case, thinking about what was to come. She had prepared for this almost her entire life. In fact, her very existence centered around the plan she had set in motion. Now it was time to initiate the next phase. She smiled coldly as she went over her plans in her mind and pulled a thick file from her briefcase.

A photograph that was paper-clipped to the inside cover drew her eyes to it. She studied the man's face, admiring the strong lines and black penetrating eyes. This was a man she could go for in a big way. He was the kind of man who was a match for her and that was something she had looked for all her life.

There was a distinct possibility that he would have to be sacrificed in order to see her scheme to completion. She hoped it would work out so that she could keep him, but if it didn't, she could bear the loss. Nothing could stand in the way of her getting what she wanted most. Revenge.

"Let's just hope you make it through," she said to the picture. "Then I'll show you all kinds of new tricks."

Thoughts of what she would do with him make her pulse race. She smiled and blew the picture a kiss just before she returned the file to her briefcase and locked it. Picking up her cosmetics case, she returned to the bathroom.

As she was putting the finishing touches on her hair, a knock sounded at the door. Wearing only a towel, she answered it.

Greg Holling smiled licentiously as he saw her and she returned the smile, stepping to one side. "Come in," she invited in a seductive tone.

He stepped inside the room. Pushing the door closed with one hand he reached for her with the other. Iris chuckled and let him pull the towel away. His hands roamed over her body and she felt him harden against her as they embraced. "God, I've missed you," he murmured against the side of her neck.

"Ummm," she purred, slithering against him and imagining him to be the man in the picture. "Me, too."

He steered her toward the bed, fumbling with the buttons on his shirt at the same time. Iris let him push her back on the bed and looked up at him slyly. She knew him well. If she let him have what he wanted now she would be giving up her advantage.

Just as he reached for the button of his slacks she sat up, moving his hands away and tracing her fingers across his stomach. "Slow down, lover. We have all night."

Greg moaned as she leaned forward and licked his stomach but didn't argue. Iris smiled and pulled him down beside her. "What have you been doing, darling?"

He shrugged and reached for her breasts. She let him fondle her without protest but lightly pushed him away when he tried to roll over on her. "Come on, baby. I've been thinking about your pussy all day."

"Slow down, stud," she teased him. "I need a little time to warm up. Let's talk. You know how excited it makes me to hear about your little adventures."

Greg smiled and lay back, putting his hands behind his head. Iris unfastened his slacks and eased them down around his knees, then climbed on top of him, straddling his body so that her wet sex rubbed against his erection. "Now, tell me absolutely everything," she cooed.

He reached up and squeezed her breasts, toying with them as he talked. Iris listening attentively, filing away every detail in her mind. By the time Greg finished she was filled with excitement. He was doing exactly what she wanted him to do.

"Darling, I'm so proud of you," she cooed as she reached down to stroke him. "You see how right I was now, don't you?"

"Yes," he groaned, pressing up against her.

"And you will continue to do as I ask, won't you?" she asked, evading his attempt to penetrate her.

"Yes!" he rasped in frustration. "Baby, I need it now!"

Iris smiled and rubbed his engorged staff against her wet pussy. "Darling, listen to me. This is important. Everything is in place now. All we have to do is follow the plan and soon we will have everything we ever dreamed of."

"Everything?" He looked up at her. "Are you forgetting about my father?"

Iris laughed. "Lover, your father is nothing. Leave that to me. When the dust settles you'll be in control of the Holling empire and Winston will be worm food."

Greg smiled excitedly. "How?" he asked. "How are you going to do it?"

"Leave everything to me, honey." She leaned down to lick his lips. "I have everything under control. Just do as I tell you and I promise you'll find yourself one of the most powerful and influential men in this country."

"And you'll be by my side," he rasped, grabbing her hips and trying to ram inside her.

Iris smiled and sat up, running her hands down her own body and sighing in pleasure. "Oh, Greg, it will be perfect. Just perfect."

She rose up enough to guide his erection inside her. He groaned as she slid down the length of him and she smiled. *Oh, yes, she thought triumphantly, everything's perfect. Soon I'll have it all – very soon.*

\* \* \* \* \*



Chance closed her briefcase and looked around the room. All of her bags were packed and ready. She picked up a couple and carried them into the living area. Wyatt was standing in front of the window with his hands jammed in his pockets.

"Everything okay?" she asked as she put the bags down.

He turned and looked at her. "Fine. Need some help?"

"I can manage," she replied and walked over to him. "We still have a little time before our flight. Want something to eat?"

He shook his head. "No, thanks. So, when is this lawyer supposed to show up?"

"Mr. Horton, my attorney, contacted her and she said she'd be there tomorrow," Chance answered. "He paid her base fee and gave her some background information. She's supposed to call when she gets in. He gave her your number and your father's. She'll probably want to meet with you before she speaks to the council."

"And will you be there?"

"Probably not. I want to get up with Greg Holling and see what I can get going. I have to find out as much as I can, as quick as I can because we need evidence if we're going to take this thing to court. Besides, as far as she knows she was hired by someone named Daven Porter. I don't want her to find out who I am until I'm sure Maurice isn't involved."

Wyatt nodded and made no comment. Chance was quiet for a moment then touched his arm. "What's wrong?"

"I still don't like the idea of you being around Holling. You don't know what he's like."

She blew out her breath and looked up at him. "Nothing's going to happen. Besides, we've been over and over this and you agreed."

"Yeah, but that doesn't mean I have to like it."

She smiled and looped her arms around his neck. "I'm kind of glad you don't, to tell you the truth."

His eyes widened slightly. "You're glad?"

"Yes. It shows you care."

Wyatt took her chin in his fingers and tilted her head back. "You know I do."

"I guess I'm still a little unsure," she said softly as she searched his eyes. "I still feel like I'm going to wake up and find out this is all a dream and that you still think I'm the rich witch of the west."

Wyatt's face hardened and his hands moved to grip her arms. "I meant what I said – and I don't lie."

"I know." She winced at the strength of his grip. "That hurts."

He loosened his hold on her and rubbed her arms lightly. "Sorry."

"It's okay." She reached up and stroked her hand through his long hair. "I do believe you. I just feel like it's too good to be true, that's all. It's kind of hard to accept when the one thing you've wish for all your life suddenly comes true."

"You might not think that after a little while. I'm not the easiest person to live with."

Chance laughed and hugged him. "You never were. But I think I'll manage."

"There won't be any fancy cars or trips to the Bahamas or catered meals. I'm not rich and I don't want your money."

"Neither do I. Look, I told you, I don't care about the money. The people on the reservation can have all of my trust for all I care. I don't need it. All I want is you."

Wyatt held her tightly, burying his face in her hair. "I want this to work, Chance."

"It will," she whispered determinedly. "I promise."

"Is that a guarantee?" he asked as he pulled back and looked down at her.

"Yes, it is," she said adamantly. "Don't you remember? I believe in fairy tales and happily ever after – and that's what we're going to have."

Wyatt smiled at her lovingly. "Well, let's just hope there are no dragons or monsters in this fairy tale of yours."

She laughed and hugged him. "Nope, just a big bad wolf."

\* \* \* \* \*

Wyatt pulled up in front of his father's house and parked the Jeep. John Nashoba walked out on the porch as Wyatt got out. "That attorney called," he said as Wyatt walked up to the front steps. "Said she'd appreciate if someone picked her up at her hotel since she doesn't know her way around."

"What time?"

John held the door open for him. "In an hour or so. She said she had some calls to make first. You want some dinner?"

"I've eaten, thanks." Wyatt walked into the kitchen. "But a cup of coffee would be good."

John poured two cups and put them down on the table. "So, what happened in Atlanta?"

Wyatt filled his father in on everything, including Chance's plans. John listened without interruption then shook his head. "I don't know about this, son. Getting mixed up with the Holling boy could be dangerous. To begin with he's liable to recognize the name. Davenport's not exactly common."

"Yeah, I know. But she's not going to be using her real name. And she's determined to get the goods on him and his father."

"She is a determined woman." John looked at Wyatt for a few moments. "So tell me, what's going on inside you?"

Wyatt set his cup down and raked his hands back through his hair. "A tornado."

"That have anything to do with what happened at the cave?"

Wyatt looked at him suddenly, wondering just how much he knew about what had gone on.

"Tsa'li and I had a talk. I'd just like to know where things stand. You and Chance really come to terms with this?"

"I love her, Dad. Guess I always have. But the anger was always in the way. I thought she betrayed me and I let that rage blind me. Knowing the truth makes everything different."

"Different enough that you and she can make a life together? She's still white, Wyatt, and used to being rich. You think she can adapt to another kind of life?"

"I want to think so. And she believes it can work. Besides, she's really not what people think."

"Well, you'd know that better than anyone, I guess, so I'll trust your judgment. There is something else, though. Tsa'li seems to think that your past is becoming a little clearer."

"Some. But it's not exactly pleasant. In fact some of the things I've remembered scare the hell outta me. Like, for instance, what made you and Mom choose my name?"

John got up abruptly and walked to the back door. He stared outside for a few moments. "We gave you the name Wyatt because Sarah liked it. Tsa'li chose your middle name."

"Why? Why not John or William? What made him choose Une'ga-dihi?"

For a few moments John didn't move or speak, then he turned and looked at Wyatt. "I don't know how to explain it to you, son. Besides being Sarah's father, Tsa'li is also...different—set apart. He sees things the rest of us can't. When he told us what your name was we just accepted it."

Wyatt put his head in his hands and stared down at the tabletop. "He wants me to follow him, doesn't he?"

"You know he does." John walked over and sat down beside him. "There isn't anyone else. Sarah was his only child and she's gone. You're all that's left. Wyatt, I know this is an old sore and I don't want to reopen it, but I do think you should give it some thought."

"I know." Wyatt looked up at him. "And I will. I just can't make any promises. Right now, I just need to find out who I am for myself. I need to know if I'm the monster I'm afraid I am, Dad."

John put his hand on Wyatt's shoulder. "You're not a monster, son. I can guarantee that. You're just a man who's had a lot of trouble in his life. But you can overcome anything. I know that and I have faith in you."

Wyatt smiled. "Thanks."

John removed his hand. "Why don't you run over and pick up Miss Waters for me."

"Sure." Wyatt stood up. "Be back soon."

As he started down the road his mind turned to thoughts of Chance. *Please don't do anything stupid*, he thought. *If you get caught* –

A cold sweat broke out over his body at the thought of Holling doing something to Chance, and his hands tightened on the steering wheel. A sudden rage took control of him and bloody visions of what he would do to Holling if he hurt Chance filled his mind. Trying to dispel the images, he turned on the radio. Music blared from the speakers, but the pounding beat only seemed to fuel the fury inside him. He looked up in the rearview mirror and froze. The face that looked back was that of a stranger. A stranger with his face.

The black eyes seemed to blaze as if lit by some internal fire and the face itself seemed to be carved from living stone—there was a sense of power and unbridled menace in the expression.

Jerking the steering wheel to one side, he pulled off the side of the road and stomped on the brake. He looked into the mirror again and panic seized him. Releasing the wheel, he covered his face with his hands.

For a few minutes he sat still with his hands over his face. The panic made the rage dissipate until at last he felt only a sense of fear and dread. Uncovering his face he looked at his eyes in the mirror. They appeared normal. He stared at his once-more familiar reflection. "What's happening to me?" he whispered. "Dear God, what am I?"

\* \* \* \* \*

Chance followed the hostess to a table by the window. A handsome blond man looked up at her and smiled. "Mr. Holling?" she asked. "I'm Daven Porter."

"Miss Porter." He smiled as he stood and extended his hand. "Please, call me Greg."

"Greg." She smiled, taking his hand. "It's nice to meet you. Thank you for agreeing to see me."

The hostess left and Chance took a seat across from Greg. He signaled the waitress over to their table. Chance looked up from collecting her recorder and notepad from her bag. "Just coffee please."

Greg ordered another bourbon on the rocks and the waitress left. "So, Miss Porter, you said on the phone you're interested in doing a story concerning the Indians. Forgive me, but it seems to me you should be talking to one of them."

Chance put her attaché down on the table and cut a look over at him. "As a matter of fact I have spoken to a couple of them. But you see, Greg, the slant of my story is not so much on the proposed casino they want to build, but its effect on the community at

large. That's why I asked to see you. As a prominent member of the community, I thought you might have some insights to share with me."

Greg leaned back and smiled. "Well, I just might. What do you want to know?"

"Do you mind if I tape this?" Chance set her recorder on the table.

"I'd prefer not," Greg replied. "At least not right now. Why don't we get to know each other first."

Chance shrugged and picked up the recorder, surreptitiously turning it on and placing it inside her open attaché case. "Fine by me. Where do we start?"

"To begin, I think it's very important that we be honest," Greg said. "And honestly, I think you're one of the most beautiful women I've ever seen in my life."

Chance smiled and lowered her eyes. "Well, thank you, Greg. I'm flattered." She looked up at him again. "And I'll admit that you're not at all what I expected."

"What did you expect?"

"Oh, I don't know," she laughed lightly. "A spoiled rich boy who only had his money going for him. Certainly not such a handsome and charming man."

Greg beamed at her compliment. The waitress returned with their drinks and Chance took a sip of the coffee. She thought it was time to throw out a little bait and see if he bit. "Since we're being honest, I feel I should tell you that I am not entirely comfortable with the Indians. Something about them makes me uneasy and...well, don't repeat this, but I'm not so sure I'd be thrilled about this gambling thing if I lived here. You know, alcoholism and crime has risen in other areas where gambling was started and in the long run, the entire community suffered."

"I agree completely," he said as he leaned forward. "Not only that, but can you imagine what would happen around here if the Indians did finish that casino? There's no telling what kind of people it would attract. Why we all know that organized crime would move in and what would that do for the people around here? Not to mention the businesses that would suffer because of labor losses. And that's just the tip of the iceberg."

Chance nodded thoughtfully. "I see your point and I would like to explore that in more detail. But right now I'd like to ask a couple of questions if I may."

"Fire away."

"Okay." She looked straight at him. "I've heard a couple of rumors about some trouble that's been going on around here—bar fights, fires, things like that. It seems like there's two stories about that. One is that the Indians are causing the trouble and the other is that it's the whites. So what's the real story?"

Greg's face had noticeably paled and he took a stiff swallow of his drink before answering. "Daven—may I call you Daven?"

At a nod from her he continued, "Good. Now, Daven, I have to tell you that if you had lived here as long as I have you wouldn't even have had to ask what the cause of the trouble is. But since you're a stranger I feel it's my duty to tell you the truth."

“And just what is the truth?” she asked in a low voice, giving him an inviting look.

Greg reacted immediately to the look. He reached over and took her hand in his. “You can’t trust those Indians, Daven,” he said gravely. “They’re deceptive and misleading and very dangerous. You have no idea of how low they’ll stoop to try and make the whites around here look bad. They try to blame every misfortune they bring on themselves on us.”

“That’s horrible!”

“Yes, and not only that, there are some of the Indians who will go so far as to physically hurt people.”

“You mean like the fights and things I’ve heard about?” she asked innocently. “Well, why don’t you report them or have them arrested or something?”

Greg released her hand and took another sip of his drink. “That’s another problem. They pick their times carefully, always making sure they’re on reservation property. That way the whites don’t have a chance. We try to report them and we have to go through their law enforcement. And, well, you can imagine how far that goes.”

Chance studied him for a moment. “Isn’t there some way of legally dealing with these people? Perhaps if you sat down and talked with whoever is in charge some kind of compromise could be reached.”

Greg laughed. “Nice thought but it’d never work. Daven, since we’re off the record I’m going to give it to you straight. These people are still the bloodthirsty savages they’ve always been. The only way of dealing with them is a gun.”

Chance pretended to be shocked by his words. “You mean like some kind of war? But surely there are people on the tribal council who are willing to listen to reason.”

“It’s not the council that’s the whole problem,” Greg said. “See, there’s this one family on the reservation. The Nashobas. Old man Nashoba has had it in for the whites as long as I can remember. So he keeps the council turned against us. That’s been hard enough to deal with but now his crazy son has shown back up. He’s the real problem.”

“Who is this man?”

“Wyatt Nashoba.” Greg spat his name like it was dirty. “The meanest, most cold-blooded son of a whore you’ll ever meet. He’s the one causing the trouble. I tell you, Daven, that man’s some kind of lunatic. He lives to cause trouble. If we could get rid of him and his family then maybe things would change.”

Chance wanted to reach over the table and slap Greg’s smug face. Instead she looked down at her coffee cup until she regained her composure. “Well, this is not what I expected at all. In fact, it looks like my story has taken on a new twist.”

She forced herself to look at him, reached over and took his hand. “Listen, I know we don’t know one another well and you have no reason to trust me. But I’d like to help—bring all this out so the truth will be exposed. Only I can’t do it alone. I’ll need your help. Now, I know you probably think I’m only doing this for my own sake and

that's partly true. It'd be a feather in my cap to break this story. But it'd help you and the people around here, too."

Greg was silent for a moment then he squeezed her hand. "You mean you want to expose the Nashobas and the trouble they're causing?"

"Exactly."

"Then I guess you and I are going to be spending a lot of time together." Greg's hand tightened around hers. "'Cause I'm the man that can lead you to the truth."

Chance smiled and withdrew her hand. "Well, I have to admit that the idea of getting to know you better does have its appeal, Greg. So, if you're agreeing to help then here's what I need. I need to see firsthand this Nashoba person in action. In fact, if there's any way possible, I need to document it. Do you have any way of finding out if something's going to happen?"

Greg smiled and leaned back in his chair, signaling the waitress for another drink. "Don't you worry about that. You just leave everything to me."

Chance smiled and took a sip of her cold coffee. The fish had taken the bait.

## Chapter Six

*Sylva, North Carolina*

Wyatt pulled up in front of the hotel and got out to go into the lobby. As he walked inside the front door a woman with auburn hair stepped up to him. "Wyatt Nashoba?"

He stopped and looked at her. She was very beautiful. "Yes. Miss Waters?"

"Please, call me Iris." She smiled seductively and extended her hand.

Wyatt took her hand in his, noticing how she clasped his a little longer than normal and how her dark eyes looked directly into his own. He released her hand, feeling a little uncomfortable at the way she was looking at him and the way it was making him feel.

"My Jeep's outside," he gestured. "You ready?"

"Actually, I'd like to take a look around first. That is, if you don't mind. Then we can meet with your father and the others."

"Sure," Wyatt agreed. "Let me give him a call."

Iris pulled a small fold-up cell phone from her pocket. "Here, use mine."

Wyatt took the phone and called his father to tell him they would be a little late then returned the phone to her. "So, what would you like to see?"

Iris took his arm and turned him toward the door. "Everything."

They got in the Jeep and pulled out onto the road. Iris turned in her seat toward him. "So, tell me, Wyatt, what do you do?"

"I'm just here on leave. On my own time I do a little illustrating," he replied, trying not to look at the way her skirt had risen high on her thighs.

"Really?" she breathed, moving so that the skirt rose even higher, high enough he could see she had on no underwear. "How interesting. Do you have a studio?"

"At home."

"I'd love to see it," she suggested huskily.

Wyatt turned and looked at her with a puzzled expression. "I thought you were here to help the council deal with the construction and all that."

"I am. But you have to understand, Wyatt. I need to know all I can about the people in order to do the best possible job I can for them. And since you're my—let's say—unofficial escort, then what better way to get to know about the people than through your eyes?"

"I don't think the council will be willing to pay you to look at my artwork."

Iris surprised him by laughing. "Well, you don't have to worry about that. My fee's already been paid."



He looked at her again. "Mind if I ask how much that is?"

"Not at all." She smiled. "In fact I'd like to think that we can be totally honest with one another, Wyatt. My base fee is two hundred and fifty thousand dollars. That covers my being here and doing the preliminary work."

Wyatt raised his eyebrows and whistled. "That's a nice chunk of change."

"But I'm worth it," she said and put her hand on his arm. "Now, how about you show me some of your artwork."

Wyatt considered it for a moment then decided that there would be no harm in it. After all, it wasn't like he was on a date with Iris or something. He was just doing what the attorney they had hired wanted.

"Sure. But don't get your hopes up. I'm not that good."

Iris' hand tightened slightly on his arm. "Oh, I don't believe that, Wyatt. In fact, I'd be willing to bet that you're very good – very, very good."

Wyatt shifted uncomfortably and cut her a quick look. Something about Iris was compelling. She was beautiful and intelligent and he got the idea that she was accustomed to getting exactly what she wanted.

"I'm afraid you're going to be disappointed," he said in reply. "I'm really nothing special."

Iris' eyes locked with his and her voice deepened to a lusty growl. "You won't disappoint me, Wyatt. I guarantee it."

\* \* \* \* \*

Chance closed her attaché case and stood. "Greg, I really appreciate you taking the time to talk with me. You've certainly opened my eyes."

Greg stood and took her hand in his. "When can I see you again?"

Chance hesitated for a moment. "Well, are you busy tomorrow? I have to contact my office and get some preliminary things done so we can move on this story, so I'll be tied up tonight."

"Tomorrow's just fine. Say around two in the afternoon. We can meet at my lake house. I'll have Cook whip us up something special and we can talk in private."

"That sounds lovely," Chance agreed, thinking that she was not looking forward to spending any private time with him. But she had to find a way to get him to admit that he and his family were behind the trouble. "Where shall I meet you?"

"Why don't I pick you up at your hotel? Where are you staying?"

"Actually, I don't have a place yet," she lied. "I just got here. Listen, why don't you give me directions and I'll meet you there. Write down your phone number and if I get lost I'll call."

Greg wrote down the directions to the lake house along with his phone number on a pad she pulled from her attaché case. Chance read over it then returned the pad to the attaché and they walked outside together.

"Thanks again, Greg. I'll see you tomorrow."

He leaned down and kissed her on the cheek. "I'm looking forward to it. See you at two."

She nodded and watched him walk to his car. As soon as the Jaguar pulled away, she got in her Jeep and picked up the phone, dialing John's number.

"Hello," he answered on the second ring.

"Hi, it's Chance. Is Wyatt there?"

"No, he went to pick up the lawyer. She asked him to show her around and they're supposed to be here in an hour or so."

"Oh, okay." She checked her watch. "Well, I guess I'll come on over. Is that okay?"

"Always. See you soon."

Severing the connection, Chance started the Jeep. As she pulled out onto the road she took the recorder from her attaché case. Rewinding the tape she listened to the conversation she had recorded between her and Greg. With any luck the next tape would contain something she could use to put him and his groupies away.

\* \* \* \* \*

Wyatt parked the Jeep in front of the house and got out. Iris didn't move as he started toward the house. After he had taken a few steps he stopped and looked back at her. She made no move to get out. Finally he walked over to open her door for her.

She got out and looked around. "Well, you certainly are isolated here."

"I like it that way," he said as he shut the door and turned toward the house.

She smiled and walked with him, studying him and paying no attention to anything else. He was even more handsome in person than in his picture. And she found herself very attracted to him.

He opened the door and stepped aside for her to enter. She looked around the small cozy den and smiled at him. "Very nice. It's like a lover's hideaway."

Wyatt made no comment. He put a couple of logs on the fire and stood up. "Would you like something to drink?"

"Actually, I'd like to see your work," she said, walking over to stand close in front of him.

He turned and led her to his small studio. Turning on the light, he moved to one side as she walked in and looked around. "Very impressive," she commented. "But some of these are rather disturbing."

She turned to look at him. "There's a dark side to you, isn't there, Wyatt? Some part you keep hidden that you allow to emerge in your work. Why? Are you afraid of that part of yourself?"

He crossed his arms and stared at her. "There's a dark side to everyone. How it surfaces depends on the individual. I guess allowing it out in my pictures is as good as anything. It doesn't hurt anyone that way."

She walked over and put her hand on his arm. "You're very mysterious, Wyatt. I like that. I'm attracted to mysteries."

He moved his arm slightly and her hand fell away. "I can recommend a couple of books."

She laughed and moved closer. "That's not what I was referring to. Wyatt, we're both adults. Let's not play these games. I'm attracted to you and you feel the same. Why try to pretend it doesn't exist? It's not like it will interfere with my job here."

He moved back again. "You're very beautiful, Iris. But we don't even know each other. And surface attractions are usually just that—only surface. I don't have any place in my life for such things."

She studied his face for a moment, trying to figure him out. He should not be resisting her. No man ever did. *What's with him?* she wondered. *There's nothing about anything him being married or involved with anyone in his file. Is he just trying to play hard to get? Is that his game?*

She moved closer once more. "And just what makes you think that's all it is, Wyatt? Don't you believe in things like fate?"

"Absolutely."

"So do I," she crooned, running one hand down his arm. "And I think our meeting is fate."

"I think we better get over to my father's," he said. "You ready?"

"Could I use your bathroom first?" she asked, deciding to back down for the time being.

"Sure." He walked out into the hall. "Right over there, under the loft." He pointed as they emerged from the studio.

She picked up her bag from the couch where she had dropped it and went into the bathroom. Closing the door, she pulled her cell phone from her bag.

Her call was answered on the second ring. "Are things set on your end?"

"She fell for it hook, line and sinker," Greg replied. "Now she wants to do a story on how rotten those red bastards are. And just like you said, she wants to get proof that Nashoba's behind it. I told her I'll see what I could find out and I'm supposed to see her again tomorrow. So how're things on your end?"

"Perfect," she said giving her reflection in the mirror a smile. "But I can't talk. Listen, I want you to go ahead with that little scenario I gave you. It has to go down tonight."

"Everything's ready to roll," he said. "I was just waiting on your call."

"Then do it," she instructed. "I'll be in touch."

She put the phone in her bag, flushed the toilet and walked out of the bathroom. Wyatt was standing on the front porch with his hands jammed in his pockets.

"I'm ready," she said as she walked outside. "Do we have time to do any more sightseeing?"

Wyatt shook his head. "It's too dark now."

She said nothing as she followed him to the Jeep. He started it and turned around. Iris wondered how long it would be before they got word about Greg's latest little adventure and she wondered just how Wyatt would react.

\* \* \* \* \*

Chance washed the dishes while John dried and put them away. "You don't have to do that, you know," he commented as she handed him the last pan.

"I don't mind. In fact, it's kind of nice. I appreciate dinner, by the way. The fish was wonderful."

He smiled and put the pan in the cabinet. "You want coffee or a beer or something?"

"I'm too stuffed." She checked her watch. "Wonder what's keeping Wyatt?"

"Don't know. He said the lawyer wanted to take a look around. They should be here soon."

She nodded and started to sit down at the table. Just then the back door opened and Tsa'li walked in. "Hey, Tsa'li, what brings you here?" John asked. "Want something to eat or a cup of coffee?"

Tsa'li shook his head and looked at Chance. "Come. We must speak."

She looked at John and he nodded. "Go on. I'll tell Wyatt when he gets here."

She gave John a quick kiss on the cheek and grabbed her jacket from the chair. Tsa'li walked out and she followed. He didn't speak at all but continued walking. She followed, staying close behind so as not to lose sight of him in the dark. Several times she checked the lighted readout on her watch. After twenty minutes of hiking he stopped beside a small stream.

A fire was ready to be lit on the bank. Tsa'li did so and sat down. Chance sat down beside him. For a few moments neither of them spoke.

"Why are we here?" she asked, unable to bear the silence or suspense any longer.

"Wyatt is in a time of testing," Tsa'li said. "Much depends on his success or failure."

Chance didn't know what to say so she remained silent. After a few moments he looked at her. "When a man is one with a spirit, his strength must be great or he will be absorbed."

"I know, John told me everything, and I remember what you showed me in that vision or whatever you call it. He doesn't know what happens to him. It's like this spirit takes over and Wyatt disappears." She felt a sudden grip of fear around her heart. "Tsa'li, what happens to Wyatt if he isn't strong enough? Will he disappear forever? Will I lose him?"

Tsa'li looked into her eyes. "Is your love strong enough to prevent the other from assuming permanent control?"

Her eyes widened in surprise and anxiety. "Are you saying that it's up to me?" she croaked. "Tsa'li, I don't know how! I love him, I do! More than life. But I don't know how to stop this thing."

Tsa'li took her hand in both of his. "White woman, you have the eyes of the wa'ya and the spirit of the Tsa'lagi, the Cherokee. You must look deep within yourself and find the strength to do what you must."

Chance looked at him for a long time. "How do I start?"

Tsa'li nodded and moved his hand in a sweeping gesture around them. "This is Wa`ya'hi—place of the Wolf clan. Here you will become one with the spirit of the wa'ya."

Chance gasped as her eyes followed the sweep of his hand. From the darkness sets of glowing eyes began to appear. Icy fingers of fear crawled down her back as the wolves started to move from the darkness, circling the fire.

"Tsa'li!" she exclaimed, grabbing his arm. "God, what do we do?"

Tsa'li patted her hand and spoke to the wolves in a low singsong chant she didn't understand. One by one they lay down, their legs stretched out in front of them like lupine sphinxes around the fire.

Chance could not believe her eyes. She looked at the creatures and then at Tsa'li. He finished his song and turned to her. "Close your eyes, Woman with the Eyes of a Wolf. Close your eyes and see the man you love in your mind. Set your spirit free to search for his. Let your strength be his."

Chance looked at him for a moment then at the enormous wolf that lay just feet away from her. The animal turned its head to look into her eyes and she felt a jolt run through her as a silent command to obey Tsa'li's words came from its mind. Giving in, she closed her eyes.

\* \* \* \* \*

Jimmy Martin and Billy Hawkes parked across the street from the bar. Billy threw his arm over Jimmy's shoulders as they started across the street. "You sure you're up for a night out?"

Jimmy nodded. "Man, I've had enough of hospitals to last me a lifetime. Besides, this is Jenny's first night at her new job and I promised her I'd come."

Billy smiled and let his arm drop as they walked up to the door. Jimmy stopped him as he started in. "Remember, don't say nothing about her face. She's real sensitive about it."

"Don't worry," Billy assured him. "Say, the doctor did say it wouldn't leave a scar, didn't he?"

Jimmy shrugged. "She might need some plastic surgery. Hey, get this! John Nashoba called and told her that if she needed it, someone had donated the money for her to have it done. Ain't that some shit? You think it's John and he just don't want nobody to know?"

Billy shook his head. "Just between you and me I'd bet my last dime it's that blonde Wyatt's with. She's got bucks, Jim—lots of 'em. And she ain't stingy with it either. Fact is, she's putting up the money to hire that high-fangled lawyer that's supposed to help us get construction going again and get Holling off our asses."

"No shit?" Jimmy pulled open the door. "Well, I just hope it works."

They walked inside and found a seat at the bar. Jenny walked over to them and gave Jimmy a quick kiss. "Hey, sweetie." He smiled. "You're looking real fine tonight. Think you might want to do something when you get off work?"

Jenny smiled at him. "Sure thing. You gonna wait around 'til we close?"

"I'll be right here. How 'bout a couple of beers?"

She nodded and walked around the bar, speaking to the bartender. Jimmy pulled some money from his pocket as the bartender sat two beers down in front of him and Billy.

For a little while they sat and talked, watching the people dance and occasionally speaking with Jenny when she had a second. Everything was relaxed and the people were all having fun.

Until Greg Holling and six of his men showed up.

The minute they walked in, everyone in the place fell silent. Greg walked over to the bar and grabbed a bottle from behind it as his men pulled guns.

Billy and Jimmy looked at one another. "What the fuck?" Jimmy whispered.

Billy shook his head and said nothing. Greg took a big drink from the bottle then looked around. "Hey!" he yelled at Jenny who was across the room. "You, bitch! Get your red ass over here!"

Jenny froze in place, her eyes wide with fear. Jimmy jumped up and faced Greg. "Leave her alone, Holling."

"Who's gonna make me?" Greg taunted him.

"Me, that's who."

"No, Jimmy!" Jenny shouted and started across the room.

"Stay back!" Jimmy yelled at her. "Don't let him near you."

Greg slammed the bottle down on the edge of the bar with a roar. "You fuckin' little red piece of shit!" he yelled at Jimmy. "How fuckin' dare you! Jack! Matt! Get that fucking bitch and put her in my truck!"

Two of Greg's men started for Jenny. Jimmy dove at one of them and a gun went off. His body slammed into another of the men as blood spurted from the gunshot wound in his chest. The man fell under his weight and screamed for someone to help him. Two more of Holling's friends rolled Jimmy off the man.

Billy looked down at Jimmy. His sightless eyes stared up at the ceiling and his face was set in an expression of shock and pain. Jenny screamed and ran toward Jimmy but Greg's friend, Matt, grabbed her and slung her toward the other men who waited by the door.

"Nobody fucking move!" Greg waved his gun around. "You hear me? The first one that twitches is dead. Matt! You and Brad get her the fuck outta here!"

While two men dragged Jenny kicking and screaming from the bar, Greg walked over to Billy. "You find Nashoba and give him a message for me, Billy Boy. Tell him we're gonna fuck that red bitch 'til she bleeds then we're gonna skin her alive. Tell him I'll be waiting for him at the Gap. He'll know where to find me.

Giving Billy a push hard enough overturn the barstool, Greg backed up to the door. "Anyone but Billy Boy tries to leave and they die."

Everyone started shouting and talking at the same time as soon as Greg left. Billy got up from the floor and looked around. Joe Nash came over to him. "What you gonna do, Billy? You gonna tell Wyatt?"

"What else can I do?" Billy looked from Joe to Jimmy lying dead on the floor. "Call the sheriff and tell him what happened. But don't let anyone tell him what Greg said until I talk to Wyatt."

"He won't go after Holling," Joe said. "You know how he feels, Billy. He's had it with fighting."

"Maybe," Billy said. "But if he doesn't go after them, Jenny's good as dead. I have to try to talk to him."

Joe nodded. "Go on then."

Billy ran out of the bar and jumped in his truck. He had to get to Wyatt and fast.

\* \* \* \* \*

Wyatt looked out the back door for the tenth time. "Where'd he say they were going?"

"I told you he didn't say. Now will you sit down? Tsa'li will take care of her."

"Well, I must say that I'm certainly curious," Iris said somewhat insolently, looking up at Wyatt from where she sat at the kitchen table. "Any woman who inspires this kind of worry must be very special."

Wyatt turned and looked at her with an irritated expression. But before he could speak the back door flew open, almost knocking him down. "Wyatt!" Billy bounded in shouting.

Wyatt caught his balance and turned to Billy. "Holling shot Jimmy. He killed him, Wyatt!" Billy's voice was filled with panic. "And he took Jenny. Told me to tell you that—" Billy stopped as his eyes fell on Iris.

Wyatt took him by the shoulders and turned him around, pushing him back outside. "Dad?" he called over his shoulder.

John stood up and followed Wyatt. "Excuse us," he said to Iris as he walked outside.

"Okay, slow down and tell me what happened," Wyatt said to Billy.

"I told you!" Billy exclaimed. "Holling and his men showed up at the Drinking Hole. He said he was going to take Jenny and Jimmy tried to stop him and he shot him! Dead! Then his men took Jenny and Holling said for me to bring you a message so I jumped in my truck—"

"What message?" Wyatt interrupted him.

"He said to tell you that they were going to fuck that red bitch 'til she bled then they were going to skin her alive and that if you wanted him he'd be at the Gap. Said you'd know where."

Wyatt looked from Billy to his father. Neither man spoke and Billy looked from one to the other. "Wyatt, you've got to do something. You can't let them do that to her."

Wyatt turned and walked away, standing at the back of the yard and staring up at the sky. John nodded toward the house. "Come on, Billy. Let's go in. He needs to be alone."

Billy started to protest but John shook his head and he closed his mouth. They went inside. Iris was standing by the door. "Don't you think you should call the police?" she asked as they walked in.

Billy turned to her and shouted. "Don't you think we have? We call and call and call! And every time they walk. The law can't help us."

Iris looked at John for a second then opened the door and went outside. Wyatt didn't look at her as she walked up beside him.

"What are you going to do?"

He didn't answer and she moved in front of him. "When I was in college I took a course on Native American mythology. I remember talking about it with a girl in my class. She was from the Oklahoma Cherokees. She told me this story about these spirits or immortals or something that were supposed to live in the mountains around here and how they would appear and fight to save the Cherokees when they were in danger. Another story she told me was about two twins, something about one being Light and the other Dark and how one was good and the other evil. But she said these twins loved the Cherokee and would help them when they were called on." Wyatt looked down at



her without speaking. "Looks like you people could use some of that help now," she said softly.

"That's just a story," Wyatt said in a constricted voice.

Iris put her hand on his arm. "True. If we were back in time a hundred years or so, we wouldn't be standing here like this. You'd be on your way to wherever those men are and you'd kill them. You'd avenge the death of your friend and keep them from killing the girl. Imagine it, Wyatt, tracking them through the dark forest, the adrenaline pumping through your body as you anticipated the oncoming fight, feeling your muscles quiver with excitement and almost smelling the warm scent of their blood."

"Stop!" Wyatt barked. "Shut up!"

Iris eyed him for a moment. "But it's true. That's what you'd do. You'd find them and kill them, make them pay for the death of your friend. That's the way justice was dealt at one time. There was no criminal justice system, no courts, no —"

"Stop it!" he whispered. "Don't —"

"Don't what? I'm only saying that in the past —"

He howled at her and backed away, feeling as if a storm was brewing in his mind. His head felt like it was about to explode. An agonizing pain tore through him and he felt as if he was being consumed from within.

Suddenly the pain vanished. In its place was a cold, silent rage. He looked around and saw Iris staring up at him with wide eyes. She looked so small. He could break her in half with his bare hands. But it was not her he wanted to hurt. It was someone else. But who? He couldn't remember. Then a voice whispered in his mind. *Holling, Greg Holling. That's the enemy. That's who we kill tonight.*

Visions of blood filled his mind and he lost himself in them. Turning away from the woman who watched him, he ran into the forest.

John ran out into the backyard and found Iris alone. "What happened?"

"I have no idea. I was standing here telling him how we could have those men arrested and suddenly he just starting howling like an animal and ran off. Is there something wrong with him, Mr. Nashoba?"

John looked at her then looked toward the darkness of the forest.

\* \* \* \* \*

Deep in the forest, Chance was lost in a world without substance. She felt her spirit soaring and exhilarated in the freedom. Reaching out with her essence, she called to Wyatt. At first she couldn't sense him, then his presence was felt. She felt his spirit and sensed his concern for her.

Then something intruded, something that felt cold and evil. The evil moved closer to him. Chance tried to wrap her own essence around his to protect him. But he was caught in the web the evil spun around him.

Suddenly she felt his spirit change. Another was with him, one who was powerful and filled with bloodlust. Chance tried to combat it, willing her own spirit to push it aside.

Abruptly she was back in her physical body. Her eyes flew open as a scream erupted from her throat. "Tsa'li!" She whirled to look at him.

Tsa'li nodded. "Yes, the other is with him."

"I have to get to him! You have to help me."

"I cannot. It is not for me to do, Woman with the Eyes of a Wolf. You must do this."

"But how?" she asked, filled with fear for what would happen to Wyatt. "How do I find him?"

Tsa'li nodded toward the wolf that lay beside her. "Perhaps it is time to ask for help from those who are best suited to give it."

Chance looked from him to the wolf. For a few moments she hesitated then she turned to face the wolf. "Will you please help me?"

The wolf stood and walked to her. Chance froze, sure that it would attack her. It made no aggressive moves. Instead it looked into her eyes for a brief moment then lowered its head.

She reached out hesitantly and touched the thick fur between its ears, stroking it gently, then ran her hand down its snout. The wolf lifted its head and licked her hand then turned to the others.

As one, the creatures rose. Tsa'li put his hand on Chance's shoulder. "Go with them. They will guide you."

She put her hand on top of his and gave it a squeeze then stood. She had no idea why she was doing this. It didn't make any sense. But she had to find Wyatt and if this was the only way she had to risk it.

The big male wolf looked up at her and she nodded. "I'm ready." He turned and started upstream. She followed close behind, surrounded by the pack. Within moments Tsa'li and the safety of the fire had vanished.

\* \* \* \* \*

Greg Holling turned the bottle up to his mouth and took a long drink then passed it over to one of his men. He looked over at Jenny. She was staked out on the ground, her hands and feet spread wide and tied to stakes driven in the ground.

"Not bad for an Indian bitch," he laughed.

Matt Taylor, his closest friend laughed with him. "Yeah, so when do we get to sample her?"

"Not 'til Nashoba gets here," Greg replied. "He gets to watch."

"But your old man gave pretty clear orders that we couldn't kill him," Matt pointed out. "You ready to buck the old man?"

"Who said I had to?" Greg retorted. "We'll just rough him up a little and dump him somewhere."

"Then he'll be able to identify us," Matt said. "That don't sound like a good idea to me."

"Well, who the fuck asked you?" Greg barked. "Besides, who's he gonna tell? The police? Yeah, right! Like they'd believe him. And anyway, we all have alibis. We were at my old man's house having this big barbecue. There's thirty people who'll swear to it."

"Well, hell." Matt grinned. "Then let's have us some fun."

Greg laughed and yelled over at Jenny, "You hear that, bitch? Yeah, you get all wet and juicy thinking 'bout it 'cause I'm gonna fuck you blind."

He and all his men laughed and starting joking and bragging about what they were going to do to her.

They had no idea they were being watched.

From only yards away the Warrior crouched and watched in silence. Inside him Wyatt begged to be heard, pleading with him not to go to war against the white men. But the Warrior dismissed Wyatt's pleas. The men were enemies of the people and it was his duty to kill them, to avenge the lives they had taken and to make them pay for defiling the woman.

He stripped off the shirt and the white man's pants that Wyatt had covered himself with. He had no shame in his nudity. He was the Warrior—he was afraid of nothing.

The men finished drinking their firewater and threw the bottle aside. As they moved to circle the woman staked out on the ground, the Warrior slid from his hiding place and crept silently to the nearest vehicle.

In the back of the truck were several rifles, a short-handled ax and a long skinning knife. He ignored the guns. Those were weapons of the white man. He took the knife and the ax.

Greg Holling moved to stand between the woman's legs. "Okay, boys, it's just about time to give this bitch a good fuck."

The men laughed and started arguing over who would go first. None of them heard the Warrior until it was too late. He sprang up with a war cry and heaved the ax.

The ax head embedded in the skull of one man. He fell to the ground, dead before his body landed. The other white men turned in fear. After one look at the Warrior, they all made a dash for the vehicles where the weapons were. The Warrior laughed and grabbed one man who tried to get past him by the throat. The man gurgled a scream, trying to get away but his strength was no match for the Warrior's.

The Warrior gave a mighty howl and stabbed the knife into the man's abdomen, just above the pelvic bone. He jerked the knife upward and the man screamed and twisted, his intestines spilling out onto the cold ground in a steaming mass.

Tossing the man aside, the Warrior dove at a third man, taking him to the ground. Greg took one look at what was happening and ran for his truck. Jumping in and starting the engine, he stomped the accelerator and pulled away in a storm of flying leaves and dirt. Three other men raced after him, throwing themselves into the back of the truck in a panic.

The Warrior slit the throat of the man he held on the ground and looked around, seeing the truck making its way down the beaten path. Jumping to his feet, he started after it.

Chance saw the truck race down the path, bumping and sliding. She emerged from the trees and saw Wyatt coming toward her. My god! What happened to him?

She knew the man was Wyatt, but he had definitely changed. His eyes were like that of someone possessed. They gleamed with a manic fire. His face wore an enraged expression and every muscle on his body was tight. Naked and barefoot, he appeared like some ancient avenging god suddenly sprung to life.

He stopped and looked down at her. The gray wolf moved beside her and the Warrior looked at it in silence. A moment later he stepped forward as if to pursue to fleeing men.

"Wyatt, no!" Chance held up her hands. "Let them go, please!"

"I am the Warrior! Do not order me, woman!"

"I'm not ordering you." She lowered her hands and her voice. "I'm asking you. Please, let them go."

"They are the enemy! Tell your pack to stand aside."

"No." She shook her head and took a tentative step toward him. "Please, listen to me. They are enemies, I agree. But you don't have to kill them. There are other ways of dealing with them. Please, I beg you, let them go and come with me."

The Warrior looked at her for a long time. "You are the white woman that belongs to him." He walked to her and looked down into her eyes. "We are one. If you are his woman then you belong to me as well."

Chance looked up at him and nodded, swallowing nervously. "Yes, I do, and I want to take you home."

The Warrior grabbed her by the hair and jerked her to him. "Do you dare, white woman?"

Chance winced at the pain, feeling unsure and afraid. "Yes, I do. I came here to find you...to take you home with me. Wyatt, please, please come with me."

The Warrior smiled. "He hears you, white woman, and is concerned for your well-being." He looked at Chance for a moment then released her hair to take hold of her coat and rip it off.

"Stop!" she protested, feeling angry and afraid at the same time. "I mean it, stop! It's cold out here!"

He laughed and grabbed the front of her shirt, tearing it from her body. She hit at him angrily and screamed for him to stop but he laughed. "You said you belong to me, white woman."

Chance picked up her ruined coat and held it around her shoulders. "That doesn't mean you have the right to treat me like some piece of meat!"

The Warrior looked around at the wolves. "Your friends understand, white woman. Perhaps it is time you did as well."

Chance almost let her anger get the better of her at his imperious tone and attitude, but she swallowed her pride, looking first at the wolves then at him. "Fine, but I'll understand much better at home. So let's free that girl and then we can go."

She walked past him and tried not to look at the dead men lying on the ground. Kneeling down beside Jenny, she spoke softly as she untied her. "You don't have to be afraid now. They've gone. You're safe."

Jenny looked up at her with fear-filled eyes. "They were going to-to—" Her words were choked off by a flood of tears.

"Come on." Chance helped Jenny up and draped her own coat over her. "It's okay, it's over and you're safe."

Jenny let Chance lead her over to the truck that had been left by Greg and his men. The keys were inside. "Listen to me," Chance told her. "Take this truck and go over to John Nashoba's house. You'll be safe there. Tell him I'll be with Wyatt at his house. Tell him what happened and have him call the state police. Can you do that?"

Jenny nodded then looked nervously over her shoulder. "What's wrong with him? Why did Wyatt—"

Chance looked over at the Warrior who stood silently watching. "That's not Wyatt, just someone who looks like him—someone who needs help. Now, go on, do what I said. Everything will be fine."

Jenny threw her arms around Chance and hugged her. "Thank you. We were wrong about you. You are different. You walk with the wolves."

"Only occasionally," Chance quipped and untangled herself from Jenny to look at her seriously. "I need you to do something for me."

Jenny nodded and Chance continued. "You didn't see Wyatt here tonight. Do you understand? I'm not asking you to lie, even though it may seem that way. That isn't Wyatt. You have to believe me. Wyatt isn't here. That's..."

Her voice trailed off as she tried to come up with a convincing lie. Finally she opted for the truth. "He's...he's the Warrior. So when anyone asks, you didn't see Wyatt. Understand?"

Jenny nodded again and Chance gave her a brief hug. "Okay, now get going."

Jenny got in the truck and pulled off. The Warrior and the wolves moved aside for the truck to pass then he walked over to where Chance stood.

She made herself look at the dead men. "You did this." She turned to him.

"Yes."

"It's wrong."

"They are the enemy. They have taken lives. They deserve to die."

"They're still people! Don't you get it? Their lives have value too! Wyatt knows that so why don't you?"

The Warrior slapped her and sent her tumbling to the ground. Chance stared up at him with fear in her eyes as she pulled herself into a sitting position. He smiled and squatted down beside her. "You have much to learn, white woman."

"My name is Chance, not white woman."

"What does the Old One call you?"

"The old one? I don't know who you mean."

"The one who sent you with the wolves."

"Oh! Tsa'li! He calls me White Woman with the Eyes of a Wolf."

"Wolf Eyes, yes, that is fitting. Very well, Wolf Eyes, take off your clothes and let me see you."

Chance looked up at him in surprise. "What? You can't be serious!"

The Warrior grabbed her and threw her down, ripping her clothes away. Chance screamed and fought him with all her strength but he was too powerful. When she was naked he sat back on his heels and looked at her. Chance sat up and crossed her arms over her chest but he grabbed her hands and moved them out to her sides.

"Why are you doing this?" she asked, trying to keep the fear out of her voice.

"I want to see you."

"But you know what I look like. You've seen me before."

"Through his eyes," he said. "I wish to see with my own. You are very beautiful, Wolf Eyes. I feel desire for you."

Chance stiffened at his words, her eyes moving involuntarily to his groin. "No!" she whispered hoarsely as she saw his erection. "No, please. Not here...not among all this death. Please, let me take you home."

"And will you take me to your bed?"

She didn't answer for a moment. She was afraid if she said the wrong thing she would anger him, and as long as he felt the rage he would not release Wyatt. Finally she nodded. "Yes, if that's what you want. But we have to leave here."

"Very well." He stood up and pulled her to her feet.

Chance looked around and saw that all but the one gray wolf had vanished. She picked up her torn clothes and draped them around her then walked over and knelt down in front of the wolf. "Thank you," she whispered. "I'm in your debt."

The wolf licked her face then turned and disappeared into the trees. Chance stood and held out her hand to the Warrior. He looked down at the offered hand for a moment then crossed his arms in front of his chest. "You may proceed."

Hoping she was not making a major mistake, she walked down the path ahead of him.

\* \* \* \* \*

John was standing on the front porch with Tsa'li when Jenny jerked the truck to a stop in front of his house. She ran up to him, babbling hysterically. He put his arm around her shoulders and took her inside.

Tsa'li sat down beside her on the couch. Billy Hawkes and Iris came in from the kitchen. Billy ran over to Jenny and she threw herself in his arms, crying in loud sobs.

Iris stood watching impassively. John took no notice of her until he saw Tsa'li watching her with his dark impenetrable eyes. Then he turned and gave her a curious look. She looked away and sat down.

Tsa'li pulled Jenny from Billy's arms, gently but firmly. "Speak."

She sniffed and wiped her face with the sleeve of the torn coat. "It was Holling—Greg Holling and some of his friends. They killed Jimmy! Oh, god, Tsa'li, they just shot him like he was nothing."

"Yes." Tsa'li nodded. "That we know."

Jenny wrapped her arms tightly around herself and rocked back and forth. "They took me to Black Camp Gap and tied me down on the ground. They said they were going to-to—"

She looked over at Billy and he sat down and took her hand. "They know, Jenny. Just tell them what happened."

Holding his hand tightly, she turned to Tsa'li. "They were all drinking and laughing and talking about how they were going to make Wyatt watch. How they were going to beat him up and after they killed me they were going to dump him somewhere."

John interrupted her. "You mean they wanted to kill Wyatt as well."

"No." She shook her head. "I heard Matt say something to Greg about how Greg's father had given specific orders that Wyatt wasn't to be killed. Greg didn't seem to like that much. Then they all walked over to me. They were arguing over who was going to be first."

She put one hand to her forehead and closed her eyes. "Then—then...it was so unreal. This-this, I don't know—*something*—like some warrior out of the past suddenly appeared. Tsa'li, he really was scary! He attacked the men, killing one before anyone hardly had time to blink. Then everything went crazy. The men were running and screaming, trying to get away. The warrior grabbed one of the men and lifted him up off the ground. The man was kicking and trying to scream and the giant slit him open. His insides spilled out all over the ground. The warrior threw him down and went for another man. Greg and the others jumped in one of the trucks and disappeared."

She paused to take a breath then continued. "The warrior slit the man's throat he had on the ground then ran after the truck. I don't know what happened because I couldn't see. But the next thing I did see was that white woman. She untied me and told me to come here. She gave me this coat and told me to take the truck."

"And what about Wyatt?" John asked. "Did you see him?"

Jenny dropped her eyes before she looked at him. "No, but that woman said to tell you that he was safe at home."

Billy looked from John to Tsa'li then at Jenny. "What happened then?"

"I asked her about the warrior," Jenny said. "She said he was someone who needed help. That was all. I got in the truck and pulled out on the path and – this sounds crazy I know, but there were all these wolves there. They came with the white woman. They were just standing there and the warrior with them. The last thing I saw was when I looked in the mirror and the woman kneeling down talking to one of the wolves. Then she stood up and she and the warrior disappeared into the trees."

No one spoke after she finished. Billy was staring at her wide-eyed and Tsa'li was looking at John. Iris was watching everyone with a curious expression. John broke the silence. "Billy, why don't you take Jenny to Wyatt's old room? There should be something there she can wear. Then get her something warm to drink."

Billy helped Jenny up and they left the room. Tsa'li stood and walked to the front door. John watched him then turned to Iris. "Excuse me, please."

He followed Tsa'li outside. "You knew she had gone after him."

Tsa'li turned and looked at him. "She did what she had to do. It was her place."

"And the warrior Jenny spoke of?"

Tsa'li's hard face softened and he put his hand on John's shoulder. "I love him as well, John. But in this we cannot interfere. It is his destiny and we must not stand in the way."

"But why involve Chance?"

Tsa'li looked up at the stars for a long time before he spoke. "White Woman with the Eyes of a Wolf is as much a part of this as he. You must try to understand, old friend, all things must be balanced. As there is high there is also low. As there is male there must also be female. As there is evil there must also be good."

"Are you saying that my son is evil?"

Tsa'li shook his head. "The evil does not dwell in him. Not even the other is evil, my friend. He is very powerful and wants very much to once more live in the world of man. He makes war because he is angry that his life was taken too soon. His power need not be evil unless evil is stronger than good and he is swayed by its temptation."

"Then there is an evil here."

"Oh, yes." Tsa'li nodded. "Evil is present and it is very close."

"And that's where Chance comes in?"



Tsa'li turned to him once more. "She is the only chance your son has."

John sighed and looked up at the sky. "Is there nothing we can do, Tsa'li?"

"Only what you have always done. Do what is right, my friend. Let your heart guide you."

John looked at him with sad eyes. "Sometimes that's easier said than done."

Tsa'li nodded in agreement. "Yes. Take care of Jenny. I must go."

John watched the old man step off the porch and walk away. Within moments his form had disappeared into the darkness. With a sigh John turned and went inside.

"Would you like to tell me what in the world that was all about?" Iris asked as soon as he walked in.

"The reason you're here, Miss Waters. This killing has to come to an end. Now, you heard for yourself what happened and who was involved. I suggest you earn your money and get the people responsible arrested. If you'll excuse me."

He didn't give her a chance to reply but left her standing in the front room with her mouth hanging open in surprise. She stood there for a few moments then went outside, got in Wyatt's Jeep, and pulled out onto the road.

\* \* \* \* \*

"I'm telling you he was like some kind of fucking monster!" Greg shouted, waving his arms and pacing the floor. "Ask anyone! Nashoba just appeared out of thin air and started killing everyone."

Winston frowned at his son and stood up. "Okay, that's enough. Just sit down and shut up."

Greg turned to him with a look of disbelief on his face. "Didn't you hear what I said? That bastard killed three men!"

"I heard you!" Winston barked. "Now sit down and shut the hell up so I can think!"

"What's there to think about? We've got to get some more men and some dogs. Track that bastard down and kill him."

Winston held up one hand and walked over to Greg. "Just simmer down a minute and listen to me."

Greg fell silent and Winston studied his face for a moment before he turned away. What Greg had described was the very thing he had been having nightmares about for over twenty years. But he was not about to let Greg know. He poured himself a drink and drained the glass then turned to Greg again.

"Okay, consider this. You had all been drinking and were worked up and suddenly Nashoba shows up, all decked out like some Indian warrior and it just took you off guard. We both know he's got the training and the skills to kill like you described."

Greg shook his head and flopped down in a chair. "It was a nightmare."

Winston walked over and took a seat across from him. "I know, son, and I want to nail the bastard who did this as much as you do. That's why I want to have Nashoba picked up. I want you to have the boys meet here in half an hour. I'm going to call the police and have them come over. When they get here I want you and the others to tell them you were just out having a little fun, drinking and talking. You say that the Indian girl asked to go along with you, that she's been trying to get in your bed for a long time. You tell the police that Nashoba showed up and started attacking you for no reason. Every one of you is going to swear to that. We'll have the police go out and get the bodies, dust everything for prints, and I'll bet you a dime to a dollar they'll match Nashoba's."

"And what about the bar?"

"That's already been taken care of. If anyone asks, there's a whole lot of people who were here earlier that'll swear you and your friends were here until the barbecue wound down. Then you left to go meet some girl. That'll fit your story about the Indian bitch."

Greg nodded and smiled for the first time. "And they'll arrest Nashoba?"

"You can count on it," Winston replied. "'Course, he'll probably resist arrest and they'll have to rough him up a bit."

Greg's smile widened to a grin. A moment later he and Winston were both laughing.

\* \* \* \* \*

Chance stopped at the edge of Wyatt's yard and looked up at the Warrior. "I guess you must love this place."

He looked down at her with a frown. She gestured around them. "I can understand it. It's so peaceful and beautiful here. You could almost imagine that there's no one else in the world – that you're all alone."

His frown lessened somewhat and he watched her curiously as she walked across the yard and leaned against the rail on the front steps, looking up at the moon overhead. "Wyatt loves it here."

Following, he moved close in front of her. "And does Wolf Eyes?"

Chance looked up at him. "I love you, Wyatt."

"I am the Warrior!"

"You don't have to get upset," she said gently, reaching out to put her hand against the bare skin of his chest. "I know who you are. But Wyatt's inside you. He's part of you and even if you won't let him speak, I still know he's there."

The Warrior blinked several times and Chance thought she saw a flicker in his eyes. For a split second she thought she saw Wyatt looking at her. Hoping that she was not making a mistake she took a chance.

"I wish you were here with me, Wyatt," she said softly. "I'm so afraid of losing you. After all those years of wanting you and loving you, to lose you now after just finding you is so frightening. I don't know if I can bear it."

"That is enough talk," the Warrior said in a less than convincing tone of anger.

"No, it's not." Chance moved closer to him. "I need you, Wyatt. I love you so much and I need you here with me. You're a good man, Wyatt, a good decent man who wants to do the right thing. There's nothing evil about you. Even the Warrior isn't evil. He just doesn't understand. He's angry and confused because his life ended abruptly, too soon. He doesn't realize that by holding on to his ties with you he can't move on. He doesn't understand that. He can learn, though—if you help him. You're the only one who can. You have to help him understand. But right now you need to come out. I know it's safer to stay hidden in the Warrior, that his rage and his power keep you safe from your own fears and uncertainties. But it's not where you belong. You belong here, Wyatt—with me. I know that now. Tsa'li helped me see the truth. He gave me my name and showed me that I belong to you and you to me. So, please come back."

The Warrior shook his head and stepped back from her. "Wyatt, please," she whispered. "I love you."

A cross between a cry and a roar came from the Warrior. Within moments it was over. In place of the Warrior stood Wyatt.

He shook his head, appearing disoriented, and she ran to him. "Wyatt! Oh god, Wyatt, it's you!"

"Chance!" He pulled her into his arms and held her tightly. "I didn't think I could do it," he whispered. "I didn't know if I was strong enough."

"You are," she replied earnestly. "Wyatt, you're stronger than he is. You proved it. You came back."

"You brought me back," he said holding her at arm's length and looking into her eyes. "It was you."

She shook her head. "No, it was us. He can't beat us as long as we're together."

He pulled her into his arms and kissed her deeply. Chance looked up into his troubled eyes as the kiss ended. "What are we going to do? Those men—Chance, I killed them."

"No! It wasn't you! The Warrior's responsible for that, not you."

"But he's part of me."

"But when he comes out, you don't have any control, so you can't be held accountable for his actions."

Wyatt stared at her for a moment then a ghost of a smile appeared on his face. "You sound so sure, I could almost believe you."

"You can believe me." She took his face in her hands and searched his eyes. "Wyatt, I promise we'll get through this. We'll find a way to deal with the Warrior, make him

understand that violence is no longer the answer or make him leave you. I don't know what exactly, but we will find a way out, I promise."

Wyatt took her hand and kissed the palm. "I love you, Chance. Thank you for being here with me."

"I couldn't be anywhere else. Now, come on, let's go in before you freeze. You need to get some sleep."

A haunted look took hold of Wyatt's face and he shook his head. "I don't think I can sleep."

She smiled and caressed his face. "Okay, whatever you want."

He seemed to pull himself together for a moment then a deep frown took hold of his face. "We can't stay here."

"Why?"

"Because three men are dead and Greg sent Billy to tell me so I'd show up."

"And?" He raised his eyebrows at her and her mouth dropped open. "Damn! You're right. Okay, fine. Let's get cleaned up and we can go...where? Where can we go?"

"I think I know a place," he said as he opened the door.

Chance made a face as she followed him inside. "I'd be willing to bet this place doesn't have room service. Right?"

Wyatt forced a smile. "No, but it does have a great view and a warm bed—sort of. And didn't I hear you say something about taking someone into your bed?"

She shrugged, trying to go along with his attempt to lighten the mood. "Well, yes, but—"

"Then let's get moving," he said as he pushed her ahead of him toward the bathroom.

Chance sighed and let him propel her along. "You know, life with you sure isn't dull."

## Chapter Seven

John Nashoba opened the door to find the sheriff standing on his porch. "Hey, Tom, come on in, I've got a fresh pot of coffee on. What brings you here so early?"

Sheriff Tom Smith followed him inside. "This isn't a social call, John. I have to bring Wyatt in."

John turned around and looked at Tom with narrowed eyes. "What's this all about?"

"Winston Holling. Tell you what, pour me a cup of that coffee and I'll fill you in."

John poured two cups of coffee, handed one to Tom then sat down at the kitchen table. Tom took a drink of the coffee and pulled out a chair across from John. "Got a call from the state police a couple of hours ago. Seems Holling's boy, Greg and three of his friends claim Wyatt attacked them up around Black Camp Gap. Greg and six others went up there last night after a barbecue at the Holling place. They were drinking and carrying on with some girl and say that Wyatt showed up and picked a fight. Three men wound up dead."

John was silent for a moment, his dark eyes focused on Tom's as if looking inside his mind. "They say who this girl was they were with?"

"Jenny Watts. But no one's seen anything of her since last night."

"You mean since Holling and his boys shot Jimmy Martin and took her at gunpoint from the bar," John said in an angry tone.

Tom's eyes widened with surprise. "Where'd you get that information?"

"From me," Jenny's voice came from the door that led into the hall.

Tom turned and looked at her then looked back at John with one brow arched. "You want to explain this?"

John stood up and poured a cup of coffee for Jenny. She accepted it and took a seat at the table. John sat down again and twirled his cup for a few seconds then looked over at Tom.

"Holling and his friends shot Jimmy in cold blood. They took Jenny and had Billy Hawkes come here with a message for Wyatt that they were going to rape her and then skin her and if he wanted them to come to the Gap."

Tom looked at Jenny. "What do you have to say?"

"That's exactly what happened, Sheriff," she replied, meeting his eyes. "They took me up to Black Camp and tied me down on the ground and said that when Wyatt got there they were going to beat him up and make him watch."

"And is that what happened?"

"No," Jenny replied, twisting her hands together nervously in her lap. "Wyatt never showed up."

"Then who killed those men?"

Jenny cut her eyes over at John and he nodded. Tom watched the exchange but made no comment. "Well?" he asked after a few moments of silence.

"It was..." Jenny's voice faded and she stood up to pace back and forth a few times. "It was like something out of a myth...you know. He had eyes that glowed like some kind of black crystal and his face...his face had the hardest look I've ever seen...like he wouldn't think twice about ripping your heart out. He was sort of tall, I guess, and long dark hair and-and he was like some-some—" Her eyes widened and she stopped pacing to look at Tom. "He was like some ancient warrior out of the legends. Stronger than a normal man. He picked up Curly Wilkes like he was a doll and held him up over his head with one hand and slit him open with the other."

She shuddered and hugged her arms around herself tightly. "As soon as he grabbed Curly, he killed Brad, and then Greg and the others hightailed it for the trucks. Joey Sykes didn't make it. That-that thing killed him then ran after the truck."

Tom was listening with a frown on his face. "So how did you get free?"

"A..." Her voice faded and she looked at John nervously. "A white woman."

"White woman? What white woman? The lawyer?"

"No." Jenny shook her head. "The one with the golden eyes—you know the one that's been here a couple of days asking questions about Wyatt. It was her. But it was so weird, like something out of a movie. She appeared with a pack of wolves. Don't look at me like that! I'm telling you the truth. She ran out of the trees with these wolves and shouted at that giant to stop and he listened to her. She untied me and told me to come here. I took Clay Roper's truck and did like she said. It's parked right there, out back. See for yourself."

Tom stood up and walked to the door, looking out. "Okay, so who exactly is this white woman and what happened to her?"

"I don't know." Jenny turned to look at him. "The last I saw of her she was with that...warrior."

Tom sat back down and focused his gaze on her. "Are you willing to swear that what you've told me is the truth?"

"On my life."

"Fine, I'll need you to come with me and make a formal statement. Why don't you get ready?"

Jenny looked over at John and he nodded. "Go on, get cleaned up. I'll go with you."

She left the room and Tom turned to John. "Do you believe that story?"

"Yes."

"An ancient warrior?" Tom asked in disbelief. "Who appears out of thin air and a white woman who runs around with a pack of wolves. Come on, John! It sounds like some old story Tsa'li would tell."

"Have you lived so long with the whites that you have forgotten your heritage, Tom?"

"Don't start that shit with me," Tom barked irritably. "John, listen, I just want to find out what really happened."

"Jenny told you."

Tom leaned back and stared at John with a grimace on his face. "Okay, so how about this white woman? What's the story on her?"

"She came to see Wyatt."

"And does she have a name?"

"Yes, her name is Chance," John answered without elaboration.

"Chance," Tom repeated the name. "Chance what?"

"Davenport."

"Davenport!" Tom exclaimed letting his chair bump down on all four legs with a thump. "Jesus! What's she doing here looking for Wyatt?"

"She and Wyatt are..." John paused for a moment. "They've known one another a very long time. You know that."

"Do you know where I can find Chance Davenport?"

"She was staying at Mrs. Carter's. Check there."

"Yeah, I'll do that," Tom said and drained his cup. "You know, this thing is liable to be nasty." He heaved a sigh and rubbed his red eyes.

John got up and freshened his coffee. "Jenny told you what happened. She was there. What more do you need?"

Tom snorted and rubbed his eyes again. "What more? Well, think about this, John. I've talked to over two dozen people already who swear that Greg Holling and those men were at the Holling's place during the time Jimmy Martin was shot."

"Then you've got two dozen people who are lying!" Jenny exclaimed as she walked back into the room.

Tom blew out his breath and looked from her to John. "Just between us I don't have any doubt that Holling is lying through his teeth. Just like I don't doubt that his old man paid those people to support Greg's story about being at the barbecue. But the truth is, my hands are tied on this one. Winston Holling called the county and state police on this and I just don't have the authority to buck them. There's a warrant out for Wyatt and I have to take him in."

"As you can see he's not here."

"When was the last time you saw him?"

"Last night. He was here with that lawyer, Miss Waters."

"All night?"

"No, he left."

Tom stood up and picked up his hat from the table. "Don't make this any harder than it has to be. I'll do everything I can for Wyatt, you know that. But it's best if I take him in instead of letting someone else – if you get my meaning."

John stood up and crossed his arms in front of his chest. "I understand."

"Then you'll tell me where he is?"

"Can't tell you what I don't know, Tom. Try his house."

"I already did. He's not there."

"Then I don't know what to tell you. Except that if you want to see justice done, you should be locking up Holling and his pack of animals."

Tom put his hat on without comment. "Jenny, you ready?"

She looked at John. He nodded and picked up his coat. Together they followed Tom out to his car and got in the backseat. John looked back at the house as they pulled away. Tsa'li was disappearing into the trees that bordered the yard.

\* \* \* \* \*

Wyatt stopped halfway up the steep incline, looking around as the sky began to lighten. Chance would be waking up soon. He had not been able to sleep. Visions of what had happened at the Gap kept playing over and over in his mind until he felt as if his head was going to explode.

It was not so much the sight of death that bothered him. He had seen death up close and personal more than once. It was the feelings. During the time the Warrior had taken over his body he had felt like he was being held prisoner, pleading and screaming to be heard but being left alone in the dark unable to do anything but witness what was happening. That feeling of helplessness was terrifying.

Trying to push the thoughts aside he ran as fast as he could up the incline to the opening of the cave. Taking a look inside he saw that Chance was still asleep. He walked back to the entrance and looked up at the sky.

The cold air soothed his parched throat as he sucked it in greedily, gaining strength from its purity as a parched man might from a clear mountain stream. He sat down and closed his eyes, listening to the steady drumming of his heart. His pulse slowed and a curious warmth stole over him making him feel strangely at peace and relaxed. A vision took shape and swept him up in it.

He was sitting in a small clearing overlooking the valley. It was autumn and there was a chill in the air. The leaves had lost their green and now blazed with colors of orange and red. The sound of someone calling his name made him turn and look over his shoulder.



Chance ran toward him. Her hair seemed to float out behind her in a golden halo and her eyes were bright with happiness. In her arms was a small dark-haired child.

Wyatt got to his feet and started toward them and he marveled at the love that filled him. This was his family, his wife and child. The realization made him feel joy unlike anything he had ever experienced. He broke into a run and the distance between them closed.

He was just feet away when suddenly something dark and malevolent barred the way. Chance stopped suddenly as if she had run into an invisible barrier and the smile on her face turned to a look of horror. The air around her swirled like a dark cloud, whipping her hair about and making the baby cry fearfully. Wyatt tried to reach for her.

A bolt of energy sent him hurtling backward. He hit the ground and scrambled to his feet, intent on reaching her. The dark cloud around her was moving faster and faster, like a tornado. He tried to run to her but it was like moving through molasses. His legs strained against the unseen force that held him back.

"Wyatt!" she screamed and reached out one hand to him.

He tried again to get to her, all the while watching as the whirling cloud grew darker and thicker. Abruptly it stopped and gathered in a dense column in front of her. Both she and the baby screamed at the same moment. A split second later Wyatt felt a scream tear loose from his own throat.

Where a moment ago had existed a column of darkness now stood a man. His hair was dark and his shoulders were broad. Wyatt could tell he was strong by his build but could not see his face.

Chance was staring at the man in terror. Her eyes were wide and her face was pale as death. The man reached for her and she screamed again, trying to back away.

"No!" Wyatt shouted. "Leave her alone!"

The man paused and turned to look at Wyatt. The moment he did everything shattered like glass.

Wyatt felt a touch on his shoulder as the vision faded. He looked up and saw Chance kneeling beside him with a concerned expression on her face. "Are you okay?"

He nodded without speaking and she took his hand. "Come in by the fire."

They went inside the cave where the fire burned brightly. Wyatt stripped off his sweater and sat down on the sleeping bag. Chance sat down beside him, watching him as he stared into the fire. He was thinking about what he had seen. The man in the vision must have been the other, and if the vision was true, he was going to prevent Wyatt from having the future he wanted, unless Wyatt could find a way to stop him.

"Chance, if the Warrior shows up again I want you to get as far away from him as you can," he said after a long silence.

She looked at him with a puzzled expression. "I don't think he'll hurt me."

"That's not it." He looked away from her.

“Then what?”

Wyatt didn't answer for a few moments but finally he turned to her, putting his hands on her shoulders. “Just promise me that you won't let him touch you.”

Her brows drew together in bewilderment for a moment then arched. “No danger of that!” she exclaimed, flushing slightly and dropping her eyes downward.

“What?” He put his finger under her chin and lifted her face.

Chance made a face and chewed her lip for a moment. “Well, let's just say that one of you is more than enough.”

Wyatt smiled in spite of himself and she blushed. “But what made you think of something like that?”

“A vision. And I'm serious.”

“All right,” she agreed solemnly. “I promise.” He nodded and gave her shoulders a squeeze. She smiled and leaned over to nip his chin. “Have I told you today that I love you?”

“Are you sure you do?” he asked in an anxious tone.

Her features hardened and her eyes flashed. “How can you even ask that? You know I do. More than anything.”

Wyatt pulled her to him roughly, holding her pressed against him so close that he could feel the beat of her heart against his chest. “I never thought I'd feel this way about someone. I love you – so much it scares me. I don't want to lose you.”

“You won't,” she whispered. “Not even if you try. I told you before, you're stuck with me.”

He loosened his hold on her enough to move his lips to hers. She returned the kiss with passion and he could feel her heat. Pushing away everything else from his mind he lowered her down on the sleeping bag.

Her eyes glowed with love and desire as he looked down at her. A feeling of urgency swept over him and he tore the clothes from her, needing to feel her against him. She gasped as his hands fondled her roughly but moved against him, tearing at his clothes. He stood up to remove his pants and she climbed up on her knees, running her tongue up his inner thigh to his groin. Wyatt groaned as she took him in her mouth, feeling like he would explode from need. The sound inflamed Chance.

With one hand she reached around him, grabbing his ass to pull him deeper into her mouth. Her free hand worked up his leg to stroke his balls, feeling them tighten under her administration.

“Chance, baby...” Wyatt groaned again, fisting her long hair in both hands. “You're killing me.” He firmly pushed her mouth away, sank down in front of her and gathered her against him.

No sooner had their lips met, she climbed on him, wrapping her legs around his waist. Wyatt was certain he was going to lose it when she started grinding her wet pussy against him. “Christ, I gotta have you – now.”

Pushing her back he thrust inside her. She cried out in pleasure and moved against him like a wave, drawing him deeper. Wyatt could not think of her needs or even her pleasure at the moment. His world had narrowed to his own need. The need to be buried deep inside her slick hot sex, to feel her pant and moan beneath him as he rode her, to hear her scream his name as he drove her relentlessly toward release. He could only focus on the feel and taste and smell of her and how much he needed to stake his claim on this woman he needed so much that it scared him.

Chance matched her rhythm to Wyatt's, feeling the vibration of tension that ran through him. She understood the desperate need on a level that was purely instinctual and it wakened answering primal urges within herself, the need to claim him as her mate.

Her body rocked forward, meeting every thrust, and she pulled her knees up, circling her legs high around his back to pull him deeper. Every thrust brought a unique mixture of pain and pleasure that had her digging her fingernails into the flesh of his muscular arms as she matched him.

She felt the onset of his orgasm a heartbeat before his body stiffened. His hard cock pulsed inside her and she clamped down on it with her inner muscles, milking him as he came.

Wyatt rolled over to one side, pulling her against him. Chance laid her head on his broad chest, listening to the rapid drum of his heart. Her fingers traced a path over his chest and down his abdomen. By the time she reached his groin he was already thickening. Chance climbed on top of him, straddling him and undulating suggestively.

The feel of her hot wet sex pressed against him had Wyatt's cock surging to attention. He pulled her down so that she was stretched out on him. He ran both hands from her shoulders to her ass, moved down between her spread legs to stroke her hot channel.

Ripples of pleasure spread out through every nerve in her body and Chance moved her hips up and back, meeting his probing fingers. Pushing herself up, propped with her hands on his muscular chest, she smiled down at him then arched back, the movement stretching her like a bow.

Wyatt needed no more invitation. His hands started on her inner thighs, stroking gently and moving inward to the warm flesh pressed down on his erection. Chance drew in a breath as his fingers found her clit and began to circle and stroke.

"Come for me, baby," he whispered in a voice tight with desire.

Chance did not require encouragement. With Wyatt's nimble fingers working at her clit and her pussy rocking back and forth along the length of his cock, it didn't take long before her slim body was quaking in ecstasy.

Once the climax had abated, she straightened and ran her hands from the dark thick hair at the base of his dick, up over the rippled abs and over the firm swell of his chest. She stopped when movement had her breasts brushing against his chest, the hard nipples creating little explosions of sensation on his skin. She took his face in her hands

and claimed his lips, exploring his mouth with her tongue then withdrawing to nip at his lip.

"You're out to kill me, woman," he groaned when one of her hands snaked between them to squeeze his hard cock.

"Can't hang, Nashoba?" she teased.

He growled and flipped them both so that she was pinned beneath him. Chance purred and stretched her arms above her head. Her breasts brushed his skin then pressed against him as she arched her back.

Wyatt took both her wrists in one hand and held her captive as he positioned himself between her legs. With his free hand he lifted her hips as he entered. Chance groaned and tightened around him. "Please, oh god, please."

"Please what, baby. Tell me what you want."

"You. I want you. Take me hard, Wyatt. Long and hard."

"Oh, I will," he promised. "But not until you're mad with the wanting."

His movements were slow and measured. Each stroke went deep only to be withdrawn until just the head of his cock teased the entrance of her pussy. Chance wiggled and bucked, trying to get him to move, but he held her immobile, pinned and helpless until at last she was a quivering mass of need.

"Damn you, Wyatt, fuck me!" she screamed. "Now, now, now. I need you now!"

Wyatt released her hands and took hold of her legs behind the knees, lifting her legs up. He pounded into her, a primitive dance that spoke of the need to possess and be possessed. When he saw Chance's hands move to her breasts to fondle herself, squeezing her hard nipples and arching her head back in total abandon, he lost all control. Together they crested the hill.

Chance went limp at the cessation of the orgasm, and Wyatt nearly collapsed with the force of the climax. Spent and satiated, he drew Chance into the curve of his body, holding her tenderly.

"I love you, Wyatt," she whispered.

"And I'll never love anyone else," he replied. But she was already fast asleep.

\* \* \* \* \*

Iris picked up the phone in her hotel room and started to dial then reconsidered and hung up. She was not quite sure how she wanted to handle the latest development. She had found out only an hour ago that the police were looking for Wyatt.

Lying back on the bed, she stared up at the ceiling, replaying the events of the previous night in her mind. She had been almost afraid when she saw what happened to Wyatt. She wondered if he was even aware that she had seen the transformation take place.

But what exactly happened to him? He was definitely different, almost like another person entirely. Could that be it? Could he have a split personality? No, it was more than that. It was...it was almost like something from mythology. Mythology! Her eyes widened. Even though outwardly she had erased all evidence of her heritage, inside there still existed the girl who had believed all the old legends and myths. *Ummm, so what if it is possible? How can I use it to my best advantage?*

That thought made her mind turn to the reason she was in North Carolina to begin with and she smiled. Greg thought he was the reason, just like she wanted him to. The truth was Greg was just a tool to help her get what she wanted most. Revenge.

Iris got up and opened her suitcase. Beneath the neatly folded stack of expensive lingerie were an old photo album and a worn, cloth-covered diary. She took them with her to the bed and sat down, opening the photo album.

The first picture was of two lovely girls. Both were dark-haired with eyes almost as dark as their shining tresses. Standing in front of an old, beat-up car they each had an arm around the other, smiling happily at the camera.

Iris looked at her mother's image standing with her best friend, Sarah. They had both been beautiful women. But where Sarah was slim as a willow, with elegant lines and delicate features, Doris Stillwater had been full-busted and slim-waisted with a smile that could light up a room. She could have had any man she wanted.

Flipping to the next picture, Iris' dark eyes smoldered with hatred. A stocky man with dull brown hair smiled at the camera as Doris perched on his lap. Iris looked at her mother's face, seeing the happiness and hope written on it and once more cursed the man in the picture for turning that face into one filled with hopelessness and loss.

Slamming the album shut, she flipped idly through the diary. It had belonged to her mother. She had discovered it after Doris died. What was contained inside it had altered the course of her life. It had given her a singular purpose.

"And if I play my cards right, this could work out even better than I hoped!" she said aloud as an idea occurred to her.

Returning the items to her suitcase she called Greg Holling's private number. After several rings he answered.

"Hello, darling," she purred into the receiver. "Miss me?"

"Iris, this thing is getting way out of hand!"

"Now, darling. I know what happened and I'll admit it is a little odd, but trust me, it's nothing to worry about. Why don't you come over and we'll talk about it."

"I don't know. The old man wants me to stick close to home—you know, talk to the cops and all that shit. Why don't I give you a call later?"

"Fine," she snapped, unused to being turned down. "I might be available," she stressed the word might. "If you're lucky."

"Come on, honey," his tone turned to one of pleading. "Don't be mad. Didn't I do everything you asked me?"

"Well, yes." She rolled her eyes as she pictured him in her mind. "I suppose you did. But there's still a couple of things you need to do, lover."

"What?"

"To begin with I need to know who the woman was that Indian waitress said was at the scene of the crime. And I need a connection with the police. I want to know what forensics turned up at the scene."

"I'll see what I can do. I'll call as soon as I have something. Will you be around?"

"Of course I will," she said, letting her voice lower suggestively. "Call me on my cell. Bye, lover."

She paced back and forth for a few minutes, considering her options. Then picking up the cell phone she dialed a familiar number, one she knew few people had. When the man's voice came on the line she smiled.

"Get ready," she whispered, pitching her voice much lower than normal. "Payday's coming."

Hanging up before the man could reply she laughed and twirled around. "Yes!" she held her arms up above her head as she danced around. "Yes, yes, yes! I'm going to pay you back in spades."

\* \* \* \* \*

Wyatt was buttoning his shirt when Tsa'li's voice called to him from outside the cave. He walked to the entrance and looked out. "Come on in."

Tsa'li entered and sat down by the fire. Chance finished putting on her shoes then went over and knelt down beside him. "Thank you," she whispered and gave him a kiss on the cheek.

He waved her thanks away and looked up at Wyatt. "The sheriff is looking for you."

Wyatt looked from him to Chance then back again. "I'm not surprised. You know what happened?"

Tsa'li nodded once. "Jenny came to your father's last night. She told what happened."

"Exactly what did she say?" Chance asked.

"That a warrior killed three men and was then persuaded to stop by a white woman who appeared with a pack of wolves."

Chance looked up at Wyatt for a moment then stood. "She told the sheriff that?"

When Tsa'li nodded she put her fingers to her lips, tapping lightly as she walked around the cave. The only sound inside the cave was of her footsteps and the crackle of the fire.

"Okay," she broke the silence. "I need to get back and see what's going on."

"The sheriff won't have much trouble determining that you're the white woman Jenny was talking about," Wyatt pointed out.

"So?"

"So, how are you going to explain being there with a pack of wolves and a warrior?" He looked at her with a strained expression.

She thought about it for a moment. "Well, maybe I'll turn his attention to the fact that there's more to consider than just what happened at the Gap. Such as the fact that a bar full of people saw Holling shoot a man to death and forcibly abduct and assault a woman."

"Aren't you forgetting who we're up against?" he asked argumentatively. "This is the Holling family we're talking about. Don't fool yourself into thinking you can turn the tables on them so easily."

"Then I'll just tell the police that the girl was mistaken about seeing me."

Wyatt's mouth fell open and he looked at her like she had just turned green. Chance walked over to him. "Let's just think about it. That girl was terrified. In her situation it's easy to make mistakes. She thought she saw me. But it couldn't have been me, could it? I was with you all night."

"No!" Wyatt's voice boomed in the small enclosure. "Absolutely not."

"Why?" she challenged him with her eyes and tone of voice.

He ran his hands back through his hair and blew out his breath. "To begin with, if you say that your cover with Holling is blown. And secondly, I won't have you lying to protect me."

"I won't be lying. I was with you."

Wyatt looked over at Tsa'li. "Will you try and talk some sense into her?"

Tsa'li stood up and regarded Wyatt silently. "Perhaps you should listen to her."

"What?" Wyatt looked at him in disbelief. "You can't be serious?"

"I am very serious. If she tells the sheriff she was with you and Jenny says that you were not at Black Camp then the sheriff has no reason to think you were responsible."

"I think you're forgetting a few things."

"Like what?" Chance asked.

"Like a little thing like fingerprints. They're sure to lift prints off the weapons and just whose prints do you think they'll find?"

Chance looked at Tsa'li for a few seconds then turned to Wyatt. "Let's just take this one step at a time, all right? First, I'm going to go and find out what's happening. Then we can decide where to go from there."

She looked at Tsa'li. "Will you do me a favor?"

He didn't say yes or no and she took that to mean that he would consider her request. "Will you make sure he doesn't do something stupid like trying to turn himself in?"

"He will be with me," Tsa'li stated.

"Where can I find you?" she asked as she picked up her coat.

"We will wait for you at his house," Tsa'li said. "The police have already been there. They will not be back today."

"You sure about that?" she asked.

He shrugged and she chewed her lip for a moment. "But what if they do?"

"Then we will not be there," he replied nonchalantly.

"And how will I find you?"

"Your guide will bring you to us." Tsa'li gestured toward the mouth of the cave.

Chance saw the big gray wolf standing just outside the cave. "I guess this means he's coming with me."

Tsa'li nodded and she grimaced slightly in uncertainty. "You think he's going to just get in the Jeep and ride around with me like my pet dog or something?"

"Ask him." Tsa'li gestured to the wolf. "Wa'ya?"

The wolf entered the cave, staying back from the fire. Chance looked at Tsa'li for reassurance then walked to the wolf and knelt down in front of him. "Will you help me again?"

The wolf lowered his mouth to her hand and gave it a lick. Chance smiled and put her arms around his thick neck, hugging and rubbing it. She stood up and turned to Wyatt. "I'll be back as soon as I can."

Wyatt didn't speak or move but stared at her silently. She put her hands on either side of his face and pulled his head down. "I love you, Wyatt. You're all that matters to me."

He looked into her eyes for a moment then pulled her against him. "Be careful."

"I will," she assured him with a smile as she pulled back. "Besides I won't be alone." She gestured to the wolf. "Now, I've gotta get going."

Giving him a lingering kiss she pulled her coat closed and left the cave with the wolf beside her. Wyatt stood watching the mouth of the cave long after she had gone. When he turned to Tsa'li his eyes were grave.

"This isn't her fight. Why have you involved her?"

"It has always been her fight. Listen to the visions and use the knowledge they offer. You still have much to learn."

Wyatt thought about his words before speaking. "You're probably right. But I worry about what could happen to her."

"She will face her own tests," Tsa'li said and started outside. "Come."

Wyatt grabbed his coat and put it on as he followed. If there was one thing he had learned it was not to argue with Tsa'li.



\* \* \* \* \*

John Nashoba's house was empty when Chance got there. She left him a note to please call her, along with her cell phone number then went back outside to her Jeep. Just as she was getting in, a sheriff's car pulled up behind her. She leaned in and rubbed the wolf between the ears. "Maybe you better stay here, buddy."

John got out of the car with Jenny. "That's her!" Jenny exclaimed as the sheriff got out. "That's the woman that untied me."

Sheriff Smith looked over at Chance and started forward. She looked from him to John and closed the door of the Jeep. "Mr. Nashoba?"

"Chance, this is Sheriff Tom Smith." John walked over and took her arm. "Tom, this is Chance. She's Wyatt's—"

"Old acquaintance," Chance cut in.

"Well," Sheriff Smith looked at Jenny as she walked up to them, "Jenny tells me you know something about what happened last night."

Chance frowned as if surprised and looked at John. "Did something happen?"

Before John could respond, Jenny spoke up. "What do you mean, did something happen? You were there— with the wolves! You untied me and left with that warrior!"

Chance looked at Jenny with an expression she hoped the sheriff would interpret as disbelief. "Excuse me, but are you feeling okay?"

Jenny's mouth dropped open and she looked from Chance to Sheriff Smith. "I swear to God it was her! I swear it."

Tom took off his hat and smoothed his hair back on his head. "Maybe we should take a ride to the station and have a little talk, Miss Davenport."

"You can talk here," John said quietly and turned to the house.

Chance followed him before the sheriff could argue. They exchanged a look as John held the door for her. "Just go along with me," she whispered. "I'll explain later."

Tom and Jenny followed them inside and they all went into the kitchen. Everyone took a seat at the table and Tom turned to Chance. "Now, why don't you start by telling me where you were last night?"

"With Wyatt."

"Wyatt Nashoba?"

"Yes."

"And exactly what time would that have been?"

"I don't know, exactly. I came by here and had dinner with John then took a walk. Wyatt dropped the attorney here and met me out by the stream and we went to his house."

"So you weren't anywhere near Black Camp Gap last night?"

"I don't even know where that is. Just exactly what is this all about?"

"It's about three men being murdered."

"Really?" She raised her eyebrows. "Well, maybe you could give me the details. You see, I work for CNN and I'd be interested in hearing all about—"

He interrupted. "I'm not interested in your job and I sure have no desire for this to become a news story. What I am interested in is why Jenny claims she saw you at the Gap with a pack of wolves and a-a warrior."

Chance barked a short laugh. "I'd be interested in hearing that myself."

"Then you still claim you were not at the Gap last night?"

Chance stared at him for a moment then leaned her arms on the table. "Like I said, I was with Wyatt."

"You were at his house?"

"Yes."

"Why exactly were you there?"

"That's not really any of your business," she said defensively.

"I'm afraid it is. This is a murder investigation."

"Then why aren't you out looking for whoever did it instead of interrogating me?"

"As a matter of fact we are and interestingly enough you seem to be connected to the prime suspect."

Chance made no comment but raised her eyebrows. Sheriff Smith looked from her to John then back again. "We're looking for Wyatt. Do you know where we can find him?"

"Wyatt? You think Wyatt had something to do with some murder? That's preposterous! I told you I was with him. He couldn't have been involved. Besides that, Wyatt isn't the kind of person who would murder someone."

"According to the three witnesses present he could and did. We have sworn statements from all three men that it was Wyatt that did the killing."

"Then you seem to have three liars on your hands, Sheriff Smith. But if you don't believe me then why don't we take a ride to your station. I'd be more than happy to take a polygraph test."

"It was you," Jenny said quietly. "Why are you lying?"

Chance turned to Jenny, feeling bad about the lie she was about to tell. But protecting Wyatt was more important than her guilty conscience. "I'm sure you thought it was. But think hard. You were afraid and probably in shock. Isn't it possible that you just thought it was me? I've interviewed a lot of people who claim to have seen things while terrified that later on, when they calmed down, they realized just couldn't have been real. So, let me ask you, do you really believe that I was out in the middle of the woods with a pack of wild wolves and some madman? I mean, that is a little far-fetched, you have to admit."

Jenny opened her mouth then closed it and looked down. After a second she looked up into Chance's eyes. "Maybe you're right. Maybe I was just so scared I didn't know what was going on."

Chance sent her a silent thank you. Somehow she had the idea that Jenny knew she was lying and was going along with her. She smiled and turned to the sheriff. "Well, unless there's something else you need, I really need to be—"

"You didn't answer my question," he cut in as she started to stand. "Where's Wyatt?"

"I have no idea," she replied and settled back down into her chair. "The last time I saw him was this morning. I showered and when I left he was getting in the shower. Did you try his house?"

"Yes, and there's no one there."

"Well, I'm sorry, but I really think you're looking in the wrong direction. Hey, didn't you have a forensics team go over the scene? Surely there must have been fingerprints or blood or skin samples or something."

"Yes. We lifted several sets of prints and that's another reason we want to see Wyatt. We need to compare his prints to the ones at the scene."

"Why don't you just lift prints from his house? As a matter of fact, he gave me a key. I'll be glad to let you in if it'll help. And I'm sure John will agree to go with us, won't you, John?"

John nodded without speaking and Chance looked at the sheriff. "So?"

He stood up and put on his hat. "Okay, let's go."

Chance and John stood at the same time and Chance looked at Jenny. "Can we give you a ride home or take you somewhere?"

"I'd like to go over to Billy's." Jenny looked at the sheriff. "If that's okay."

"Fine. We'll drop you on the way."

They all went outside. Chance got in her Jeep and John got in beside her. Jenny looked from Chance to the sheriff and he waved. "You can ride with them. I'll meet you at Wyatt's."

Jenny started to climb in and the wolf sat up. She froze with a terrified look on her face and Chance turned around in her seat. "It's okay. This is my friend, Wa'ya. Wa'ya, this is Jenny. How about letting her ride with you?"

The wolf looked from Chance to Jenny then lay down, taking up almost the entire backseat. Jenny climbed in cautiously, making sure not to touch the wolf. John gave Chance a curious look and she mouthed the word "Tsa'li" to him. He nodded and she looked back at Jenny.

"Jenny, I want you to know that—"

"You don't have to say it," Jenny interrupted in a soft voice. "I don't want them to nail this on Wyatt either. Look, Miss Davenport, I don't know what's going on and to be honest I don't think I want to know. But I don't want Wyatt to be punished because of

something Holling started—and I don't want you to get in trouble either. You helped me and I won't forget it."

Chance smiled and turned to look at her. "You're a good person, Jenny. I'm really sorry for all that's happened. I can't change it but I can try to help put a stop to it. Thank you for your help. It means a lot."

Jenny smiled and Chance backed out onto the road. No one spoke except to give her directions to Billy Hawkes' house. When they dropped Jenny off, Chance headed for Wyatt's.

"You think it's such a good idea to lie to Tom like that?" John looked over at her.

"I told him I was with Wyatt and that's not a lie."

"It is stretching the truth."

"John, we both know that no one would believe the truth so what's the point in telling them? Besides, it wasn't Wyatt that killed those men. I know that. I saw who did it. I talked to him."

John's eyes widened and his mouth dropped open. She reached over to take his hand. "We'll find a way to make things right. We just have to stick together."

"Well, if Wyatt's prints match the ones at the murder scene then it won't matter what we do or say."

"I don't think there's much danger of that," Chance said quietly.

"What do you mean?"

She looked over at him and blew out her breath. "This is going to sound really far out but here's what happened..."

Tom didn't speak a word the rest of the way to Wyatt's house. When they arrived, Chance parked the Jeep and opened the door to let the sheriff and his men in the house. John just sat in the Jeep with a look of astonishment on his face.

\* \* \* \* \*

It was almost one in the afternoon by the time the lab got through comparing the prints from the murder scene with the ones at Wyatt's house. Chance and John waited in Sheriff Smith's office for the results.

He walked in and tossed his hat on his desk, running his hands back to smooth down his hair then over his face. "Well?" Chance asked. "Do you have the results?"

"Yes." He sat down and looked at her. "The prints match—"

"No!" she argued.

Sheriff Smith blew out his breath and leaned forward with his arms on his desk. "And we still have the testimony of the eyewitnesses."

"Like I said before, you have three liars." Chance stood and walked around her chair, putting her hand on top of it. "Sheriff, I know I'm not a resident and there's a lot I don't know but I'll be honest with you. I've been asking around and it's clear that

something's going on around here, something bad. People are getting beaten and shot, buildings are being set on fire and women are being assaulted. And from what I hear the only thing all this has in common is the Holling family. See, I'm kind of like you. We both make our living digging around for the truth. And the truth is, you're up against some heavy hitters who have a lot of money and power. I don't know how you're going to deal with this and I won't presume to tell you how to do your job. But I will tell you this. I'm first and foremost a journalist and I'm going to get to the bottom of this. One way or the other."

Sheriff Smith eyed her suspiciously for a moment before speaking. "What exactly are you getting at?"

"That we'd stand a much better chance if we work together. I have a lot of resources at my disposal, not to mention a considerable amount of money. I'm willing to commit both to putting an end to this and seeing the people responsible behind bars. All I ask is that you don't get in my way. Just don't act on those fingerprint results right now. I'm just asking for some time and I'll prove to you that it wasn't Wyatt. That regardless of how this looks, he isn't a murderer. Think about it. Would John Nashoba sit there and lie to you? You know him. If you can't trust my word then trust his. You have the power, Sheriff, and all we're asking for is a little time. Is that really so much to ask to save the life of one of your oldest friends' son?"

"You know just where to hit a man, don't you? Do you mind if I ask you a personal question?"

"What's that?"

"Why're you so interested? Just what's in this for you?"

"Besides a story, you mean? Let's just say it's personal and let it go at that, shall we?"

Sheriff Smith stood up and walked over to her. "I'm probably gonna regret this, but okay."

She smiled and extended her hand. "Sheriff, it's a pleasure working with you."

He took her hand and returned the smile. "Why don't you call me Tom? All my friends do."

Chance nodded and looked at John. He shook his head and stood up. "Chance, I'm beginning to think you're in the wrong line of work."

"Oh?" She arched her eyebrows at him. "Why's that?"

"'Cause you could sell ice to an Eskimo," he said with a laugh.

She gave him a look of surprise then glanced at Tom. He was chuckling and nodding. Finally she laughed with them. Now if she could just get the goods on Greg Holling.

\* \* \* \* \*

Wyatt sat beside the stream and watched the water flow over the rocks worn smooth by its passage. Tsa'li sat close by, holding the crystal in his hand with his eyes closed. After a long time he opened his eyes and turned to Wyatt. "You have long lived in the darkness. Your mind has been imprisoned in this self-imposed creation since you were but a small child. During your youth this protection served a purpose. It insulated you from your fear and grief. But now you are a man and the time for hiding has past. Now is the time for you to face the darkness and fear. Like all men, you have a destiny to fulfill. It cannot be put off any longer."

Wyatt looked at him for a long time. "I hear what you say and I don't dispute your wisdom. But there are times when saying is much easier than doing. I don't know how to fill the blanks in my mind. I have no memories with which to fill them. What am I to do?"

"Surrender."

Wyatt's eyebrows rose sharply. "Surrender? To what? To this-this demon or spirit or whatever it is that possesses me? Would you have me give in to something that can commit such acts of brutality as happened last night?"

Tsa'li shook his head. "You hear but do not listen. Surrender to yourself. You hold the key to the gate. You can unlock it."

Wyatt thought about the dream, the dream in which he saw his friends raping the woman. Was the truth of their deaths buried somewhere inside him?

"What if the truth is that I am the monster? What if I am no more than my name, Grandfather?"

"And what if you are more than the sum of a handful of letters strung together to create a word?"

Wyatt shook his head, doubt showing on his face. "I have to tell you that I'm afraid of what I might find. I don't know if I could live with knowing that what I am is a man who has so little value for life that I could kill another with no more care than I might throw out an empty beer bottle. And if I can't live with that, then how could anyone else? How could I ever face..."

"How could you face the woman with the eyes of a wolf?" Tsa'li asked when Wyatt's voice trailed off. Wyatt looked at him and nodded and Tsa'li reached out to put his hand on Wyatt's shoulder. "You underestimate her love for you as well as yours for her and that is your greatest danger. That is where your true strength lies, my grandson. That is what you must rely on. Without it you are truly lost. You must keep that in your mind always. Especially in the days to come when that strength will be put to the test."

Wyatt thought about Tsa'li's words. While part of him wanted to argue, the smarter part knew that Tsa'li was right. If he were wise he would follow the advice Tsa'li gave.

\* \* \* \* \*

Despite John's protests and attempts to change her mind, Chance was determined to keep her date with Greg Holling. She dropped John at his house with a promise to return after she had seen Greg, then drove to the motel. Stuffing the directions to the Holling's lake house in the pocket of her jacket along with her miniature recorder, she paused long enough to call her office and leave instructions for Steve to call his contact in the State Bureau of Investigations and find out everything he could about the murders.

It was a quarter past two when she pulled up behind the red Jaguar parked in front of the house at Fontana Lake. "You stay here, okay?" she said to the wolf. "But if you hear me scream come running."

He growled softly and she gave him a rub then got out of the Jeep. The front door opened to display Greg Holling as she started down the walk. Dressed in a pair of dark green designer slacks and an unbuttoned shirt, he held an almost empty drink glass in his hand.

"Well, I was beginning to think you'd stood me up," he said as he reached for her hand.

She let him take it and pull her inside. "No way. Especially not after I heard what happened last night. It scared me to death! Are you all right?"

He shut the door and leaned back against it. "Yeah, I'm okay," he sighed dramatically and slumped. "But I lost three of my oldest friends."

"Oh, Greg." She moved closer to him. "I'm so sorry. It must have been horrible for you."

He pulled her to him and wrapped one arm around her. "It was pretty bad."

Chance waited a moment then pulled away. "I can't even imagine how horrifying it must have been." She frowned fiercely and clenched her fists as if enraged. "I just hope they find whoever did it and string him up!"

Greg's eyes brightened at her words and he pushed away from the door. "I need another drink. Care to join me?"

"No, thanks. It's a little early for me but you go ahead."

He led her to an enormous room at the back of the house. Floor-to-ceiling windows dominated the curved rear wall providing a panoramic view of the lake. Chance walked over to look outside as Greg went to the bar at the end of the room. Cutting a look at him to see him pouring a drink, she reached in her pocket and turned on the recorder then took a seat on the couch.

After downing half his drink Greg crossed the room and sat down beside her, stretching his legs out to prop his feet on the expensive marble and walnut coffee table. Chance shifted so that she was turned toward him and put her hand on his shoulder. "Greg, I know this has been terrible for you and I'm really sorry. I know that sounds trite but I just don't know what else to say. I wish there was something I could – wait! Maybe there is something I can do. Maybe if you tell me about it I can help."

He looked at her for a moment then put his hand on her leg. "It's been a nightmare, a fucking nightmare. You can't imagine how it feels to see your friends die right before your eyes and not be able to do anything about it."

She nodded and squeezed his shoulder sympathetically. "How awful! You mean you actually saw it happen? You know who the murderer is?"

Greg polished off his drink and set the glass on the table then moved a little closer to her. "Remember me mentioning Wyatt Nashoba?"

Chance knew that her entire plan of getting information to use against Greg and his family hinged on her reply and how convincing she could be. "Yes, and unfortunately I've had the displeasure of meeting Mr. Nashoba!" she spat the words as spitefully as she could. "But why do you ask? Does he have something to do with what happened?"

"He's the murderer! That goddamn redskin bastard killed my friends!"

Chance opened her eyes very wide and gasped. "My god! You mean— Greg, you have to tell the police so they can arrest him!"

Greg smiled and rubbed his hand higher up her thigh. "They know. By now he should be sitting in jail."

"Thank god! I hope they throw away the key! Anyone who could do something like that doesn't deserve to live."

As his hand moved a little higher his smile turned sly. "I agree. And just between you and me I'd like to be the one that puts the gun to his head and blows him to hell."

"Well, I can certainly understand why you'd feel that way," she replied, hoping that now he had admitted he wanted to kill Wyatt she could get him to admit that he had already killed one man. "But do you really think you could just shoot someone? I don't know about you, but I just don't know if I'd have the courage."

Greg's hand moved higher. "Babe, I wouldn't give it a second thought. But right now I'd kill to get you out of those clothes and next to me. Why don't we get naked?"

Chance would rather have eaten cow manure than let him touch her but she could not let him know how he repulsed her. "You don't really mean that, do you? About killing someone, I mean. Do you really think you could do that?"

"Sure." His hand crept higher on her thigh. "In a New York minute."

"I can't believe that. You just don't seem like —"

"Like what?" He tensed and straightened up. "Like someone who has balls enough to off someone. Well, let me tell you something, Miss Porter —"

The phone rang and he stopped to pick it up. "Yeah?... Oh, hi... No, I'm kinda busy right now. Why don't I call you back later... Yeah, will do. Bye."

"You were saying?" Chance prompted. She was sure that he was about to tell her he had already killed someone when the phone rang.

"Forget it." He reached for her. "I got other things on my mind." His hands moved up her sides to her breasts and she stiffened despite her intentions to appear willing. "Nice." He grinned as he squeezed. "So, you wanna do it here or in the bed?"



"Actually, I'm afraid I have to go." She wiggled free of his grasp and put some distance between them. "I have to make a conference call on this story and I can't put it off. How about we get together, say tomorrow night?"

"How 'bout you forget your call?" He leaned over and grabbed her leg.

Chance picked up his hand from her leg and held it in both of hers. "Greg, I'd love to...but I can't. Besides, this story could help put a murderer on death row. I don't know about you but I'd like to see him get what's coming to him."

Greg leaned forward and kissed her, moving his hand behind her to press her against him. Trying not to tense in response, Chance let him kiss her but moved back as his tongue tried to work between her closed lips.

"Sure you won't change your mind?" He moved his hand to her breast.

She smiled and moved away. "You really make it hard on a girl to say no, but I have to. Give me a rain check for tomorrow night?"

"Well..." He crowded in on her again. "I might be persuaded."

Chance would have like to give him a swift kick in the teeth but instead she smiled and traced her fingers up his leg from his knee to the crotch of his slacks. "I promise it'll be worth the wait."

Greg smiled and put his hand over hers, pressing it against his groin. "You got that right, babe."

Babe? The word and the arrogant supercilious way it was said made her skin crawl. She forced a smile to her face and disengaged her hand from his so that she could stand. "I'll be in anticipation. Where shall we meet?"

"Why don't you come over to the house around seven?"

"You mean here?"

"No, our estate in Bryson. I'll introduce you to my hot tub."

*Oh, thrill,* she thought in complete disgust. "I'll be there."

He grinned but made no move to rise as she turned and started across the room. When she reached the door she heard him call out behind her. "Hey, babe!"

"Yes?" She looked over her shoulder.

"Just so you'll know, I like my women horny and willing. I'm a very creative lover and I'm counting on you to be. Don't disappoint me."

She raised her eyebrows then turned and grimaced in distaste. As she let herself out of the house she turned off her recorder. *Disappoint you? If I have my way you'll have lots and lots of time to be creative, Greg, old boy. And lots of new playmates to do it with. I hear those boys in prison are real creative.*

Smiling at the thought, she got into her Jeep and pulled away with the wolf sitting beside her, hanging his head out of the window.

\* \* \* \* \*

John looked up as the back door opened and Wyatt looked in. "Dad? Is it safe?"

"Come in!" John jumped up and hurried to the door.

Wyatt entered, followed by Tsa'li. He stopped and put his arm around his father's shoulders to give him a hug. "You okay?"

"I'm fine. I was worried about you, son."

"Was the sheriff here?"

John nodded. "Come on, have a seat and I'll tell you what happened."

Wyatt and Tsa'li sat down and John filled them in on everything that had happened. When he finished, Wyatt's face wore a deep scowl. "You shouldn't have let her go, Dad. If Holling finds out Jenny pointed her out as being the woman she saw then she'll be in danger."

"I tried to tell her that, but she wouldn't listen. She's determined and to tell you the truth, she's about as stubborn a person as I've ever met."

"I know," Wyatt sighed. "So how long has she been gone?"

"Less than an hour."

"She give you any idea when she'd be back?"

Before John could answer, the phone rang. He picked it up. "Hello?... Hello, Miss Waters. What can I do for you?"

"It's what I can do for you that prompted me to call. Mr. Nashoba, are you aware that Wyatt is the prime suspect in a murder investigation?"

"Yes, I am. But Sheriff Smith told me that the fingerprints from the murder scene didn't match Wyatt's so I don't see—"

"Mr. Nashoba, you seem to forget that there are three eyewitnesses who have positively identified Wyatt as the murderer. Considering that I think it would be wise for Wyatt to have counsel and I'm offering my services. Do you know where I can reach him?"

"Hold on..." John covered the receiver with his hand. "It's Iris Waters. She seems to think that you need a lawyer since Holling and his boys are swearing you did the killing. She offered to represent you."

Wyatt frowned thoughtfully. There was something that he hadn't considered until now. Iris had been with him just before he had been overcome by whatever possessed him. He didn't know how much she knew but he thought he better find out.

"Tell her to come over and we'll talk," he said at last.

John relayed the message. "Why don't you come over to the house, Miss Waters?"

"Actually, I think it'd be best if Wyatt and I met alone. Have him meet me at his house in half an hour."

"I'll relay the message. Thanks for calling."

John hung up the phone. "She said she'd be at your house in thirty minutes."

Wyatt stood and John tossed him a set of keys. "What's this for?" Wyatt asked.

"Miss Walters took your Jeep so you'll need the truck."

"Thanks. When Chance gets back tell her to wait here for me. I won't be long."

He plucked the keys from a peg beside the door and started out but Tsa'li's voice made him stop. "Remember where your strength lies."

Wyatt looked at him for a moment and nodded. "I will."

He left the house and John turned to Tsa'li. "What did that mean?"

"It means that all things are tested in life, even love. If love cannot survive the test then it dies."

A stricken look came over John's face. "What you're saying is that Wyatt could die, isn't it?"

Tsa'li looked in his eyes but didn't reply. After a moment John walked to the door and looked out in the direction Wyatt had gone. When he turned back around Tsa'li was gone.

## Chapter Eight

Wyatt's jeep was parked in front of the house when he got home. Seeing no one in the car or in the yard he bounded up on the porch and started to put his key in the lock. The door opened and Iris smiled at him.

"How did you get in?" He was as surprised by the way she was dressed as he was that she was in the house. She was wearing a very short, skintight black skirt and a sheer lace black top that clearly displayed the fact that she was not wearing a bra. Black sheer stockings and high, spike-heeled shoes completed her outfit.

She smiled seductively at him. "The door was open and I didn't think you'd mind."

Wyatt walked in and she closed the door behind him. He turned and looked back at her and she gave him a look he could read only as invitation. He said nothing as she slithered over to him. "You don't mind, do you, Wyatt?" Her voice was husky.

For a moment he was distracted. She was very beautiful and it was hard not to look at her. Especially since she was dressed in a way that demanded attention. "Mind? No, I guess not. My father said you wanted to talk."

"Ummm, yes," she purred and ran one finger down the center of his chest.

Her touch provoked excitement and for a moment he didn't move. Then an image of Chance's face flashed in his mind and he moved back from her. "How about a cup of coffee?"

"A drink would be preferable." She took a step toward him.

"Why don't I make a beer run?" He dodged around her for the door. "Make yourself comfortable. I'll be back in a few minutes."

Not giving her a chance to reply he walked outside and got in his father's truck. He took a deep breath and started the engine. It didn't take a genius to figure out that Iris was interested in more than just talking about being his lawyer. And she was a very appealing woman. Even though he had no desire to get intimate with her, it was hard not to be affected.

*And maybe you're just letting your ego take over, he considered. Maybe she's not interested in you in that way at all.*

\* \* \* \* \*

Chance arrived at John's to find him cooking. He turned as soon as she walked in. "So, what happened?" he asked as he eyed the wolf that followed her.

"I thought I had him," she complained. "I was sure he was going to give something away but the phone rang and...well, to make a long story short he didn't admit

anything to me about what really happened. But he sure made it clear that he hates Wyatt. And he's sticking to the story that he and his friends could identify Wyatt as the murderer."

"So what now?"

"I have a date with him tomorrow," she said with a grimace, kneeling down and rubbing the wolf as she talked. "Have you heard from Wyatt?"

"That lawyer, Iris Waters, called. She said that Wyatt was still a suspect even though his fingerprints didn't match the ones at the murder scene. She offered to represent him and he went to meet her at his house."

"When was that?"

"Over an hour ago." He checked his watch. "I thought he'd be back by now."

Chance thought about it for a second. "I think I'll ride over there. I want to meet Miss Waters, anyway. You want to come?"

"No, you go on. I'll have dinner ready if you want to eat."

"Thanks." She walked over and gave him a hug. "We'll be back as soon as we can." The wolf followed her silently as she left through the back door. Jumping in the door of the Jeep when she opened it, he settled onto the passenger seat and barked sharply as if to tell her to get in. She smiled and got in the Jeep, pulling out onto the road.

\* \* \* \* \*

Iris was sitting on the steps of the front porch when Wyatt returned. She stood up as he walked up the steps and opened the door. He continued into the house and she followed, closing the door.

"You want a beer?"

She shook her head and walked over to him. "Actually I had something else in mind."

Wyatt felt very uncomfortable. Putting the beer down on a table he walked across the room to take a seat on the couch. "What do you want to talk about?"

She made a show of her trip to the couch, swaying her hips provocatively and reaching up to brush her hair back over both shoulders, pushing her breasts out as she did so. She sat down close to him and leaned even closer. "You do realize that you're a suspect in the triple murder that happened last night?"

"Yes, I've heard that."

"The sheriff will want to talk to you."

"I suppose so."

"And just what will you tell him?" She leaned a little closer.

"The truth," he replied, wanting to move away but not doing so. Her eyes were locked with his and they held such a naked look of hunger and invitation it was hard to resist.

"And just what is the truth?" She reached over and put her hand on his leg.

"I wasn't alone."

She tipped her head back and laughed then let herself fall back on the couch. Her skirt rose higher and without wanting to, Wyatt found himself looking. Aside from the sheer black pantyhose, she was wearing nothing else.

"Wyatt, I told your father that I'd represent you, so you can be honest with me. I was with you at your father's house last night, remember? I saw what happened to you and I know you didn't just toddle off home. Why don't you tell me what really happened."

"I told you. I wasn't alone."

"Oh, yes." She smiled and put one arm behind her head. "All right. Then who were you with?"

"That's not important."

"But it is." She sat up and leaned toward him. "Very important. If I'm going to represent you then you're going to have to be honest with me."

He didn't comment and after a moment she moved closer. "Let's talk about what happened last night."

He still didn't speak. She reached up and smoothed his long hair back from his face, letting her hand rest on his shoulder as she moved closer.

"I saw what happened to you," she breathed the words. "I've never seen anything like it. It was so...stimulating."

Wyatt tensed. It was clear to him she was trying to seduce him. He knew he should put a stop to it, but he told himself that he needed to know what she had seen.

"You were like a great wild beast," she purred, "primitive and powerful. It was almost as if you changed into someone else right before my eyes, becoming even more masculine, more aggressive, more...virile."

Wyatt felt her pull and part of him weakened. She seemed to sense it and moved to loop her other arm around his neck. "I wish I could have seen what happened next. I thought about it all night, imagining you as a warrior from long ago, thrilling to the chase, anticipating the upcoming battle, your body tensed and ready, the need to feel warm blood spill on you making you excited."

An attack of dizziness made Wyatt blink. It felt as if a hurricane was blowing in his mind. He could feel the pressure behind his eyes like the pulse of a giant heart. His breath quickened and his heart sounded louder, like the beating of a drum.

Iris smiled and moved again, pressing against him. He could feel her hard nipples against his chest and smell her scent. She pulled his face down close to hers. "I am not afraid of the beast within you, Wyatt. It excites me. You don't have to hide what you are from me. Let it go. I'll protect you."

Wyatt put his hands on her shoulders to push her away but she wrapped her arms around his neck and held on. Her lips moved to his and even though he didn't want to, he felt his own hands tightening on her. Their lips met and she groaned lustily.

He didn't understand why he was responding to her the way he was. He knew that although she was tempting, he was not interested. And yet he could not stop his hands from moving to her lush breasts.

Suddenly it dawned on him what was happening. It was not him that was attracted to her so much as it was the other. That thought gave him the strength he needed to push her away. "No!" he shouted, trying to make his body obey his desire to stop the transformation.

Iris reached out and put one hand against his groin, cupping him firmly. "Don't fight it," she whispered eagerly. "Let it happen."

Suddenly the front door opened. Iris turned and Wyatt jumped up. "Help—" his voice broke, "me."

Chance ran over to him. "Wyatt, hold on, just concentrate. It'll be okay."

She led him to a chair across the room. Once he was seated she turned to Iris, who was watching the big wolf standing just inside the door with a scared look on her face. "Miss Waters, I assume?"

Iris tossed her hair and smiled smugly. "And you are?"

"The woman who's paying you." Chance's eyes narrowed as she took in Iris' sheer top and short shirt. "Chanc— Daven Porter."

Iris' eyes widened and her mouth dropped open. Then she seemed to compose herself. She crossed her legs and leaned back. "What can I do for you, Miss Porter?"

"You can get the hell out!"

Iris laughed, "Well, it just so happens that I'm not ready to leave. Wyatt and I have...unfinished business."

The wolf growled menacingly as Chance advanced on her with eyes blazing. "I don't think so. Your business here is finished. Now get out!"

Iris looked up at Chance for a moment then at the wolf who had silently inched closer. The fur on his back was bristled and his ears were flat against his skull. After a moment she stood and looked at Wyatt who was holding his head in his hands and breathing hard. "Darling, give me a call when you finish with Miss Porter. You know where to find me."

Chance glared at her as she gathered up her purse and keys and carefully walked to the door. The wolf watched her leave as Chance ran to kneel down in front of Wyatt. "Wyatt? Wyatt, listen to me. You can push him back. Please, you have to. I love you, Wyatt. I need you here with me. Please, don't let his rage overpower you. Think about how much we've gone through to get here—all the years we wasted. Don't let him rob us of any more time. I love you, Wyatt. Please, do it for me."

For several moments emotions played on his face – rage and bitterness battling with tenderness and love. Abruptly he howled and jumped up, pushing her back. She bounded to her feet as he picked up the chair he had been sitting in and hurled it. It flew across the room and crashed into the wall.

The wolf bounded up and howled as she grabbed Wyatt's arm and he whirled, slinging her around. She screamed as she was tossed to the floor. "Wyatt! You have to try harder!"

In the middle of picking up a table he stopped and looked down at her. He dropped the table and pounced like an animal. Chance grunted as he landed on her, pinning her to the floor. The wolf snarled and moved closer.

"Wa'ya, no!" She panted to breathe under Wyatt's weight as she looked at the wolf. "It's okay. He won't hurt me." Looking up at Wyatt she tried to speak as calmly as she could. "Wyatt, please try to hear me. You can push him back. You're stronger than he is. Don't let him out."

He bared his teeth in more of a snarl than a smile and she reached to take his face in her hands. But he grabbed them and slammed them down on the floor. Chance was afraid that Wyatt was losing the fight and that made her fear for her own safety. She didn't think she could fight the Warrior.

In desperation she did the only thing she could think of. She surrendered. "I won't fight you, Wyatt. I can't. You're all that matters to me – all that I love."

His expression changed slightly and gave her hope. She continued to speak softly to him, expressing her love. Little by little his face lost its hardness.

"Chance," he rasped.

"Wyatt." She pulled him down on her and wrapped her arms around him.

He gathered her in his arms and held on to her tightly. The wolf moved to lie beside them. For a long time there was only the sound of their hearts beating in time with one another and the soft breath of the wolf. Wyatt pushed back to look at her and she smiled and touched his face. "It's over. You won."

"The battle maybe," he replied. "But I'm afraid we still have to face the war."

\* \* \* \* \*

Iris' fury was in full bloom by the time she reached the hotel. Slamming the door hard enough to jar the walls, she threw her purse across the room then flung herself down on the bed with a scream of rage. "Chance Davenport!" She spat the name like trying to get rid of a bad taste in her mouth. "The princess herself – fucking snobby, high-brow bitch!"

Grabbing a pillow, she shoved it under her head and stared at the ceiling through narrowed eyes. She had been caught off guard by Chance's appearance at Wyatt's. When Larry Horton had contacted her on his client's behalf, he had said that his client's name was Porter, a producer for CNN who wished to remain anonymous in the



Cherokee's legal action. Iris had not let on to Larry that she knew who the client was. Just as she had not let on that she knew Chance was posing as Daven Porter.

Iris wondered now if she should have told Greg the truth. She had informed him that her client, Porter, was siding with the Indians and for him to be extremely careful if he was approached by her. Iris had anticipated Chance attempting to get information on the Holling family and knew there was no better fish to fry than Greg. With his reputation for being a playboy of sorts and unable to resist chasing skirts, he made an ideal target. She had also anticipated the approach Chance would use, pretending to be sympathetic with the rich white citizens and in favor of stopping the casino project.

Now she considered that possibly she should rethink her plans. She could have to consider whether Greg really needed to know the truth or whether it would hamper her plans. A smile crossed her face for a moment. She thought about it carefully and made up her mind. She would leave things as they were for the time being.

Once that was no longer on her mind she turned her attention to the encounter at Wyatt's. Chance was not exactly what she had expected. Tonight was the first time they had ever met face-to-face. She had never thought that Chance would have so much fire. She had always imagined her as a pasty-faced, little hothouse plant who was weak and spoiled and cared more for shopping sprees and teas at the club than being involved in a situation like what was happening here.

But Chance didn't appear to be anything like that. Not only did she seem strong and confident, she was rich and beautiful. All of the things Iris had wished to be all her life. All the hate she felt for Chance had manifested in a red flood of malice the moment she saw her and now it continued to boil and bubble.

"And just how involved is she with Wyatt?" Iris asked herself aloud.

The information she had on Chance indicated that she had not had any contact with Wyatt in three years. And according to her sources their last meeting ended on less than friendly terms. So why were they together now?

"Shit!" She jolted upright. "The white woman with the wolves! It was her, it had to be. She had a wolf with her tonight. That's who Wyatt was talking about when he said he wasn't alone. But why was she with a wolf? It doesn't make sense. She's just a rich, spoiled city girl."

Getting up from the bed, Iris retrieved her mother's diary and sat down again, holding it against her chest. For a long time she didn't move. Then a smile began to slowly form on her face. She just might be able to use this surprise development to her advantage. Laying the diary on the bed, she got her purse from the floor and took out her cell phone. After three rings a man answered. "Holling residence. How may I help you?"

"Greg Holling, please."

"I am very sorry but Mr. Holling is not here at present. May I take a message?"

"No, thank you, but perhaps you can tell me when you expect him."

"I'm not certain. He is with his father and they did not indicate what time they would return. May I say who called?"

"No, I'll catch up with him later," she said and ended the call. "Damn! Just like a man. Never there when you need them!"

She started to put the phone down then changed her mind. Dialing another number, she waited for an answer, running her hand over the diary.

"Yes?" a male voice came over the line.

"Are you watching the skies?" she whispered in a voice low enough to be a growl. "The storm's coming – it's coming for you. Prepare for the end."

"Who is this?" the man demanded in an anxious tone.

"The architect of your destruction," she whispered and hung up. Tossing the phone aside she threw herself back on the bed and laughed wildly. If anyone had walked by her door they would have thought she sounded quite insane.

\* \* \* \* \*

Wyatt followed Chance in his father's truck. She had been tight jawed and fist clenched when she got in her Jeep to head for his father's house. The wolf had gone with her and rode with his head hung out of the window.

He didn't understand what had happened with Iris Waters. He would be the first to admit that she was an extremely attractive woman. But he was not sexually attracted to her. Her sexuality was too visible and blatant for his taste. And yet part of him had responded to her against his will.

*But was it really me?* he asked himself. Could it be that the other inside him was who had responded and Wyatt was just swept along? He had no time to ponder the question further because Chance was stopping beside his father's house.

She got out and held the seat back so the wolf could get out. Kneeling down she spoke softly to it. The wolf licked her face then ran for the forest. She watched it then rose and walked around to the back of the house. Wyatt caught up with her as she was opening the door. John looked up from where he was sitting at the table, watching television on the small black-and-white set on the counter. One look at Chance's face and he stood. "What's wrong?"

Chance looked at him for a moment then turned away. "You'll have to ask Wyatt that."

John watched her walk down the hall to the bathroom then looked at Wyatt. "Son?"

Wyatt sat down at the table and put his elbows down, propping his forehead in his hands for a second or two. "I wish I knew myself," he said softly. "All I can tell you is that this-this thing inside me tried to take over again."

John sat down hard with a fearful look in his eyes. "And?"

"And luckily Chance got there in time to stop it."

John sighed and stared at Wyatt who was staring back miserably. Chance walked back in the room and sat down at the table. John watched her for a moment as she stared down at her hands in her lap. "Is there something else?"

She looked up at him then turned to Wyatt. Wyatt looked down at the table. "Iris was there, Dad. She...well, she sort of came on to me."

Chance snorted and jumped up to rush out the back door. John's eyes flew open wide in surprise. He opened his mouth as if to speak then closed it and shook his head.

"What?" Wyatt asked, turning his eyes from the door.

"Wyatt, I've tried real hard not to interfere in your life but I can't hold my tongue this time. I don't know what happened with you and Miss Waters and to tell you the truth I probably don't want to. But I do know that you can't afford to screw things up with Chance, because sure as sunrise that's what she is—your best and maybe only chance. Take some advice just this once from your old man. Real love's as hard to find as rain in the desert. When you find it you better hang on to it with your life. Don't blow this, Wyatt. For all our sakes, but for your own most of all. Now go out there and talk to her."

Wyatt nodded and stood up. "Thanks, Dad. I think maybe I should take her on home. We have some things to work out. Sorry about dinner."

John waved his hand. "Forget it. You go on now."

Wyatt walked outside. He didn't see Chance. He looked in the Jeep but it was empty so he returned to the backyard, walking toward the shelter of trees that bordered the grass. Then he saw her. Standing just inside the cover of the trees with Tsali.

"I understand," Chance said. "But he's not a child anymore, Tsali, and sooner or later he has to be told the truth."

"That is true. In the beginning the family could not bring themselves to tell him. There was fear as to what it would do to him. Later, it was just easier to try and forget it. And John was afraid of what would happen if Wyatt found out."

"Well, it couldn't have been much worse than what's happened already, could it?" Chance exclaimed then closed her eyes and sighed. "Besides," she opened her eyes, "the first step to solving any problem is recognizing that there is one."

"And do you? Do you recognize it?"

"Oh, yes," she replied without hesitation. "I've seen it up close and personal."

Tsali took her hand in his. "I am glad you have realized your destiny, my child. It is a hard task you face but you must do whatever it takes to guide him to the light of truth."

Chance squeezed his hand. "I'll try, Tsali. I promise you I'll do everything I can. I do love him—more than anything."

"That I know as well. But now you must go. He is waiting."

Chance turned and saw Wyatt watching them. Releasing Tsali's hand she walked to him.

"We need to talk," he said.

She nodded without reply and walked to the Jeep, getting in the passenger seat. Wyatt got in behind the wheel and started the engine. In silence they started the trip home.

\* \* \* \* \*

Winston Holling and his son, Greg, walked into Sheriff Tom Smith's office unannounced. "I want to know why that murderous bastard isn't behind bars!" Winston demanded.

Tom looked up at him with annoyance. "I don't believe I'm obligated to report the progress of any of this office's investigations to you, Mr. Holling. But I am glad you and your son are here. It saves me the effort of having him brought in."

"For what?" Winston barked.

"Questioning," Tom said and gestured to the two straight-backed wooden chairs across the room. "In the murder of Jimmy Martin. You see, there seems to be some discrepancies between your son's statement as to his whereabouts during the time of the murder and that of eyewitnesses to the event. I have statements from twenty people who all swear it was Greg who pulled the trigger on the gun that killed Jimmy Martin."

Winston's face was suffused bright red. He glared malevolently at Tom then puffed up his chest. "This is an outrage! Not only are you allowing a psychotic killer like Wyatt Nashoba to run around loose but you have the audacity to suggest that my son is a liar! I should have you brought up on charges yourself."

Tom didn't let Winston's tirade rattle him. "I don't think you'd get far with that, sir. And that's beside the point anyway. As I said, I have statements from—"

"Yes, I know! Twenty people—or should I say, twenty Indians. Let me refresh your memory a bit. Your deputies took statements from more than thirty people who have sworn that my son was at home during that time. We were having a party. Now, considering the fact that these people are members of the highest standing in our community, just who are you going to believe? A bunch of drunk Indians or upstanding prominent—"

"Mr. Holling, I really don't have the time or inclination to listen to this. Now, would you like to proceed or would you prefer to have your attorney present?"

Winston blew out his breath in exasperation and pulled a cellular phone from his jacket. Unfolding it he dialed. "Ronald? Winston here. My son and I are in Sheriff Smith's office and I think you'd better get over here. He has some ludicrous notion that Greg is involved in that Indian's death... Yes, of course. Goodbye."

He folded the phone and replaced it in his pocket. "My attorney will be here within the hour."

Tom nodded and stood up. "Then if you'll excuse me, I'll go round up a stenographer."

He walked out and Winston turned to Greg, holding out the phone. "You call your boys and tell them to find Wyatt Nashoba. I want him found and I want it done now!"

Greg took the phone. "What do you want done with him."

Winston smiled coldly. "I don't give a fat shit—no, I think I want to see him behind bars. Tell them they can rough him up but I want him dumped alive in front of the jail by dawn."

Greg smiled and started to dial. "Let's just hope Ronald gets his ass over here fast. I don't want to miss all the fun."

\* \* \* \* \*

Chance took a seat on the couch. "Wyatt, there's something else we have to talk about. Something that might be very difficult for you."

Looking up at him, she didn't say any more. He felt a stab of anxiety run through him at her words. "What?"

"It's about what happens to you." Her voice was almost a whisper. "The other one inside you. I know who it is."

Wyatt felt like his heart had stopped. For one moment the entire universe came to a grinding halt. "You know?" he finally caught his breath enough to ask.

"Yes, and it's time you knew."

"I don't want to hear this, do I?"

"No, probably not. It's probably going to hurt—a lot. But it may be the only thing that will let you fight the other and win."

Wyatt stared at her for a moment then nodded. "So tell me."

She moved closer to him, holding his hands tightly. "Do you remember your childhood here?"

"Sure, why?"

"Just bear with me, okay? Exactly how far back do you remember—to when you were eight, six, five years old?"

Wyatt frowned. He could remember being in the third grade. At eight years old he was the tallest boy in his class. Everyone used to pick on him and call him names like beanpole because he was so tall and skinny. "Of course," he answered as soon as the memory came to him. "I remember being eight and being too tall and too skinny. I can remember being six and riding the bus for the first time and..."

His voice failed and he looked at her with dread. "And then nothing. I can't remember anything past that." Letting go of her hands, he stood up and paced back and forth in front of the couch. "Chance, I can't remember! I can't even remember starting

school. Just riding the bus and it being spring." She nodded and held out her hand to him. "Why can't I remember?" He ignored her hand.

"Please." She reached for him. "Sit down."

He did as she asked and looked at her expectantly. "Wyatt, do you remember telling me you couldn't understand why your parents named you Une'ga-dihi?"

"Yeah, so?"

"So..." she hesitated and took a deep breath. "They didn't. That was a name you took for yourself right after your mother was killed. Your birth name was Wyatt Iskagua Nashoba."

"Clear Sky?" he asked in disbelief. "You're crazy. My name has always been—"

"No," she interrupted gently. "It wasn't, Wyatt. Une'ga-dihi was not your name. It was your brother's."

Wyatt's mouth fell open in astonishment. "My-my brother? Have you lost your mind? I don't have a brother!"

"Not anymore. But you did, once. His name was Walker and he was your twin."

Wyatt felt a cold like that of the grave take hold of him. His skin prickled and he shivered violently. "No." He shook his head. "It isn't true. I never had a brother. I would have remembered that. It isn't true."

Chance pulled the quilt from the back of the sofa and wrapped it around him. "Listen to me. I'm not lying to you. You did have a brother. That's who is inside you. Walker is the Warrior and he's trying to take over."

"No!" he shouted and threw off the quilt as he bounded to his feet. "Why are you doing this to me, telling me these lies?"

Chance tried to take his hands but he pushed her away. "I'm not lying. You have to think back. Try to remember. You're six years old. You're in the first grade and you and Walker are riding the bus home from school. But you don't go home. Instead you—"

Wyatt felt something prick his mind and mentally retreated from it. "No!" he whispered harshly. "No, it isn't..." Memories of a day long ago began to take shape in his mind and he cried out, putting his hands over his face and sinking to the floor. "No, I don't want to see. I don't want to..."

The memories bloomed in his mind and his voice failed. Caught up in a time that had been buried in his mind he lost touch with the present.

Walker nudged him in the side. "Hey! Want to get off the bus at the next stop? Bobby told me that Winny Holling's fishing at his uncle's lake. The private school's out today. We can sneak up on him and scare him."

Wyatt thought about it. Walker loved to pick on Winston Holling III, or Winny as he was called. Wyatt wasn't sure why. Winny really wasn't all that bad. He was a little stuck up and always bragged about how much money his dad had but aside from that he was okay. And Wyatt felt a little sorry for him. Winny was a couple of years older

than he and Walker but he was pretty much of a sissy. He was fat and his skin was so white that whenever he got out in the sun he turned a bright pink. He couldn't climb trees and run and swim like most of the other boys and he didn't have many friends.

Wyatt really didn't enjoy picking on Winny but he knew if he told his brother that, Walker would give him the business, so he came up with another excuse. "We'll get in trouble. You remember what Dad said. We can't pick on Winny anymore. His dad gets all mad and causes trouble for everyone."

"Chicken!" Walker elbowed him again. "*Bock, bock!*"

"I'm not chicken!" Wyatt protested.

"Are too!"

"Am not!"

"Are too!"

"Am not!"

"Prove it!"

"I will!" Wyatt was angry at the way the other children were laughing at Walker calling him chicken and felt like he had to prove he wasn't afraid.

Walker laughed and put his arm around Wyatt's neck, rubbing his knuckles on Wyatt's head. "Atta boy, Wyatt! Me and you—the Wolf twins. That's what our name means, you know. Nashoba is the Choctaw word for wolf. We're not real Cherokee like grandpa 'cause Dad's father was Choctaw. But we're still real people anyway. And since our name really means wolf, that means we're just like those guys mom read us about. You know...what were their names? The ones that were raised by the wolf?"

"Romulus and Remus," Wyatt replied. He had never liked that story. Walker only listened to the part about how the brothers had been found by a wolf and had grown up to be the founders of Rome. Wyatt remembered something different from the story. How Romulus had killed Remus.

"Yeah, that's the ones!" Walker smiled again. "Hey! This is the stop. Come on!"

They got off the bus and wandered through the woods to Wilbur Johnson's place. Walker tossed his books down behind a tree and started sneaking around toward the pond. After a moment Wyatt followed him.

Just like Bobby had said, Winny Holling was sitting on the bank of the lake, holding a brand-new fishing rod and drinking a bottled soda.

Walker motioned for Wyatt to follow him. He led Wyatt to the creek that fed the stream and dug up a fat crawdad. Stuffing it in his pocket he giggled. "Come on, let's give old Winny the business."

Wyatt didn't really want to scare Winny. He had nothing against the boy. But for some reason Walker hated him. Wyatt thought it was because Winny was rich. Walker insisted it was because Winny was too prissy.

They snuck up behind Winny and Walker pulled the crawdad from his pocket. He grabbed Winny by the collar of his shirt and yanked him back, dropping the crawdad right on his face.

Winny screamed and swatted at his face. "Get it off! Get it off! Get it off!"

Walker let go of him and fell back on the ground laughing. Wyatt leaned over and plucked the crawdad from Winny's face and tossed it into the pond. Winny sat up with tears streaming down his red face. "I'm gonna fix you, both of you. When I tell my dad you'll be sorry. Your old man'll be outta work and your mother will lose her job. You're gonna be sorry."

Wyatt and Walker looked at one another. They both knew that money was tight at home. Without Sarah's job teaching it would be hard to make ends meet. John was a carpenter and his work wasn't always steady.

Winny stood and Walker jumped up in front of him. "You ain't telling nobody nothing!"

"I am too!"

"No, you're not!" Walker shoved him.

"Stop it! I'm gonna tell!"

Walker shoved him again. "And I said you won't."

"Try and stop me!"

Walker grinned and shoved Winny again. This time the shove sent Winny stumbling back into the water. "You better stop!" he yelled. "You're gonna be sorry."

Walker laughed and dove onto him. Winny went down underneath him and Walker held on. When Winny tried to raise his head to get a breath of air, Walker shoved him down farther.

Wyatt realized that Walker was serious. He was going to drown Winny. He ran out into the water and tried to knock Walker off Winny, but Walker hit him in the mouth, splitting his lip. "Chicken!" he taunted.

"Walker, stop! You're gonna kill him!"

Walker laughed and pushed Winny down harder. Wyatt tried again to dislodge his brother but once again Walker lashed out. Wyatt felt like he was in a bad dream. Winny was flailing around a lot slower. If he didn't do something he would drown.

"Walker, stop it!" he shouted. "I mean it. Let him go!"

Walker smiled and pulled an old knife from his pocket. "Or what?"

"Put that down!"

"Put it down!" Walker laughed. "Well, okay."

Wyatt screamed as he saw the knife flash down. A moment later a red stain blossomed in the water. Winny's arms quit waving and Wyatt knew he had to save him. Without thinking he dived at his brother, knocking him off the drowning boy. Walker grunted as Wyatt knocked him into the water. They both went under and came



up sputtering. Walker made a swipe at him with the knife. The tip caught on his right jawbone, slicing the skin. Wyatt cried out in pain and moved back but Walker just laughed and came after him.

Seeing his brother coming for him with the knife made an anger rise inside him. He stopped retreating and faced his brother. "Stop, Walker. I mean it. Stop."

But Walker would not stop. He kept coming. Wyatt screamed as he felt the knife cut into his arm and he jumped on Walker. They both went under, kicking and hitting as they fought for the knife. Wyatt felt his head getting dizzy. He couldn't breathe. But Walker would not let him rise to the surface. Black spots danced in front of his eyes and he felt like his lungs were going to explode.

Just as the dark spots began to coalesce into a solid shroud, Wyatt felt a burst of energy. Using every ounce of strength he had he pushed Walker down under him and put his feet on Walker's back. Pushing hard he propelled himself up.

Air rushed into his lungs and he gulped greedily. After a moment it occurred to him that Walker hadn't come up. Thinking that Walker was trying to scare him into thinking he was hurt, he kicked at him under the water. Walker still didn't surface so Wyatt ducked back under the water and grabbed him by the jacket and pulled him up.

Walker's face broke the surface of the water and Wyatt screamed.

Chance put her arms around Wyatt as he screamed. It was more the howl of pain and fear than a scream. When the sound died he slumped in her arms. She hugged him in silence, feeling the rapid pounding of his heart.

After a long time he pushed her back to arm's length and looked at her. She searched his eyes and saw a haunted look in their depths. "Wyatt? Can you talk to me? Tell me what you saw."

He didn't reply for a moment then closed his eyes and took a deep breath. "You're right. I did have a brother."

"Yes," she agreed as he opened his eyes. "But he died."

"No, he didn't just die. He was killed. By me. I killed my brother."

Chance took his hands and pulled him to her. "It wasn't like that, Wyatt. You and I both know it. Walker killed the Holling boy and you tried to stop him. Then he tried to kill you."

"But I killed my own brother." His voice sounded old and weary.

"You only tried to survive. You know that. You can't feel guilty for living, Wyatt. That's what Walker wants. He wants you to carry around that guilt—that's the power he has over you."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that the thing you've been fighting is not some nameless spirit. It's Walker."

"My brother? You expect me to believe that my dead—that Walker wants to take control of me?"

"No. He wants much more than that. What Walker wants is to take your life—completely. Wyatt, your brother wants to be you. And he wants you dead."

\* \* \* \* \*

John had just turned off the television for the night when the front door burst in. The wood frame splintered as the loud crash sounded in the quiet night. For one moment John froze in surprise. Then he went for his shotgun, propped beside the fireplace. Unfortunately his one moment of hesitation put him one second too late to reach it before the men rushed in and attacked him.

He lashed out at the first one, dealing him a glancing blow to the jaw. The second man jabbed him twice in the kidneys and John staggered in pain. By then the man he had hit had recovered and returned a blow of his own.

John's head swam from the punch but he did not give up. It took several minutes for the two younger men to overpower him but at last they managed to do so. A third man stepped up in front of John as the others held his arms immobilized. "I know you," John spat blood at the man before him. "You're Les Turner's boy—Hank. What do you want?"

Hank smiled smugly at his friends before responding. "Well, Mr. Nashoba, it's like this. You're gonna do us a little favor."

"You think so?" John asked sarcastically.

"Oh, I know so." Hank sounded cocksure as he puffed up his chest and hitched his pants up a notch over his ample belly. "See, you're gonna call that son of yours and tell him to hightail it on over here."

"Why would I want to do something like that?"

"Because you don't wanna die, old man." Hank's smile disappeared.

John shook his head. "Sorry."

Hank belted John in the stomach and laughed as he wheezed and doubled over. The men holding him jerked him upright as they laughed and Hank moved closer to look down at his face. "Like I said, you're gonna call your son."

"Go to hell," John rasped.

Hank looked at the other two men in indecision and one of them spoke up. "Maybe we should rough him up a little...change his mind."

"Or maybe we should call Gre—" The second man's words were cut short by Hank punching him. "Goddamn, Graham, why don't you just blurt it out, you dumb shit!"

Graham flushed and looked down. "Sorry, it was an accident. But I still think we should call and see what he wants us to do."

Hank looked from Graham to the other man and lastly to John then he walked across the room, picked up the phone and dialed a number. After a few seconds he spoke into the receiver. "Hey, it's me, Hank. We've got old man Nashoba but he won't 'xactly cooperate. What do you want us to do?... Yeah, got it. Okay."

He hung up the phone and went outside. When he returned he had a coil of rope in his hand. He crossed the room to stand in front of John. "Well, seeing as how you don't wanna make that call for us I guess we'll just hafta do it ourselves. Tie him in that chair over there, boys. I don't want him getting away while we're talking to his boy."

John struggled against the men as they pulled him across the room and lashed him to a straight-backed wooden chair. Hank pulled a chair over in front of him and set it down with its back facing John. Straddling the chair he rested his arms on the back of it. "Okay, boys, now here's what we're gonna do. Graham, you're gonna place the call. You tell Wyatt that we've got his old man and he better get his ass over here."

"And what if he says no?"

Hank smiled at John. "Then we'll just have to let his daddy convince him to change his mind. Now, make the call."

\* \* \* \* \*

Chance was sitting quietly, watching Wyatt as he stood by the window under the loft, staring silently into the darkness outside. He hadn't spoken a word since she told him that his brother wanted him dead.

Wyatt wasn't even aware she was watching him. His mind was caught in the memory of what had happened the day his brother died. He remembered how horrified he was at what he'd done and how afraid he was to go home and tell his father.

His mom and dad had gone back with him to the pond after calling the police. It was bad enough that Wyatt had to see the look on his parents' faces when they saw Walker, but when the police arrived it got worse. Winston Holling arrived with them and as soon as he got a look at Winny he made a beeline for Wyatt. If John hadn't stopped him, Wyatt was sure Winston would have killed him.

Now that the memory had returned, Wyatt could remember the grief and sadness that followed that day. His parents had believed what he said when he told them what happened, but that didn't stop them from crying over and missing Walker. Wyatt did too. Walker was more than a brother, he was like part of Wyatt. Wyatt really didn't know how to function without him so he did the only thing he could do, he made believe that Walker wasn't dead. It took a while, but in time he convinced himself that when Walker's spirit left his body it entered him. Now he and Walker were one and no one could ever take his brother away from him again.

Wyatt never told anyone about it. The Walker he thought he had created in his mind told him not to. Walker said that it had to be their secret or he would go away and never come back. Wyatt promised not to tell and he didn't, at least not for a couple of years.

Tsa'li had begun teaching him the history of his people, and Wyatt couldn't get enough of the old stories and legends. Inspired by the stories and wanting to appear special in Tsa'li's eyes, he told Tsa'li about Walker. Tsa'li didn't say that he believed or disbelieved what Wyatt said but told him to go home.

As soon as Wyatt got home he went to his room. That's when Walker came out. He told Wyatt that he was going to make him pay. Wyatt had broken his word and now he was going to be sorry. Wyatt begged him not to leave but he never got a reply. Walker was gone.

*But he was never with me,* Wyatt tried to reason with the child inside him, the little boy who had wanted to believe that his brother had been with him. It was just childish imagination.

Then another memory demanded attention, a memory of that long-ago mission when two of his men ended up mutilated and murdered. He mentally walked through the mission, once more experiencing the sights and sounds and smells. As always his memory contained a gap. He saw DJ and Fish with the woman, DJ's hand holding the knife to the woman's throat while Fish raped her. He saw the look of terror and helplessness on the woman's face and the blood that ran from the cuts on her face.

Then – nothing. No, not nothing, his mind told him. What about the rage?

Wyatt closed his eyes and allowed himself to sink into the memory of the past. He remembered the way he felt. His chest felt like it was about to explode with rage and his eyes burned like someone had poured acid into them. Then –

His eyes flew open as the memory began to come back to him. Blackness closed in around him, blocking his peripheral vision. A coldness accompanied the dark cloud, cold that seeped into the bones and numbed the mind. Then he saw it.

The shrill ring of the phone snapped him back to the present. He turned as Chance picked up the receiver. "Hello?... Yes, could you hold, please?"

"Wyatt? It's for you."

He walked over and took the phone from her. "Yeah?... Who is this?... Put him on the phone. Damn you, I want to talk to him!... All right... Yes, I understand. I'm on my way."

Cradling the receiver he turned and walked out of the room. Chance followed him to the back of the house. He entered his studio and knelt down beside an old trunk. "What's going on?"

Unlocking the thick padlock on the front of the trunk Wyatt pushed the lid open. "They have my dad. I have to go to him."

Chance threw herself down beside him and he reached inside the trunk. "Wyatt, no! We have to call Tom – Sheriff Smith, I mean. You can't go alone."

"I have to," he said as he pulled a long knife in a black leather sheath from the trunk. "They'll kill him if I don't."

"Then call the sheriff and have him meet you there. If he catches the men responsible he can put them in jail!"

"I don't have time," he said as he picked up a gun then changed his mind, returned it to the trunk and stood. "I have to go."

"I'm going with you."

"No!" He took her by the arms. "You're not."

"Yes, I am!"

"Chance, don't push me on this." He tried to speak calmly even though the rage was beginning to bubble in his belly.

"I'm sorry, but I can't let you go alone. I'm going with you."

"I said no!" he barked, unable to restrain the anger. "Do as I tell you!"

Chance's eyes were wide as she looked up at him. "It's happening, isn't it? Right now. I can see it on your face."

Wyatt pushed her away from him and stared over her shoulder with a fixed expression of rage on his face. She looked over her shoulder but saw nothing except the wall. When she turned to him his expression had changed. Along with rage there was fear.

"Wyatt..." She tried to take his hand. "What do you see? Can you hear me? You have to fight this—"

"There's nothing to fight. I'm in control and I know what I have to do." Without another word he ran outside to his father's truck and jumped in.

Chance ran for the phone and dialed. Sheriff Smith's voice came on the line. He barely had time to say hello. "Tom, it's Chance. Someone has John Nashoba and I think they're going to kill him. They called and said for Wyatt to get over there. I couldn't stop him. You have to get over there. I'm on my way now. Hurry!"

Slamming the phone down, she jerked her keys from the table beside the door and ran out of the house.

## Chapter Nine

### *Maggie Valley*

Iris was back in control by the time she heard the knock on her hotel room door. She opened it and stood framed in the doorway, letting Greg take a long look at her. Dressed in a sheer lace teddy with a matching chiffon jacket, she knew she presented an alluring picture. The expression on Greg's face as he looked at her confirmed it.

"Oh, yeah," he breathed and gathered her against him as he backed her up into the room. "This is what I call a welcome."

He kicked the door closed behind him then claimed her in a hungry kiss. Iris let him indulge himself for a few moments then playfully pushed him away. "Slow down there, big boy."

"Slow down, hell!" he exclaimed and reached for her again. "Baby, I'm just getting warmed up."

"Well, cool your jets for a minute, lover." She walked away from him to fix them each a stiff drink. "Before we get too involved having fun there're some things we need to go over."

"Such as?"

"Such as your little friend, Daven Porter," she replied as she arranged herself provocatively on the bed.

"I'm listening," Greg said as his eyes traveled appreciatively over her lush body.

"I think it's time to eliminate Miss Porter."

"Eliminate?" Greg's eyes moved sharply to hers. "As in—"

"As in kill, lover."

"Look, Iris." Greg put his drink down on the nightstand and held up his hands. "Taking out those red bastards is one thing, but killing a woman—a white woman—that's something else altogether."

"Even a white woman who's trying to trap you into admitting that you're behind all the trouble? Not to mention one who's bedding Wyatt Nashoba like a bitch in heat?"

"She's fucking Nashoba? But I thought you said—"

"Forget what I said and pay attention," she snapped then softened her tone. "Greg, honey, listen to me. I've seen Miss Porter, and talked to her. Don't forget, as far as she's concerned I'm on the Indians' side, so she doesn't have any reservations about being honest with me. And I know for a fact that she's going to try her damndest to make sure that you're the one left holding the shitty end of the stick. And from what I understand she already has some pretty damaging evidence."

"What evidence?" Greg's face noticeably paled.

Iris wanted to laugh at the stricken, fearful look that was stamped on his handsome face but she knew better. She needed Greg in order to succeed. "That I don't know," she said, trying to sound frustrated. "But she indicated that it's enough to get you and some of your boys arrested for murder and attempted rape."

"Son of a bitch!" he shouted and swiped at the glass on the nightstand, sending it flying across the room. "That conniving bitch!"

"My thoughts exactly, lover. But we still have the upper hand."

"We do?" He looked at her with a perplexed expression taking shape on his face.

"Oh yes, indeed."

"Then what do we do?"

"Why don't you come on over here and I'll tell you," she suggested, patting the bed.

Greg complied without hesitation. Iris pushed him onto his back and climbed on top of him. "Now, I want you to pay close attention," she said as she started to unbutton his shirt. "Here's what I want you to do..."

\* \* \* \* \*

Wyatt pulled off the road about a quarter of a mile from his father's house. Leaving the truck parked in the trees, he covered the rest of the distance on foot. There was a late-model pickup truck parked in front of the house. He skirted the property, staying in the cover of the trees to make sure there was no one standing watch outside, then silently ran around to the side of the house.

Easing along, he looked into the windows as he reached them. There was no one in either of the two bedrooms or the kitchen. He checked the bathroom and found it empty then made his way toward the front of the house.

He looked through the window and could see his father. John was tied to a straight-backed wooden chair near the back wall. His face was battered and bloody and Wyatt could tell that he'd taken quite a beating. But John's back was straight and his face was set in a mask of defiance and rage. His eyes stared straight ahead without blinking.

Two men were in the room with him. Wyatt recognized one of them, Hank Turner. The two other men he had seen around, mostly with Holling's boys. He thought one of the men's name was Graham but he wasn't sure. Hank was sitting on the couch with a deer rifle lying across his legs, watching television. Graham was smoking a cigarette, thumping the ashes on the floor as he peered out the front window every few seconds, while the third man paced.

Wyatt ducked down and made his way to the back of the house. Carefully he crept up the back steps and twisted the knob of the back door. He breathed a silent thanks to discover it unlocked. Slipping inside the kitchen, he stood and listened for a few moments then began to make his way toward the front of the house.

He had just made it past the bathroom door when he heard a sound from outside. The sound of a vehicle pulling up in front of the house. Wyatt stopped, listening to see if it was more of Holling's men. He inched forward a little closer to the living room door and pulled the knife from its sheath.

John Nashoba looked up in alarm as Graham threw down his cigarette and cursed. "Goddamn, it's that fucking reporter!"

Hank jumped up and positioned himself on the other side of the door. "Get back!" he hissed at Graham.

Graham had just enough time to press against the wall beside the door before it flew open. "Chance, look out," John shouted as she burst in.

"John!" she screamed, seeing him at the same moment Hank grabbed her from behind. "Let me go!" she shouted and thrashed around, kicking. "Get your hands off me!"

Suddenly Wyatt appeared in the room. "Let her go," he said in a deadly calm voice. "It's me you want."

Hank jumped in surprise but didn't release Chance. Graham leveled his gun at Wyatt. "You fuckin' redskin piece of shit. I oughta do you right now."

"Then do it." Wyatt looked him in the eyes. "But let the woman go."

"No!" Chance stomped down hard on Hank's foot then rammed her heel into the opposite knee. He yelled and released her as he hopped around in pain. Chance started toward Wyatt but Graham grabbed her arm and jabbed the barrel of his handgun underneath her chin.

Wyatt made a move toward them and Graham yelled at him, "One more step and she buys it!"

By then Hank had recovered. He trained his gun on Wyatt and spoke to Graham. "Tie her hands behind her back."

While Hank kept his weapon aimed at Wyatt, Graham pulled a length of nylon cord from the pocket of his hunting jacket. "You try anything and your boyfriend gets blowed to hell," he told Chance as he lowered his weapon. "You got it?"

She nodded mutely and didn't resist as he pulled her hands behind her back and tied them tightly. Then he pulled her over to a heavy wooden rocker in the corner of the room and pushed her down in it. He tied the free length of cord to the wooden slats in the back then looked at Hank.

"Now tie him." Hank nodded toward Wyatt.

Graham swallowed nervously as he approached Wyatt. Wyatt didn't move but kept his eyes fixed on Chance where she sat tied to the chair. Graham lashed his hands behind his back then looked again at Hank.

"His feet, too."

"Get on the floor!" Graham ordered Wyatt.



For a moment Wyatt didn't move, then he did as Graham ordered. Graham wound the cord tightly around his ankles, tying it tight enough that it almost cut off the circulation to his feet.

"Well, now." Hank smiled smugly. "That's better. Now we can have us some fun."

"Let the woman go," Wyatt demanded. "She's no good to you. It's me you want."

"Oh, I think you're wrong there, redskin," Hank replied arrogantly. "Seems to me she'd be purty damn good." He looked over at Chance and sneered. "Matter of fact, why don't we find out? She ain't gonna mind. Any woman that fucks an Indian ain't gonna mind if two good old white boys stick it to her."

Graham grinned and nodded enthusiastically. "Can I go first, Hank? I wanna do her in the ass."

"Hell no, you can't go first." Hank shoved his gun in the front of his pants. "I ain't takin no sloppy seconds."

He turned and walked over to Chance, putting his hands on the arms of the chair and leaning down to leer in her face. "You ready, bitch?"

She didn't flinch or blink but instead spat in his face. "Touch me and I'll kill you, you stinking pig!"

Hank wiped the spittle off his face, straightened up and backhanded her hard enough to make her head whip to one side and bang against the back of the chair.

"Leave her alone!" John shouted.

"Or what?" Graham taunted him. "What you gonna do, old man? Call your sky spirits to come down and smite us?"

"Leave her alone," John repeated.

Graham walked over and smashed John in the temple with the butt of his gun. John's eyes rolled back and his head fell to one side. Graham looked over at Wyatt to find him staring with a look of cold hatred in his dark eyes.

"Touch her and you die," Wyatt said in a cold calm voice.

Graham laughed nervously as he took a step back then looked at Hank. Hank walked around behind Chance and unfastened the rope that held her to the chair. Grabbing her by the hair he hauled her to her feet and shoved her forward.

"You just sit there and watch, chief," he said to Wyatt as Chance struggled, kicking and squirming to get away. "We're gonna show you how to fuck a white bitch. Come on, Graham, let's get this slut's clothes off."

Chance screamed as Graham grabbed her shirt and tore it open. His hands closed painfully on her breasts and she kicked at him, catching him in the thigh. He stumbled back with a mad look on his face then came at her again.

She could not dodge the slap he delivered, as Hank still held her by the hair. Her head swam and before she could collect herself to react they shoved her to the floor.

She started kicking and screaming like a crazed person. Both men were trying to pin her legs down in order to get her pants off. Neither one of them was paying any attention to Wyatt. They weren't paying attention to anything but trying to hold Chance still.

Suddenly the front window exploded in a shower of glass and splintered wood. Hank tried to pull his gun from the waist of his pants as the huge gray wolf leaped into the room. He didn't make it. Wa'ya's weight slammed into him and a moment later his teeth sank into Hank's neck.

Graham forgot about Chance and tried to reach his rifle that was lying on the floor. She kicked at him, making him fall over sideways then kicked at the gun and sent it sliding across the floor, under the couch.

Hank was screaming in pain as Wa'ya shook him like a rag doll. Graham was trying to edge toward the door when an enraged roar that didn't sound quite human came from Wyatt's direction.

Graham immediately yelped in surprise and turned in Wyatt's direction. "Goddamn! What the fuck's—" He forgot all about Hank being torn to shreds by the wolf.

Chance scooted over to the couch and stood up. That was when she saw Wyatt. "Oh, no!" she breathed. The transformation was almost complete.

Graham didn't have the good sense to run. He just watched in morbid fascination as Wyatt changed before his eyes. His eyes grew darker until they appeared no more than black, bottomless holes. His features twisted into a hard mask of rage and hatred. The veins in his forehead and neck stood out suddenly and as everyone watched in amazement he snapped the nylon cord that bound his wrists as if it were kite string, then did the same with the bonds at his ankles.

Chance heard a gasp from John as Wyatt stood and looked at Graham with a murderous gleam in his eyes. John looked as if he were in shock. She wanted to help him but she couldn't afford to take her attention off Wyatt for long.

"Wyatt, no." She started toward him. "Don't. Let the sheriff handle it. He's on his way. Please, don't do anything."

"Do not order me, woman!" he shouted and grabbed Graham by the throat.

Graham gurgled and gasped as he was lifted up off the floor. "Stop!" Chance shouted and ran at them. "If you kill him it won't solve anything! He's no good to us dead, but alive we have proof of what happened."

"He does not deserve to live. He is an enemy of the People. He must die."

"Wya—" She stopped before she got his name out. He was not Wyatt at that moment. She had to appeal to the other. "Walker!" she shouted. "Listen to me!"

He turned his head and looked at her. "Please," she implored. "Listen to me. If you let him go I'll provide you with what you need to ensure you remain in control. I know how you can keep Wyatt trapped. But I won't tell you if you kill him."

Walker eyed her with suspicious eyes. "Tell me or he dies."

"Then kill him. And I'll never tell you."

Walker stared at her coldly for a moment then heaved Graham away, across the room. He hit the wall, shattering the plaster before he sank to the floor unconscious. Walker grabbed Chance by the arm and jerked her to him. "Tell me."

Chance heard a growl from behind her and looked to see Wa'ya poised and ready to attack. "No, Wa'ya," she said softly.

"Tell me!" Walker shouted, shaking her hard enough to lift her up.

Chance's feet scraped at the floor as she tried to balance herself. At last Walker stopped shaking her and she got her feet securely on the floor again. "I'll tell you," she said. "But the answer isn't here. We have to go somewhere else."

He jerked her up close to his face. "You think you can trick me?"

She looked into his eyes and saw the malice and hate that burned within him. "No." She forced herself to not look away. "It's no trick. Let me send the wolf away and see to John then I'll take you to the answers. I give you my word."

Walker set her down roughly. "Will you untie me?" she asked as she turned around.

For a moment he did nothing, then he untied the cord that held her wrists bound. She rubbed the tender flesh as she knelt down in front of Wa'ya. "Thank you for coming to my rescue," she whispered as she put her arms around his thick neck and pulled his face close to hers. "I need to ask something else of you. Go to Tsa'li and tell him to come to the place where you and I first met. Tell him that I'm bringing Walker."

Wa'ya gave her a lick on the face then turned and leaped through the broken window. Chance stood up and walked over to John. He was staring at Walker as if he were seeing some sort of monster.

Chance heard a noise outside. A car was coming down the road. She expected it to be the sheriff. "We have to go," she said as she untied him. "You wait for Tom and tell what happened then have him send for an ambulance. You need to see a doctor."

"Chance, don't go with him!" John's voice was a strained whisper as he grabbed her hand.

"I have to." She cut a look at the window, seeing car lights turning toward the house. "I'll be fine. Just make sure Graham doesn't get away and tell Tom what happened."

John opened his mouth and even moved it but no words emerged. Finally he gave up. "Please," she implored him. "Do as I ask."

He nodded but kept his eyes glued on Walker. Chance turned and looked at Walker. "I'm ready."

"Then show me."

She gave John one last look then led Walker out of the house. She hoped that Wa'ya understood what she asked and would find Tsa'li, because he was the only one she

could think of who would have any idea how to deal with Walker. For her part, all she could do was try help Wyatt find the strength to rise to the surface and take control. If he couldn't, she had no idea what she'd do.

\* \* \* \* \*

Greg pushed away from Iris and sat up with his back propped against the headboard. "I don't know about this," he said as he reached for the half-empty drink glass on the nightstand. "To begin with, my old man'll put a bullet through Nashoba's head the first chance he gets."

"So let him." Iris sat up and tossed her hair back over her shoulder. "Honey, this will work, trust me."

Greg shook his head and drained the glass. "Iris, I probably trust you more than anyone I know, but this is getting deep. If we get caught we'll get the fucking chair."

"But we won't get caught. Not if you follow the plan exactly like I told you."

"You willing to bet your life on it?"

"Absolutely."

Greg studied her for a long time then got up and refilled the glass, this time omitting the ice and water and pouring bourbon to the rim. He took a long drink and stared at her again. "It might work. But how can you be sure that Nashoba will show up?"

"Leave that to me," she said with a smile.

Greg smiled and took a big gulp of the drink. "Has anyone ever told you how incredibly beautiful you are when you're being devious?"

Iris laughed and leaned over to him. "Baby, you ain't seen nothing yet."

\* \* \* \* \*

### *Swain County*

Chance arrived at the spot she had told Wa'ya to meet her with Tsa'li. There was no one there. Walker's hand clamped down on her shoulder from behind, squeezing hard enough to make pain shoot down her arm. She jerked and pulled free, backing away from him.

"Give me what you promised."

She tried to think of a way to stall but at the moment her mind was blank. All she could think of was the malice in his eyes and the way her heart was pounding in fear. "Walker," she started, not having any idea what she was going to say. Before she could do more than utter his name, Wa'ya appeared. With him was the pack. The wolves circled Chance and Walker.

Walker looked around nervously at the wolves that stood with heads lowered, hackles raised and ears flattened. They all eyed him, growling softly but menacingly. Chance realized from watching Walker that he was afraid of the wolves. She was surprised. Wyatt hadn't been afraid of Wa'ya—respectful, but not filled with fear like Walker appeared to be. That gave her an idea.

"Wyatt. Wyatt, please, if you can hear me, you have to try and come back. Walker's afraid and that makes him vulnerable. You have to try and take over now. Please, Wyatt. I need you. John needs you. Wyatt, please try."

Walker turned on her with a snarl. Chance didn't have time to evade him as he grabbed her. She heard the growl of the wolves at the same time she screamed. Wa'ya edged closer, snarling and snapping at Walker. The other wolves followed his lead, inching closer to Walker as he held Chance tightly by the arms.

"Wa'ya, no," Chance pleaded with the wolf. "Please. If you kill him Wyatt will die too."

Wa'ya stopped his advance, effectively halting the rest of the pack. But he didn't alter his stance or move his eyes from Walker. Chance looked up at Walker. His eyes were like black coals that burned with rage.

"Wyatt, please!" she whispered. "I need you, please fight him."

"He cannot fight me. He is no match for me. He allows himself to be weak, drained of power by a woman. He cannot stand against me."

Chance racked her brain for something to say. She had to find something she could use against Walker. Suddenly it came to her. "But he will win. Don't you remember? It's love that will determine who emerges victorious."

"Love? Love is for the weak."

"Then the weak will overcome, because we both know that's the rules of the game. You can't win without love."

"Then love it shall be," he growled.

Chance didn't know what he meant but she had no time to think about it. Walker started tearing at her clothes. She fought him with every ounce of strength she had but it was not enough. He tore her shirt to shreds with his bare hands then threw her to the ground and started tearing at her pants.

"No!" She screamed and kicked at him. "Stop!"

He laughed and slapped her hard enough to make her head spin. "But this is what you want," he said mockingly. "Have you forgotten your own rules so fast? Love wins. So, love it will be. I will make you mine and erase all feeling you have for him. You will be mine and he will be obliterated for all time."

"Nooooo!" she screamed as he jerked her pants down. He slapped her again and she saw spots dance in front of her eyes as a wave of dizziness made her incapable of fighting. She shook her head desperately, trying to clear it, and realized that he was

positioned between her outspread legs. She saw him lower his pants and fear gave her a fresh burst of strength. Kicking him in the stomach, she started scooting backward.

The kick did little more than make him angry. With a howl of rage he grabbed her by the ankles and jerked her to him. Chance closed her eyes, tensing with fear and dread.

Even with her eyes closed tightly she could see the sudden flare of light. She felt Walker release her and her eyes flew open. Everything was bathed in a blue-white light so brilliant that it was hard to see. Shading her eyes with her hand and squinting she could just make out Tsa'li's form standing beside Wa'ya. The source of the light appeared to be coming from his outstretched hand.

Walker stood and turned to Tsa'li. "Your magic will not change anything, old man."

Tsa'li looked at Walker without anger or expression. "You have no place here."

"No place? That has a familiar ring, doesn't it? How many times did I hear you say those words to me as a child? How many times did you say it to him? Walker, you have no place here. Wyatt, your brother has no place here. It was always you and Wyatt! Wyatt the kind, Wyatt the compassionate, Wyatt the smart, the perfect, Wyatt the next wise man of the people. You had nothing but time and love for him but what did you offer me? Nothing except, 'you have no place here, Walker. This is not for you, Walker.' You taught me well, despite your efforts not to. You taught me that hate is stronger than love and with hate I will see you and he both vanquished. Then I will take his woman and your precious crystal and no one will be able to stand against me."

"Uluhsati will not allow its power to be used for evil," Tsa'li responded. "Its power will not be bestowed on one who has no love in his heart, on one who walks the path of evil. And the victor in your battle will not be decided with hatred and killing, but by matters of the heart. If you had listened to me at all in your youth you would know that. Wyatt did."

"Is that so, old man? You think you taught him what he needed to know? I don't think so. I think you failed. You had your chance with Wyatt and he walked away and now you're out of luck. There will be no one to follow in your footsteps. My hate is strong enough to defeat both of you. You think you have won some victory this night? I laugh at your foolishness just as I laugh at his. There will come a time when you are not around to save him. Then I will destroy him and reclaim that which was taken from me. I will live and not you or your petty magic will stop me."

"Perhaps not," Tsa'li said calmly. "But you will not succeed this night. Even as we speak he grows stronger."

"No!" Walker grabbed his head in both hands. "No, damn you! I won't be pushed back into the darkness. I won't let you. I won't—"

A scream of rage drowned out his final words. Chance saw him stagger, still holding his head, then he abruptly fell to his knees on the ground. She could see that

the transformation was trying to start and rushed over to him. "Come on, Wyatt," she encouraged him, "you can do it. You're stronger than he is. Come on."

He groaned and fell forward onto his hands and knees. Chance crawled around in front of him and lifted his face up to look in his eyes. "Wyatt, I know you can do it. Please come back. Do it for me. I need you."

Another groan that sounded as if he were in pain came from his lips. Then the transformation came over him. Within moments Walker was gone and Wyatt was once more himself. The brilliant light faded, putting them once more in darkness. Chance wrapped her arms around Wyatt as they knelt on the ground. "Thank god!" she breathed and hugged him tighter. "You did it, Wyatt. You beat him."

He shook his head and sagged down to the ground. Chance looked up at Tsa'li. "This has to end! Please, Tsa'li, tell me what to do. We have to get rid of Walker. Wyatt can't take much more of this. Please, he's your only grandson. You have to help us!"

Tsa'li nodded and walked over to her, stripping off his jacket. He helped her put it on then knelt down in front of her to look into her eyes. "You must discover the truth."

"The truth? Tsa'li, I need help, not advice I don't understand. I have to find a way —"

"You must discover the truth. You must find the point at which the hate became manifest. The seed that was planted that has now grown and bloomed into a festering rage. Only when the hate is destroyed will the land and the people be free and safe once more. Only then will it stop."

"And how do I go about finding this truth? Where do I look?"

"That is not for me to say," he replied as he stood. "Perhaps the starting point for all searches is within."

Chance stared at him in confusion as he turned and walked away. Within moments he had disappeared into the darkness. One by one the wolves turned away, melting into the darkness like phantoms. Finally there was only Wa'ya, Wyatt and herself. Wa'ya walked over and licked her across the face. She rubbed his head then turned to Wyatt.

"We have to get back, Wyatt. Your father needs medical attention."

Wyatt looked up at her and she could see the desperation and fear in his dark eyes. "I don't know if I can fight him much longer. He's getting stronger every time."

"Not stronger than you," she said and extended her hand to him.

Wyatt took her hand and stood. "Are you sure you're okay now?" she asked. "We really do need to get back to John."

"I'm fine," he said after a moment's hesitation. "For now, anyway. Thank you. You seem to be making a habit of saving me."

She squeezed his hand. "Just returning the favor. Besides, I'm acting purely for selfish reasons. I don't want to lose you."

Wyatt pulled her to him and held her tightly. "I love you, Chance. More than you can imagine."

She hugged him tightly. "Then how can we lose?" she asked, hoping that in reality they just stood a fighting chance.

\* \* \* \* \*

Winston Holling slammed down the phone and barreled out of his study like a man possessed. Puffing and panting, he ran up the long curved staircase and down the hall. He burst into Greg's room, only to find it empty.

"Where is he?" he shouted.

"Sir?" The butler appeared at the top of the stairs.

"Winston?" Clara, his wife, opened the door of her suite and looked out. "For goodness' sakes! What are you shouting about?"

"That no-account, imbecile son of yours! Where is he?"

"I haven't seen Gregory today," she replied coolly, giving him a pinched-face look of disapproval. "And I will not tolerate you shouting and disrupting this household in that manner."

"Put a sock in it," he grouched as he walked past her and started back down the stairs. "Where is he?" he asked the butler.

"I do not know, sir."

"Well, find him! And do it damned fast!"

"Yes, sir."

Winston returned to his study and poured himself a stiff drink, despite the earliness of the hour. He needed something to fortify himself with. According to the information he had just received, the men Greg had sent to John Nashoba's house had not only failed to complete their assignment, they had managed to make a complete mess of things. Less Turner's son was dead, apparently mauled by a wolf, and Graham Dickerson was in the hospital. Sheriff Smith had charged him with breaking and entering, assault and battery, as well as attempted murder and rape. From what Winston had been told there was a witness to what had happened, some reporter from CNN was swearing that Hank and Graham and another unnamed man broken in and tried to kill John and rape her.

A tap on the door of the study got his attention. "What is it?"

"Master Greg just arrived," the butler informed him. "I just now saw his car out front."

"Well, tell him to get his ass in here!"

The butler disappeared and Winston paced back and forth, drinking and muttering to himself. He had finished his drink and poured another by the time Greg walked in.

"I hope you have some explanation!"

Greg looked at him in confusion. "For what?"



"For once again fucking up!" Winston shouted and proceeded to tell Greg what had happened. For a few moments Greg didn't speak. He just stood staring at his father in shock.

"Well? Do you have anything to say?"

Greg looked at his father and smiled. "Yes, as a matter of fact I do. I have a plan that will take care of everything."

"A plan?" Winston laughed. "A plan? God help me, he has a plan. Should I just shoot myself now and get it over with?"

"Well, if you're not interested, just forget it," Greg said and started out of the room.

"Wait!" Winston called out just as he reached the door. "What's this plan of yours?"

Greg grinned and closed the door. "The way I see it this can work in our favor. Right now that Indian sheriff thinks he has the goods on us. But what would happen if suddenly the story took a whole new slant?"

"I'm not following you." Winston's voice had dropped several decibels.

"Okay." Greg took a seat. "The way I see it, if we can make it look like Nashoba is trying to set us up, then that'll convince the authorities that what happened at his house is all part of some plan of his. Now, it just so happens that I know for a fact he's been sticking it to that CNN lady. As luck would have it, I just happen to have a date with her. So, all we have to do is grab the bitch and let Nashoba come after her. When he does, we kill the woman, make it look like he did it and also make it appear like he tried to kill us. Then he takes the fall and we're in the clear."

Winston thought about it for a few seconds. "I still think we should just kill the sons of bitches and be done with it."

"I thought you didn't want the old man to die?"

Winston frowned thoughtfully. "You're right. Not 'til I get what I want from him. But this plan of yours—it's risky. If you do something to the woman, Wyatt and his old man are likely to come gunning for you."

"So, we grab old man Nashoba and the medicine man and that makes even more bait." Greg smiled. "Wyatt won't be able to turn his back on his father and the old man. He'll come for them, all right. But by then you'll have whatever the hell it is you want from the old man and the entire Nashoba clan will be history."

"I do like the sound of that." Winston smiled. "But I think that I should call Maurice and fill him in."

"Why? What business is it of his?"

"Let's just say that Maurice and I have a mutual interest in seeing John Nashoba and his son go down."

"Oh?" Greg raised his eyebrows. "That's news to me."

"Not anymore. Okay, you set your scheme in motion. But you listen good. You don't get Nashoba the first try then he's mine. I'm not for waiting around any longer. I want this thing settled and over, you hear me?"

"Yeah, I got it."

"Then what are you waiting for?"

Greg stood up and turned then stopped and looked at his father. "There is one other thing. Don't you owe me an apology?"

"For what?"

"For underestimating me."

Winston smiled despite himself. Greg really was a chip off the old block.

\* \* \* \* \*

Chance answered the door to find Sheriff Tom Smith standing on the porch. "Come in," she said and stepped aside. "I didn't expect to see you so soon."

"How's John?" he asked as he closed the door behind him.

"Resting," she replied as she walked to the stove. "Want a cup of coffee? I just made a fresh pot."

"Sure, thanks." He took off his hat and sat down at the table. "Where's Wyatt?"

"Right here." Wyatt walked into the room. His hair was still wet from the shower. "What's up?"

"I think you should know it's like a pressure cooker over this thing. And I don't know if I can hold the lid on. Holling's attorney has already called twice, demanding to speak with Graham Dickerson. Claims he's representing Dickerson. And I got a call from the capital this morning. Seems like Winston called and raised hell to some of his bigwig friends. They want me to turn Dickerson over to the State boys."

Chance handed him a cup of coffee, set one down on the table in front of Wyatt then took a seat herself. "Then we need to move fast."

Tom and Wyatt both looked at her, clearly not understanding what she meant. "Look, we all know that as it stands right now, it's Wyatt's, John's and my word against Dickerson's. Now, in a perfect world that would be enough. But as we all know, it's not a perfect world and we're up against people who play dirty. Believe me, I know. I grew up with those kind of people. So, the way I see it, we have to convince Dickerson that it's in his best interests to come clean and confess and maybe in return some of the charges against him can be dropped."

"What?" Wyatt barked. "You can't be serious? That man tried to rape you and he almost killed my father and you want to drop the charges?"

She put her hand on his arm. "Wyatt, I'd like nothing better than to see him put in jail for what he did and tried to do, but to be honest, he's more valuable testifying with us than against us. And besides," she looked over at Tom, "it's our best chance of winning against them in court."

Tom took a drink of his coffee then nodded. "I have to agree. The problem is how do we convince him to go along with us?"

Chance smiled and winked at him. "Tell you what, you decide what charges we can drop and I'll take care of the rest. I think I know something that just might convince him it'd be beneficial to switch teams."

"That sounds suspiciously like you're going to bribe him," Tom commented then held up his hand as Chance opened her mouth to speak. "No, don't tell me. The less I know the better off I am."

"So?" she asked.

"So, okay. I'll take care of the paperwork and give you a call later then you can take it from there."

"Thanks." She smiled as he stood up. "And I'll tell John you were here."

"Wyatt." Tom nodded at him. "You take care."

"Will do," Wyatt replied. "See ya, Tom."

Chance let Tom out then turned to Wyatt. "What?" she immediately asked as he sat looking at her with lowered eyebrows and his arms crossed in front of his chest.

"Did anyone ever tell you that you're in the wrong line of work?"

She laughed as she remembered where she had heard that question last. "As a matter of fact, yes. I seem to remember someone saying something about me selling ice to the Eskimos."

Wyatt pulled her down on his lap and nuzzled her neck. "Just don't go getting in trouble."

"Trouble?" She pulled back and looked at him in mock innocence. "Who me?"

He shook his head and pulled her back to him. Their lips met and for a moment everything else faded into the background. Neither of them heard John until he cleared his throat then they both turned and looked at him standing in the doorway. "Did I hear something about you selling something again?" he asked, looking at Chance.

She smiled and got up to take his arm and lead him to the table. "As a matter of fact, Tom was just here and we were all talking about the best way to sell sand to an Arab."

John raised one eyebrow at her then looked over at Wyatt. "I always knew this girl was going to turn out to be a handful."

Wyatt laughed as Chance put her hands on her hips and pretended to be insulted. "You don't know the half of it, Dad."

## Chapter Ten

Wyatt was making himself busy, trying to keep his mind occupied as he waited for Chance to get back from the hospital. He didn't hold much hope that she could convince Graham Dickerson to testify against Holling, but he hadn't told her that. And maybe his father was right. John seemed to think she would be able to get through to Dickerson.

Putting away the rest of the dishes, he walked outside and picked up the ax that was propped against the woodpile. His father was resting, and after the beating he had taken he was in no shape to split wood. Wyatt, on the other hand, felt like he needed the physical exertion just to dampen the turmoil that brewed in his mind.

He'd just put a large log on top of the splitting block when he heard the phone ring. Leaning the ax against the block he ran up the back steps. Just as he opened the door the ringing stopped. He heard his father's voice coming from the den.

"Well, I don't know. Why don't you hold on and let me find out."

Wyatt walked into the den just as John was rising from the couch. "Is that Chance?"

"No, Iris Waters." John covered the receiver of the phone with his hand. "She said she wants to come over and talk to us about what happened last night but there're some problems with her rental car and she can't get another one until in the morning. She wants to know if you'll come pick her up."

Wyatt considered it. He almost wished Iris had not had his Jeep returned. That would have given him an excuse. And he knew that Chance did not want him to be around Iris. She was convinced that Iris had deliberately tried to coax Walker out. Why, she had no idea. But she was very insistent that Wyatt not be alone with her. They couldn't take any chances on Walker making another surprise appearance.

Wyatt valued her insight, and after what happened the last time he was with Iris, he was not inclined to argue. Iris did seem to want to bring Walker out. Wyatt couldn't figure out why. She was supposed to be there to help them, and having Walker take over and run amok was the last thing they needed.

"I don't know," he finally answered. "Why don't we wait for Chance then both of us can go over and get Miss Waters."

John relayed the message then listened for a few seconds. "Why don't you just talk to him yourself," he said and held the phone out to Wyatt.

For a moment Wyatt toyed with the idea of refusing to speak with her. But when he heard a mocking laugh echoing in the dim recesses of his mind and Walker's voice taunting him for being afraid of a woman he grabbed the phone from his father.

"What?" His voice was harsh and unfriendly.

"Well, hello to you, too." Iris sounded amused. "Since you seem to be in such a fine mood, I won't keep you long. I just need to know if you'll come pick me up so we can go over what happened at your father's house."

"What time?"

"Ummm, say sevenish?"

"Fine," he replied and hung up the phone.

John looked at him with a concerned expression on his face. "Is there something you're not telling me about this lawyer lady?"

"Like what?" Wyatt turned away so that his father wouldn't see his face.

"Like for instance the way she seems to be conveniently around when...when Walker takes over."

Wyatt was surprised that John knew. He turned and looked at his father. "Chance told you?"

"This may come as a surprise, but I don't think you should discount her ideas, Wyatt. Chance isn't what I expected. In fact, I'm downright impressed with how she turned out. She's got a good head on her shoulders and she sees a lot. Maybe more than the rest of us. At least Tsa'li seems to think so."

Wyatt sat down across from his father. "Don't you think it's kind of strange how Chance and Tsa'li hit it off? I mean, here she is, growing up in the rich world, surrounded by luxury and ignorant of our ways and beliefs and she comes up here and immediately Tsa'li takes her under his wing like...like..."

"Like he sees something in her the rest of us don't?"

"Yeah. Don't get me wrong, Dad. I love Chance. I guess I always have, I just ran from it for a long time. And I know she's smart and insightful and I value her opinions. But there's more going on between her and Tsa'li than we're aware of."

"What makes you say that?"

"For starters, she's the one who told me about Walker."

"You think Tsa'li told her?"

"Well, who else could it have been? I didn't remember and you sure didn't tell her, so..."

"I see your point." John leaned back and closed his eyes for a moment. "Wyatt, I think maybe it'd be best if we just trusted Tsa'li on this. He's not one to make rash decisions, or one to put trust where it isn't deserved. Besides, if he hadn't told her about..."

John's voice faded off and Wyatt looked at him in concern, afraid that maybe he had overtaxed his energy. "Dad? You want to lie down? Can I get you something?"

John shook his head and opened his eyes. "Some things are just painful to remember."

"You mean Walker."

John nodded sadly and Wyatt felt an uncertainty take hold of him. "Dad, do you ever—" He stopped in mid-sentence, unsure whether to ask the question.

"Do I what?" John leaned forward and looked at him seriously.

"Do you ever wish it had been me instead of Walker?" He looked down at the floor as he asked.

"Never. Son, look at me."

When Wyatt looked up and met his father's eyes he saw the love that burned bright within them. "Don't blame yourself for what happened. All you did was try to prevent a killing then try to survive. There's no dishonor in that."

"But I killed my brother. My twin. Dad, I've been remembering things...things about when we were kids. Walker and I...we were more than brothers. We were like two parts that made up one whole, if you know what I mean. He was like part of me—the part that was strong and brave and not afraid of anything. I loved him. How could I have killed him?"

"Son, we can't change the past. No matter what we think we should have done, it doesn't matter. It's done and all we can do is learn and move on. Besides, you were only a child."

"That still doesn't excuse me. God, when I think about it, it makes me sick. I almost wish I hadn't ever remembered. Maybe it would have been better just to let it stay buried and not remember because now I have to face that not only am I a killer, I have been since I was a child. What kind of man does that make me? How can I even think about having a life with Chance, about having a family? What am I supposed to do?"

"What you've always done, son." John pushed himself up and walked over to put his hand on Wyatt's shoulder. "Be brave and honest and true to what you know to be right. That's all any of us can do. As for Chance—well, I think that's already been decided now, hasn't it? That young woman loves you, Wyatt, more than she loves herself. And she's willing to do whatever it takes to help you get free of Walker's presence. If I were you I'd take strength from that love and hold on tight to it. Real love has power that most people can't imagine. You just believe in it and nothing can stop you."

Wyatt looked up at his father and smiled. "I never knew you were such a romantic."

John smiled and patted his shoulder. "There was a time, boy. Yes, indeed, there was a time."

Both men turned at the sound of a car turning into the drive. Wyatt walked to the door and saw Chance getting out of her Jeep. She ran to the door and threw her arms around his neck. He hugged her tightly for a moment then set her down.

"You're supposed to be resting!" she exclaimed as she saw John standing. "Now come on, you need to get your strength back." Hurrying over to him she took his arm and led him back to the couch. "Are you feeling okay? I can call the doctor and ask him

to come over if you want or I'll drive you to his office. Did you eat anything? Can I fix you something?"

"Whoa!" John laughed and held up his hands. "I'm fine, really. Thank you. Now, tell us what happened at the hospital."

Chance grinned and sat down beside him. "It took a little convincing but I talked him into it. As we speak Graham Dickerson is giving a formal statement to Sheriff Smith, telling all about how Greg Holling gave him and the others orders to come over here."

Wyatt sat down and looked at her in amazement. "I can't believe it! What did you do, bribe him?"

"Puh-leeze!" She tossed her hair and pretended mock indignation. "I simply pointed out the advantages to telling the truth—and added a few little inducements like what happens in prison and how long he would probably be there since I was a witness and have a global news network behind me. In the end, he saw things my way."

John smiled and patted her knee. "Like I said, you should've been a salesman—or a politician."

"Uuugh!" She shuddered then gave him a kiss on the cheek. "So, what have you two been up to while I was gone?"

John looked at Wyatt with raised eyebrows and Wyatt looked down a little sheepishly. "What?" she asked. "Wyatt?"

"It's nothing. Iris Waters called wanting me to come get her so she could come over and talk about things and I told her we would pick her up later."

"When later?"

"Around seven."

"You're going to have to call her back then. Or have you forgotten? I'm supposed to meet Greg Holling tonight."

"I don't want you to go!" Wyatt's voice came out harsh and commanding.

She looked at him for a moment then cut a look at John. John shrugged and she got up to go over and sit on Wyatt's knee. "I have to. If I can get Greg to admit to something then that just makes our case against him and his family stronger. And we're going to need all the ammunition we can find if we're going to fight them and win."

"I just don't like the idea of you being alone with him. I don't trust him."

"Neither do I. But I can handle him. Please, let's not fight about it. I have to do this. You and John can go over and talk to Miss Waters. There's no reason she has to come here. And with your father with you she won't try any tricks."

"Okay," he agreed after a few moments. "But you take your phone and Wa'ya with you."

"Yes, sir." She gave him a goofy salute and stood up. "Now, if you two don't mind, I have to talk to Tsa'li. Wa'ya's outside waiting. I'll be back in a little while."

"I'll go with you," Wyatt offered.

"No," she said then looked at John. "John's supposed to attend a council meeting and I think you should drive him and make sure he doesn't overextend himself. Besides, I'll be fine. Wa'ya will be with me."

"I guess there's no point in arguing with you, is there?" he smiled reluctantly.

"Nope." She returned the smile then grabbed his shirt and pulled him over to her. "Have I told you lately that I love you?"

"Not that I recall," he teased.

"Well, let me rectify that. I love you, Mr. Nashoba."

Wyatt smiled and leaned down to kiss her. "And I love you."

Chance wrapped her arms around him and clung to him for a few moments after the kiss ended. Then she released him and gave him a smile. "I'll be back soon."

He nodded and watched her leave then turned and looked at his father. "What time's the meeting?"

"About the meeting—George Red Fox is stopping by on his way. I'm going to ride with him. We have some things we wanted to discuss beforehand."

"I don't mind taking you."

"I know and I appreciate it, but I want to talk to George. Matter of fact, I think I'll get cleaned up. He'll be here pretty soon."

Wyatt nodded and watched John leave the room. He flopped down on the couch and stared at the plywood that covered the broken window then picked up the phone to call around and see if he could find a replacement window somewhere. He had to do something to keep busy. That was the only way to keep his mind off the faint but constant threatening presence of the other in his mind.

\* \* \* \* \*

Tsa'li was sitting on the back steps of his house looking into the depths of the crystal when Chance and Wa'ya emerged from the trees into the backyard. He looked up at her as she walked to him. Chance stopped in front of him, cramming her hands into the pockets of her jacket.

"I need help," she said despondently.

"What help?" he asked, looking once more at the crystal.

"About what you told me," she said as she took a seat on the ground. Wa'ya lay down beside her and put his head on her leg. "I've been thinking about it," she said as she rubbed between Wa'ya's ears. "And I think I know what the starting point was."

Tsa'li looked at her and she continued. "It was when Sarah died, wasn't it?"

He didn't answer but turned his attention once more to the crystal. Chance looked at it then at him. "That's the crystal you had last night, isn't it? The one that caused that



light. You called it something when you were talking to Walker and he said something about it being magic.”

“Do you believe in magic, Woman with the Eyes of a Wolf?” Tsa’li looked her in the eyes.

“I didn’t use to. Now I think I do. Will you tell me about the crystal?”

Tsa’li looked down at the crystal in his hand then extended it to her. Chance took it from him. As soon as it touched her skin she could feel the vibration that emanated from it. She looked up at Tsa’li in surprise but he didn’t seem to notice. His eyes were lifted to the sky. A moment later he began to speak.

“In the legends of my people the crystal, Uluhsati, is told of. In times long past there lived a giant serpent, so fearful and deadly that even to look upon it was fatal to man. This was the Uktena. It is said that the body of the Uktena was as thick as a tree trunk and that it had scales that glittered like jewels. On its head was a pair of horns and between the horns was an enormous crystal, the Uluhsati.

“The Uluhsati was a great prize, for whoever could win possession of it would be ensured with success in every activity of man. But beyond that, the Uluhsati endowed its owner with the ability to foretell who would live and who would die. Many sought the Uluhsati but it is neither easily won nor possessed. The light from the magic crystal was so bright and pure that it would befuddle the senses of man, causing him to run toward the Uktena and thus becomes its victim.

“In all of the history of my people there is only one man who succeeded in killing an Uktena and securing the Uluhsati. That man was a powerful Shawnee conjurer, a Cherokee prisoner of war by the name of Oganunitsi. The Cherokee planned to kill Oganunitsi, but he bargained for his life by pledging to seek out the Uktena and secure the crystal for them. He won his freedom with this pledge and was released.

“Oganunitsi searched the length of these mountains and beyond. Along the way he encountered many dangers and faced many trials. But still he persevered. It was not until he reached the mountain known as Cohutta in what is now the northern part of the state of Georgia that he finally came upon the Uktena, sleeping on the mountaintop.

“Oganunitsi set about devising a way to defeat the Uktena. First he dug a circular trench along the mountainside. Then he piled the trench high with pine cones. When this was done he set the pine cones on fire and shot an arrow into the seventh spot on the body pattern of the Uktena.

“The wounded serpent leaped at Oganunitsi. But Oganunitsi was prepared and evaded the attack by leaping beyond the trench of fire. The Uktena writhed and spit its deadly venom in its death throes but Oganunitsi was safe beyond the barrier of fire. At length the Uktena died. Oganunitsi waited seven days, during which time the scavengers of the forest stripped the carcass of the Uktena so clean that only the Uluhsati remained. Oganunitsi took the crystal and returned to the Cherokee, presenting it to them and fulfilling his vow.

"Since that time the Uluhsati has been guarded by the Keepers, of whom I am the last."

Chance stared at the crystal for another moment then returned it to him. "But everyone knows about it, don't they?"

Tsa'li shook his head. "Its existence has been kept secret for many years."

Chance thought about the story for a few moments, idly scratching Wa'ya's head as she did. Suddenly she looked up at Tsa'li. "But what if it's not a secret? I mean, surely someone besides you knows about it. Does John know?"

"Yes, he knows."

"How did he find out? Did you tell him?"

"No." He shook his head. "He was told by my daughter."

"Sarah," she said for clarification.

"Yes."

"Then isn't it possible that Sarah told someone else? Maybe someone who doesn't have the same high morals or scruples that John does?"

"I cannot answer that. What reason would she have for divulging the secret?"

"I don't know," Chance murmured. A possibility was taking shape in her mind. "But just for the sake of argument, let's say that she did. What if she did it by accident, not really intending to give away the secret? If that happened, and someone found out that you had the crystal, then maybe they believed in its powers and decided they wanted it for themselves."

Chance jumped up as her idea took more definite shape. "What if..." She paced excitedly as she talked. "What if it was Holling and his men who followed her and Wyatt that day? What if it was really the crystal he wanted? From everything I've been told, he's about as power-hungry and greedy as they come. And we know he's in thick with my father, who would stab his own mother in the back if it made him a buck. So what if they knew about the crystal and followed Sarah to try and force her to tell them where it was?"

She stopped and looked at Tsa'li. His expression didn't change, nor did he speak. He simply stared at her. "That could be it, couldn't it?" she persisted, kneeling down in front of him. "I mean, it makes sense. But something went wrong. Something —"

She jerked in shock as an answer came to her. "Walker! That's it! Walker took possession of Wyatt because Wyatt wasn't strong enough alone and he killed those men."

A frown appeared on her face as she considered her own scenario. "We know that two men escaped. But who were they? Whoever they are, they know what happened that day!"

Tsa'li stood, tucking the crystal into a large pouch tied to his belt. Chance stood, watching him for some sign of reaction as he walked into the house. She sat down on the step and propped her chin in her hand. She had to think. Almost an hour passed

before he returned. Chance looked up at him as he walked outside, carrying a steaming mug in each hand. She accepted one from him and blew on the hot liquid before taking a sip. It was strong, dark tea of a kind she had never tasted.

"Do you think that maybe the crystal doesn't belong here anymore?" she asked, still thinking about it. "I mean, it comes from a time that sounds more like myth than reality. And maybe that's where it really belongs – with the Uktena."

"What makes you say this?" Tsa'li asked as he took a seat on the steps and regarded her thoughtfully.

"I don't know." She shook her head, not sure if she could put into words what she felt. "I guess it's just that...well, maybe aside from you there's no one really worthy of safeguarding the crystal. I can't think of anyone else who could keep it and not be tempted to use it for their own means. Bad as it is to say, I just don't think there's anyone selfless enough to resist using its power."

Tsa'li looked at her with an unreadable expression on his face for a long time. "There was a time when I had hopes that my grandson would be the next caretaker of the Ulusati."

"And I'm sure he would make an excellent choice," she agreed then added, "under normal circumstances. But let's face it, Wyatt has problems of his own right now. And unless you can tell him how to deal with Walker then I don't know what he's going to do."

She looked down at the cup in her hands for a moment. "I'm really afraid for him. I remember what you've told me and I think I understand – at least intellectually. But I still don't see how love is going to determine the outcome. If love is all it takes then why is Walker still here? I know Wyatt loves his father, you, his people, and me. Isn't that enough?"

"Is it?"

She considered it for a moment. "Is this like the old biblical thing? Love thine enemy?"

Tsa'li's lined face rearranged into a ghost of a smile. "It is not just a biblical thing. It is universal."

Chance wasn't sure she followed him and so despite the fear of appearing dense she voiced her questions. "Okay, so we all should love everyone. I can follow that. But what if it was Holling and his men who killed Sarah and Wyatt is just now remembering? If that's true then not only did they murder his mother, but set him on a course that is coming close to destroying him!"

"Did they?"

Chance looked at him like he had lost his senses. "How can you even ask that?"

"How can you not? Do you truly believe that it was those men who charted Wyatt's destiny? Or was his destiny written long before? What of your own? Whose hand wrote your destiny? Your mother, your father, Wyatt?"

"No." She shook her head, "I don't think that. And I suppose I agree with you. Someone once told me that destiny is something that is recorded for us by the universe, but that each of us has free will to chart our own course. Even now I'm not sure it makes sense, but something inside me tells me it's true. So, I suppose I can't blame Holling for what happened to Wyatt, any more than I can blame Walker. But that still doesn't answer my question. How much love is enough? Can Wyatt overcome the dark half that resides in him or will it consume him?"

"That is not for me to say."

"And what of the crystal?"

"The crystal will reside where it is meant to. When and if it becomes time for it to return home, it will leave. Until then we protect it from those who seek to use its power for evil."

"Return home?" Chance's memory was jogged by the phrase. "You mean as in where you originally came from? Is that where the crystal originated?"

"What do you know of where my people come from?"

She set her empty cup down on the step and stood up. "A long time ago Wyatt told me about something he read that was written by a Cherokee from Oklahoma. He said that the Cherokee believe they originally came from somewhere in the Pleiades. I think he said it's called the Seven Dancers. Is that right?"

Tsa'li nodded and smiled at her. "You may have white skin, but your soul is of my people. I am pleased that my grandson saw the wisdom of taking you for a mate. You will help him find the path to freedom."

Chance extended her hand to him and he grasped it firmly in his. "I hope you're right," she said, her voice was almost a whisper. "Because without Wyatt my life would be too empty to bear."

\* \* \* \* \*

Wyatt was just getting ready to leave when he heard a car pull up out front. He walked outside and saw Iris Waters getting out of a blue Ford Taurus. She was dressed in a very tight and extremely short white leather skirt and a sheer white top that was stretched tight across her breasts which were visible as the white leather jacket she wore parted.

She smiled seductively as she walked up to the porch. "I was just leaving," Wyatt said before she had a chance to speak. "I have to go to Bryson. My father isn't here, so I guess you'll have to come back later."

"It's you I wanted to see." She walked up the steps and stopped just inches from him. "We need to talk."

"It'll have to wait." He started to walk around her but she grabbed his arm and stopped him.

"Running?" she asked, rubbing her breasts against his arm.

"No." He pulled free from her grasp. "Just busy."

"This is important," she insisted. "There are still a lot of questions being asked about what happened that night at Black Gap and unless we have some very convincing answers, there's still a good chance that charges could be brought against you."

"We've already been over that." He stepped back from her. "Besides, Tom's already dropped all the charges. He said it was behind us and he won't go back on his word."

"I'm sure he won't. But he's not the problem. Winston Holling's attorney called me this morning and said that he's going over Sheriff Smith's head. He's calling in some markers with some big boys at the state capital. So, unless you like the idea of spending time in jail, you'll make time to talk – now."

Wyatt ran one hand across the stubble of beard on his chin and frowned. "Fine, but can we talk later? I need to get this window replaced and I'd prefer to wait until my father and Chan – and Miss Porter get here and –"

Iris burst out laughing, effectively stopping him. "What's so funny?" he demanded.

"You." She giggled and moved closer to him. "You're afraid."

"Afraid? Of what?"

She ran one finger down his chest. "Of me."

"That's absurd!" He moved away from her as he spoke.

"Is it?" Her tone implied she didn't believe him.

"Of course it is." Wyatt was beginning to feel foolish. He had been shot at, attacked with a knife, swum through snake-infested swamps, shark-filled oceans and survived minefields and explosions. There was no way he was going to be intimidated by one woman.

"Then prove it," she challenged him.

"I don't have to prove anything." He crossed his arms in front of his chest.

"Fine." She tossed her hair. "Have it your way. You're scared to be alone with me. Is it because you're scared Miss Porter will get mad? Is that it? She's jealous of me and you're afraid if she finds out we were alone she'll think something happened? Is she that unsure of you? Why is that, Wyatt?"

"What do you want?" he barked, tired of her taunting and wanting to shut her up.

"I want you to show me exactly where you went that night after you left me standing in your father's backyard. I want to see the route you took and I want you to walk through what happened when you reached Black Gap, step by step."

"Why?"

"Because only by knowing what really happened can I come up with a defense."

"All right," he replied, checking his watch. It would take a couple of hours, but at least it would get her off his back. He looked at her, taking in the white high-heeled boots. "You're not exactly dressed for hiking."

"Don't worry about me," she said and waved her hand in front of her. "After you."  
Wyatt walked down the steps and started around the house with Iris right behind him.

\* \* \* \* \*

Chance entered the house through the back door. "Wyatt? Hey! Anyone here?"

"Just me." John walked in from the hall.

"Where's Wyatt?"

"Don't know. George dropped me off after the morning council meeting and his Jeep was gone. There's a car in the drive."

"Whose?"

John shrugged. "Never seen it before."

Chance frowned. She hoped nothing was wrong but since she had no idea where Wyatt was she didn't see what else she could do but wait for him to return. Except send someone who can find him! she thought.

She walked outside and called Wa'ya. He trotted up from the woods and wagged his tail. "Would you please see if you can find Wyatt? I'm worried. If you find him bring him back here, okay?"

Wa'ya barked once then ran across the yard and disappeared into the trees. Chance walked back inside. While she waited for Wyatt to return there were some things on her mind, and John was probably the best person to talk to about it.

He was sitting at the table when she entered the house. "John, can we talk?"

"Sure, what's on your mind?"

"Well, it's...I'm not sure I have the right to ask you this, but I'd like to talk to you about Sarah."

"Sarah?" He looked up at her in surprise. "What about her?"

"Well," she said and took a seat across from him. "I've been thinking. Tsa'li told me that I had to discover the starting point and I think it was when Sarah was killed. But, I'm getting ahead of myself. Did Sarah know Winston Holling?"

"As a matter of fact she did. She even dated him for a while."

"Really?" Chance was surprised but also curious. If Sarah and Winston had dated it was possible that she had told him about the crystal. "What happened?"

"I don't really know. I know that Winston was in love with Sarah and begged her to marry him, but she said no. She told me that Winston could never be the kind of man she could love. You see, above everything, Sarah valued honesty. She was one of those people who believed in telling the truth, even if it hurt. When she broke off with Winston she said that she didn't want to have anything else to do with him ever."

"And that's when you started seeing her?"

"Well, yes and no. See, I was in love with Sarah most all of my life. I guess the first time I saw her I knew she was the one for me. She was about five and I was eleven. I never cared about any other girl. But I always thought that I didn't stand a chance with her. She was beautiful and smart and I always thought she saw me as kind of a big brother – you know, someone you can talk to, but not someone you fall in love with."

"Then how did you two end up falling in love?"

John smiled and leaned back in his chair. "Sarah had been away at school. I think she was still seeing Winston. Anyway she came home for the summer before her last year at school and I was helping Tsa'li make some repairs on his house. We got to talking one day and before we knew it we'd spent the entire afternoon just sitting there. Things were different after that. About a week later she came to my house and told me that she was finished with Winston and that she loved me. We got married the day after she graduated from college."

Chance thought about what he had said, imagining him and Sarah as they had been back then, young and in love, looking forward to sharing a life, having a family and growing old together. Neither of them had ever imagined that her life would be cut short.

"I know this is painful for you to talk about, but the day Sarah died – I think that Winston Holling was one of the men who survived. But there was a second man. Do you have any idea who it might be?"

John looked away, as if not wanting to meet her eyes. "John, please," she pleaded softly. "I need to know."

"Chance, I..." his voice trailed off. "That time's so hard to think about. And I wasn't there, so I can't be a hundred percent sure and..."

"Then just tell me who you suspect. Please, John, we have to figure this out."

"Well, if it was Winston then there's a good chance the second man could have been your father."

"My father?"

"Yes," John sighed. "You see, Maurice used to date one of Sarah's best friends, Doris Stillwater. Matter of fact, most everyone, including Doris, thought that Maurice would marry her. It was a surprise when he married your mother."

"How so?"

"Well, he was still seeing Doris and suddenly one day he was married and no one knew anything about your mother. Doris told Sarah after she and Maurice had a big fight about it, that the only reason he married her was because she was wealthy."

Chance looked down at the table. She had never known her mother, who had died during her birth, but she did know her father and she wouldn't doubt that he had married only for money.

"What happened to Doris?"

“Well, she and her daughter stayed around for a while. But it was pretty hard for a single woman at that time with a child. Marisa, her daughter, was kind of a shy, gangly girl that didn’t make friends too easy. They eventually moved away and no one’s heard from them for years.”

“A daughter? You mean—”

Before she could finish the question the sound of gunfire made them both jump. John ran to the front room and looked out the window then raced back to Chance. “We gotta get out of here!”

Just as they ran for the back door they heard a man’s voice call out from the front, telling them to come out and they wouldn’t be hurt. John shouted that he was coming out then pushed Chance out the back door. They raced across the backyard and made it to the cover of the trees. Working their way around they could see about a dozen men in front of the house. All except three were armed. Two of the unarmed men were pulling big containers of gasoline from the back of a pickup and another was lighting a homemade torch.

Wasting no more time, John and Chance headed for Tsa’li’s house. Chance was worried about John. He hadn’t recovered from the beating he’d received and having to run through the woods was taking a toll on him. After a few minutes she stopped. “Let’s take a break,” she suggested, seeing that his face was pale and covered in sweat.

John nodded, and leaned against a tree, trying to catch his breath. Aside from the sounds of his breathing, everything was still. When a sudden noise came from behind them they both jumped. Wa’ya bounded over to Chance and took her sleeve in his mouth, tugging at her.

“What’s he want?” John asked, pointing to the wolf.

“I asked him to find Wyatt. Come on, let’s get you to Tsa’li’s then I’m going after Wyatt.”

John nodded and allowed her to drape his arm over her shoulders. Walking slowly to accommodate John, Chance felt panic mounting. Suddenly she was sure something was terribly wrong. She had to get to Wyatt.

\* \* \* \* \*

Wyatt’s pace was swift as he made his way through the forest. He did not look back to see what Iris’ condition was. He was doing as she had asked and showing her the route he had taken that night. He heard her scream behind him and stopped to look back.

She was about twenty feet behind him, holding on to a stout pine and holding one foot off the ground with a grimace of pain on her face. “I turned my ankle,” she moaned. “I don’t think I can walk. It feels like it’s broken.”

Irritation rose immediately. He did not want to be with her in the first place, much less have to baby her all the way back to his father’s house. He wished now he had just



refused to come out here. He should have had better sense. Walking back to her he knelt down and pulled off her boot. Iris transferred her hands from the trunk of the tree to his shoulders as he examined her ankle. "I don't see anything wrong." He released her foot. "There isn't any bruising or swelling. It should be fine. Put on your shoe and we'll rest a few minutes then head back."

"I don't think I can," she complained, keeping hold of his shoulders as he stood. He made a move to step back from her but she held on, still standing on one foot so that his movement made her lean forward against him.

Wyatt could feel her warm breasts pressed against him and tried to ignore it. Iris looked up at him pleadingly. "I can't walk. It hurts."

With a grimace he put his arm underneath hers and wrapped it around her then helped her over to a fallen tree so that she could sit.

"Thank you," she sighed as he settled her on the log. She raised her ankle up and propped it on her other knee. The movement caused her short shirt to rise even higher on her spread legs. Wyatt averted his eyes from the sight she offered and moved to one side.

"It should be okay in a few minutes," he said as he took a seat on the ground.

"Why do you dislike me?" she asked as she rubbed her ankle.

"I don't know you well enough to like or dislike you."

"I'd like the chance to get to know you better," she said, letting her foot move back to the ground but keeping her legs apart.

"I'm already involved." He would not look in her direction. He did not want to see what she was displaying. One glance had told him that beneath the skirt she was naked.

"Oh yes, I forgot—Miss Porter."

"Yes."

"But she's not worthy of a man like you." Iris came off the log and knelt down in front of him. "You need someone strong and passionate and as bold as yourself."

"What makes you think she isn't all those things?" He tried not to look at the sight of her breasts beneath the sheer material as she shrugged her jacket aside.

"I'm a woman, I know these things."

"Well, maybe your feminine intuition isn't working properly," he said as he glanced at her briefly.

She laughed and reached out to run her hand through his hair. "Oh, I think it's working just fine. Let's be honest with each other. You may not like me, but you do want me. I can see it in your eyes."

"Maybe you're just seeing what you want to see." He denied it, even though he admitted to himself that she was tempting.

“Or maybe what I see is the strong side of you that isn’t afraid to want me,” she said in a taunting voice. “The part that isn’t afraid of what Miss Porter will think. Maybe it’s the other you that I see.”

Wyatt did not want to discuss that with her. Even the mention of the other made his heart race anxiously. “Maybe you’re dreaming.” He pushed her away and stood.

“Or maybe you’re lying.” She grabbed the leg of his jeans and pulled herself up, making sure that as she slid up his body his leg remained between hers.

Wyatt felt the now familiar warning signs of Walker trying to exert control and pushed her again. This time, however, she hung on to him. “It’s true,” she whispered huskily. “Part of you wants me, so much it’s eating you up inside. Let that part out, Wyatt. Give in to yourself. I can do things for you she could never do.”

Wyatt was struggling to push Walker back. He could barely focus on her words. “No!” He grabbed her by the arms and pushed her back, gripping her arms tightly so that she could not move against him.

“I can tell you how to win,” she whispered. “I know the secret.”

Wyatt felt Walker surge forward and himself slipping into darkness at her words. He released her and backed away, breathing hard and trying to concentrate on keeping the darkness at bay. But Iris did not let up.

“I know what you want,” she breathed as she advanced on him. “And I know how to make sure you get it. If you were mine, I would show you the way to make sure that you get what you want.”

Wyatt felt himself sliding further into the darkness as Walker clawed his way to the foreground. Desperately, Wyatt tried to hang on to control. But Iris’ words were like fuel to a fire, giving Walker the strength he needed to break free. For a moment that seemed an eternity, the two battled for control.

“I can give you what you want,” Iris continued to encourage Walker. “I can show you how.”

What felt like a spiraling vortex of darkness clutched at Wyatt, dragging him steadily deeper into blackness. For the first time he experienced true terror. This darkness was not like before. It was like falling into nothingness. If he did not escape he would be lost. He felt Walker’s spirit beside him, ascending even as he descended, and tried to take hold of him. But Walker just laughed and pushed him away. With a feeling of defeat, Wyatt felt reality slip away.

Iris watched as Wyatt changed. It was not as if he physically transformed into something else. His size and shape remained the same. But his expressions, the look in his eyes, the way he stood—everything was different. The man who emerged looked confident, arrogant, angry and indestructible.

“Who are you?” she asked.

"I am the Warrior," he barked, watching as she unbuttoned his shirt and ran her hands inside it.

"Hmmm, Warrior," she purred. "A bit arrogant, but I like that. So, Warrior, tell me about yourself."

"You said you would help me." He grabbed her hands in his, making her gasp in pain.

"And I will! But you're going to have to ease up, lover. You be good to me and I'll be good to you. Get it? One hand washes the other."

"What do you want?" he asked suspiciously.

"Why the same thing you do." She pulled her hands free and returned them to his chest. "Power, control, freedom, and..." she looked up at him, "most of all, revenge."

Walker smiled and reached out to cup her breasts in his hands, the sheer material providing little barrier. "And you know how to ensure we achieve these things?" he asked as he rolled her hard nipples roughly between his fingers.

"Oh, yes," she moaned, working to pull his shirt free from his pants.

"I must destroy Wyatt." His hands moved to her skirt and jerked, splitting the zipper and the seam.

"And you will," she promised, unfastening his jeans and pushing them down over his hips. "Trust me."

Walker lifted her up and she wrapped her legs around his powerful body. A cry of pain and pleasure came from her as he thrust into her. He smiled at the sound and shoved her down harder on his erection.

Iris did not resist. She wrapped her arms around his neck and pulled his face to hers. "Fuck me," she moaned into his mouth.

Walker peeled her off him, turned her around and pressed her head down toward the ground. Iris eagerly complied, bending and spreading her legs to give him easier entrance.

She did not expect him to ram the length of his thick dick into her anus. She screamed at the invasion, but he grabbed her by the hips and pulled her ass to him, pounding into her ass.

It took only a couple of strokes before Iris was screaming again, this time for more. "Yes...God, yes...fuck me...fuck me harder..."

Walker fulfilled her demand with a vengeance, reaching around her to roughly stroke her clit and pussy.

"Yes," she moaned. "Oh, Walker, we're perfect for one another. Together no one can stop us."

\* \* \* \* \*

Chance ran after Wa'ya, heedless of the branches that tore at her clothes and the roots that snaked up from the ground to make her trip and stumble. All she could think about was finding Wyatt. She had been worried enough before she and John made it to Tsa'li's. After hearing Tsa'li tell her that there was not much time and that Wyatt was in terrible peril she was absolutely terrified.

Wa'ya paused ahead of her and turned, barking one time sharply. She caught up with him. "Okay, where to?" She started past him but stopped when he did not move. "What?" She stopped and looked down at him. "Wa'ya, we have to hurry. Where is he?"

Wa'ya looked off to his left and Chance's eyes turned in the same direction. "Over there?" In reply he growled softly in his throat. Chance needed no more confirmation. Without hesitation she took off, running up a short but steep incline. At the top she skidded to a stop.

"Wyatt?" Her voice was choked with emotion and shock as she saw him. He was lying on his back on the ground and Iris Waters was sitting astride him, her skirt bunched up around her waist and her shirt hanging open. It was not difficult to see what they were doing.

Chance felt hurt well up inside her. She could not believe that Wyatt would betray her like that. Her feet started carrying her forward toward them before she consciously made the decision to move. They did not hear or see her until she was upon them. She grabbed Iris' hair in both hands and yanked as hard as she could. Iris fell away from Walker, reaching up and screaming as she tried to pry Chance's hands from her hair.

Chance slung Iris as hard as she could. "You bitch!" she screamed.

Iris rolled over and stared up at Chance hatefully. "Don't blame me if you can't satisfy your man, princess. It's obvious that you don't know how to control a man like Walker, but I do." She started to stand but Wa'ya moved close to her and growled menacingly and she immediately sat down, looking at him in fear.

Chance turned and it was then she realized it was not Wyatt she was seeing. Walker was glaring at her. She reacted with the first thing that came to mind. "Did you hear that?" she asked, waving her hand at Iris. "She thinks she can control you. You realize what that means, don't you? Iris doesn't care about you. She only wants to use you, to control you for her own purposes."

"No one controls me!"

"Iris thinks she can. What did she promise you, Walker?"

He looked at Iris for a moment then returned his gaze to Chance. "She is going to help me defeat Wyatt."

Chance laughed and shook her head. "Well, you're a bigger fool than I thought if you believe that. She isn't going to help anyone but herself. She has some hidden agenda all her own and she doesn't care about you or anyone else. She's not going to help you because it's Wyatt she wants, not you."

Surprise and anger registered on Walker's face. He snarled and advanced on Iris. "You betrayed me. No one deceives me. You will be punished."

Iris scrambled away on her rear as fast as she could. "No!" she exclaimed. "Don't listen to her. She's lying. She's just trying to trick you. I don't want Wyatt. It's you I want. Together we can't be defeated. Together we can succeed against those—"

"Enough!" he roared.

Wa'ya moved to stand beside Chance as Walker continued toward Iris. "No, please listen to me!" she begged, pushing herself up and backing away.

"You will pay," he growled.

Iris gave a strangled scream and turned, running as fast as her bare feet would carry her over the rough terrain. Walker started after her and Chance called out to him. "Looks like she pulled a good one on you, Walker."

He whirled around and faced her and she could see the rage on his face. There was no way she could stand against him. She heard Wa'ya's growl and realized that unless she did something, one of them would end up hurt. She could not let that happen so she did the only thing she could think of.

"Wa'ya, go to Tsa'li," she said calmly. "Take care of him and John."

Wa'ya growled once more, clearly hesitant to leave her side, and she reached down to stroke his head. "It's okay. Go on. I'll be fine."

He looked up at her then at Walker. For a moment he didn't move, then he turned and disappeared into the trees. Chance watched him leave then looked at Walker. "Okay, it's just you and me," she said as evenly as possible. "So do whatever it is you're going to do."

He laughed and drew near her. "Whatever? Have you any idea what it is I want to do, white woman?"

"Yes." She met his eyes.

"You will scream when I take you."

"Yes, but that won't stop you, so go on. Do it and get it over with."

"Then he is defeated." Walker smiled victoriously.

"No," she argued without raising her voice. "You can rape me, you can hurt me, you can even kill me. But it won't change anything. You'll still lose and I'll still love Wyatt and I'll never stop trying to get him back. See, the simple truth is that you can't understand that kind of love because you don't remember what love feels like. And that's why you'll lose."

"I will not lose! I am stronger and smarter and it is I who deserves to live. He is weak and afraid. He is not worthy! And you, white woman—if you were smart you would see that it would be wiser to choose me. Wyatt is not half the man I am."

"You're absolutely right. He's twice the man you are."

Walker roared in anger and grabbed her by the throat. "Twice the man?" he sneered in her face. "Why don't we put that to the test?"

Chance tried to scream but she could barely breathe. She beat at Walker with her fists and kicked like a caged animal but she could not break free. All her struggles served to do was excite him. He pushed her down and they rolled around on the ground as she fought to get away. In the end her strength ran out.

He ripped her pants away, tearing them apart at the seams. Chance tried once more to escape, kicking at him weakly. He slapped her three times in quick succession, making her head reel. Before she could recover he grabbed her knees and wrenched her legs apart.

She had never felt such pain as she did when he stabbed inside her. She felt as if she were being torn apart. Walker smiled as he pounded against her. Chance screamed until her throat was raw, fighting him until she had no more strength left. At last he finished and rolled over on the ground beside her, panting hard and staring up at the sky.

It took several tries before she could sit. Her mind was in shock at what had happened and she didn't know what to do. All she wanted was to get Wyatt back, but she didn't know how. Tsa'li said that everything hinged on love, but love didn't seem to be enough. How then could she hope to win?

An idea occurred to her, one that made her break out in a cold sweat. She was afraid to try, but it was the only thing she could think of. Hesitantly she reached out and put her hand on Walker's arm. "I'm sorry," she said softly.

He turned and looked at her in surprise. "I'm so sorry," she repeated, looking into his eyes. "Wyatt, I tried, I really tried, but I'm not strong enough alone. I can't do it without you. If you can't help me then Walker wins. I can't fight him anymore. He's too strong for me."

She saw something flicker momentarily in his dark eyes and hope swelled within her. Then it died and Walker was once more in control. "Very good," he said, sitting up and pulling her close to him. "At last you admit it. I am the strongest."

"Yes, stronger than I. I can't fight you, Walker. Only Wyatt has the strength. Without him I can't stand against you."

"Then you renounce your love for him?"

"No, never. I just can't fight you anymore. Unless he saves me, then I guess I'm lost."

Walker smiled and his hands tightened on her. She looked into his eyes and pleaded with what was trapped within him. "Wyatt, please. Save me."

Walker's smile faded and a series of expressions moved across his face as if he were experiencing some sort of muscle spasm. Suddenly he released her and moved back, clutching his head in both hands. Sweat beaded on his face and chest as his breath grew rapid and forced. Chance moved forward tentatively, reaching out to him. "Wyatt, please," she whispered. "I need you. I'm afraid."

Walker screamed and bolted to his feet, backing away from her as if he were the one who was afraid. Chance tried to stand. It took several attempts, but at last she got to her feet. "Wyatt," she called, reaching out to him.

She stumbled and fell, crying out as she hit the ground. She heard Walker scream as if in terrible pain and looked up. The transformation was beginning. "Wyatt!" she screamed.

Suddenly it was finished. Wyatt staggered toward her, falling to his knees beside her. She pushed herself up to sit and reached for him. He came into her arms, shaking as if he were freezing. She held him tightly for a long time until the trembling stopped. Then he pulled back and looked at her. "Please tell me it was just a bad dream. That I...that he didn't—"

She looked down for a moment. "I'm sorry."

"You're sorry?" he asked as he tilted his head back and took a deep breath. He swallowed hard, blinking back the tears that welled in his eyes. "You've got nothing to be sorry for. But me—I have plenty to beg your forgiveness for."

"Yes, you do," she said in a tight voice.

He looked at her, surprised by her tone, and as soon as he did she slapped him as hard as she could. "How could you be so dumb as to go off with Iris? God, what were you thinking?"

"I don't know!" he yelled, then immediately lowered his voice. "I'm sorry. I guess I deserved that. I didn't want to go with her but she kept at me, saying that Holling was cashing in some chips with some big shots at the capital and that I was going to be arrested for murdering those men at the Gap and that the only way she could defend me was to know exactly what happened and...and I finally just agreed to get her to shut up."

Chance stared at him crossly for a moment then put her hands over her face. Wyatt didn't speak or move and finally she lowered her hands. "I'm sorry I slapped you," she apologized. "But you've got to stay away from her. There's something very wrong here. She's got some agenda that we don't know about and I, for one, don't want to have anything to do with her. I'm firing her as soon as I can. We'll find another lawyer but I don't want Iris Waters within twenty feet of you."

"A hundred feet. Chance, I swear I didn't think anything would happen. And I swear to you that if I had been able to stop Walker I would have. I don't want Iris. I love you and I'd never betray you."

She nodded and put her hand over the red imprint her slap had left. "I love you, too, Wyatt. I always will."

"We have to get you home," he said, stripping off his coat. "Here, put this on."

She let him help her on with his coat. "Can you..." He hesitated. "Are you able to walk?"

Chance nodded and he pulled her up. "Are you sure?" he asked when she winced in pain.

"I'll make it," she assured him even though at that moment she would have preferred to just lie down and pass out.

He wrapped one arm around her, draping her arm across his shoulder for support. "Maybe it'd be best if I carried you."

"I'll be okay." She smiled at him, thinking how lucky they both were that he had been able to overpower Walker and return. "Thank you for saving me. I was really afraid."

"It wasn't much of a rescue. And I guess I'm not much of a hero, but I do love you, and I swear that I'm going to find a way to either get rid of Walker or at least learn how to control him."

"I know."

They started walking. After a while she realized they were headed in the direction of John's house. She stopped and looked up at him. "I think we better head over to Tsa'li's."

"Why?"

"Because I think that's where your father will be staying for a while."

A concerned look took hold on Wyatt's face. "Has something else happened?"

She nodded and started walking again. "There was some trouble."

Wyatt groaned but didn't interrupt as she began to tell him what had happened.



## Chapter Eleven

Iris was out of breath and her feet felt like chunks of ice by the time she found her way to John Nashoba's house. She gasped in surprise as she walked into the backyard. The house was nothing more than a smoldering pile of rubble. Her car was still parked in the driveway, covered with a thick layer of ash and soot.

Getting in the car, she locked all the doors and took a deep breath. What had happened had frightened her more than she would ever have admitted to anyone. The thing that Wyatt changed into was more like some vicious animal than a man. She wondered why he had called himself Walker, but dismissed the thought as something else claimed her attention.

An expression of rage took hold of her features as she started the car and backed up. If Chance Davenport hadn't shown up she would have been able to control Walker. It was Chance who ruined everything. Now Iris wasn't sure she would be able to win Walker's trust again.

*But he's still a man*, she thought with a smile, remembering the feel of his body next to hers. And she had never had any trouble controlling men. You just had to know the right buttons to push. Confidence in her own abilities reasserted itself. He might try to resist her, but in the end he would be like all the others – putty in her hands.

Chance was the problem. She was proving to be more of a nuisance than anticipated. Iris' eyes narrowed as she thought about Chance. Perhaps she should have told Greg to kill her and get it over with. *No, if we stick to the original plan it'll all work out*, she assured herself.

Suddenly she was eager to get back to her hotel. There was just one thing she needed before she could set the final phase of her plan into motion and she was anxious to see if it had been delivered to the hotel. As soon as she had the papers in her hand it would be time to close the chapter on the Davenports and the Hollings.

\* \* \* \* \*

Tsa'li and John were sitting in the small kitchen of Tsa'li's house when Chance and Wyatt entered. "Did Wa'ya come back?" she asked.

Tsa'li nodded with a frown on his face. John jumped up and helped Chance into a chair. She grimaced as she sat down and John looked at Wyatt in concern.

"I think you should call Doctor Black," Wyatt said quietly.

"No!" Chance exclaimed.

"Yes," he insisted quietly.

"What happened?" John's eyes moved over Chance's tangled hair and Wyatt's coat hanging on her small frame.

She looked down at her feet, noticing how dirty they were and how scratched her bare legs were. Wyatt looked from his father to Tsa'li. "Walker raped her."

A sharp intake of breath from John made Chance look up. Wyatt pulled out a chair for John, who sank into it with a sick expression on his face. "My god." He propped his elbows on the table and lowered his head down into his hands.

Tsa'li looked at Chance. "Do you require the attention of a doctor?"

"No."

"Yes," Wyatt insisted at the same time.

Tsa'li looked from one of them to the other then walked over and picked up the receiver of the old rotary phone that hung on the kitchen wall by the ancient refrigerator. He dialed a number and waited for several moments. "This is Tsa'li. There is someone here who needs your help."

A moment later he hung up and looked at Wyatt. "Fill the tub. She will want to bathe."

"Thank you." She nodded in appreciation to him as Wyatt left the room to do as he ordered. That was exactly what she wanted. To get clean. Thinking about what Walker had done made her feel ashamed and somehow soiled. She felt as if she should have been able to stop him. She felt angry and part of her hated him, but another part of her could not hate him for what he did, because even as it was happening, she could not help but see Wyatt in him. And she could never hate Wyatt.

She looked up to see Tsa'li staring at her intently and John watching her with a pitying expression on his face. She didn't know what to say to either one of them so she returned her gaze to the floor. She had been thinking about something that came to her mind while she was in the forest with Walker. A new possibility had occurred to her that she had not considered before and it was one that concerned her deeply.

"Tsa'li..." She didn't look up as she spoke. "There's no way to destroy Walker, is there?"

"Is that what you want? To destroy him?"

She looked up at him and for a moment was caught in his dark eyes. She searched herself for the answer to his question then shook her head. "No, not really. I only want him to leave Wyatt in peace. But I don't know how we're supposed to convince him to do that when he's so full of hate and rage."

Tsa'li nodded thoughtfully. "Yes, that is so. But even against hate and rage there are weapons that are effective."

"What? If you know then please tell me!"

"The answers lie within your own heart."

She looked at him in perplexity and frustration. She didn't know how much more she could take. She felt like she had already reached the end of her rope and it was badly frayed. Wyatt came back into the room. "The tub's ready."

He helped Chance up and walked her into the bathroom. As soon as they left the room, John looked over at Tsa'li. "I've already lost one son. I don't want to lose another. Is there a way to set Walker free without destroying Wyatt?"

Tsa'li reached over and put his hand on top of John's. "There is always a way, my friend. One only has to see the path and follow it."

John sighed and looked away. "Well, that makes about as much sense as anything else I've heard lately."

Wyatt was pacing the kitchen floor when the doctor entered the room. "Is she okay?"

Doctor Black nodded. "As far as I can tell. Barring any unforeseen internal damage, or disease, she should be fine."

"Internal damage? Disease?" Wyatt's face paled. "What do you mean by that?"

"Just what I said. Wyatt, without x-rays and such there's only so much I can determine. And she refuses to go to a hospital. She could have internal damage and god only knows what diseases she got from... Well, the point is I've done all I can."

Wyatt looked at his father. "We have to talk her into going to the hospital."

"She does not need a hospital," Tsa'li said, standing from his place at the table.

"With all due respect," Wyatt argued. "I think in this instance modern medicine is better equipped to deal with—"

"She does not need a hospital," Tsa'li repeated and left the room.

Wyatt looked from his father to the doctor. "Do you think she should be in the hospital?"

Doctor Black shook his head. "At this point, no. Aside from some bruising she appears to be undamaged. I would advise rest, however. And I would advise that she be tested for HIV in a couple of weeks. In fact, periodic testing over the next six months would be wise. In cases of rape where there was no protection used, there is always the chance of contracting some such disease."

Wyatt nodded and said nothing. No one had told the doctor who the man was who had raped Chance and he was not going to try and explain it now. He knew that she wasn't in danger of contracting HIV from him. Until he had been with her, he had made a religion out of safe sex. *Oh, shit!* Iris! The thought of what Iris and Walker had done made him feel sick. He could have put Chance at risk.

Doctor Black looked at John. "How're you feeling?"

"Better. Thanks for coming over. How much do I owe you?"

"Nothing. John, I know what all of you are trying to do and I want you to know that you have my support. The Holling family has been riding rough-herd over all of us far too long. It's time for it to stop. If there's anything I can do to help, you just let me know."

"Thanks." John shook his hand.

The doctor turned to Wyatt. "That's some woman you have there, Wyatt. I'd hang on to her if I was you."

"I intend to. Thank you."

The doctor left and Wyatt looked at his father. "I better go check on Chance."

He went into the bedroom to find Chance sitting up in bed and Tsa'li sitting beside her. Both of them looked up as he entered. "Chance, I wish you'd change your mind and let me take you to the hospital."

"I don't need to be in a hospital," she argued and slid off the bed with the sheet wrapped around her. "I'm okay, Wyatt. Really."

Wyatt looked at Tsa'li and Tsa'li stood. "I gave her something to help her body heal. She will be fine. She just needs rest. Take her to the place of healing and remain with her for three days. When the third sun sets return here."

"See?" Chance smiled and walked over to Wyatt. "Tsa'li wouldn't lie to you."

Wyatt looked at his grandfather. "When must we leave?"

"Now. Gather what provisions you need," Tsa'li replied then looked over at Chance. "I will find clothing for you. As soon as you are dressed you must go."

Wyatt didn't argue but left the room. Tsa'li provided Chance with a pair of worn jeans that were too large, a soft white T-shirt and a well-worn flannel shirt, both also too big. She strapped a belt around her thin middle to hold up the jeans while Tsa'li located a pair of old knee-high lace-up moccasins that had belonged to his daughter, Sarah.

By the time Chance was dressed, Wyatt was waiting in the kitchen with a large backpack strapped over his broad shoulders and another in his hand. He and Tsa'li were engaged in a low-toned conversation that ended the moment she entered the room.

"Sundown of the third day you begin the journey home," Tsa'li instructed.

Wyatt inclined his head, gave his father a pat on the shoulder and walked to the door. Chance gave both Tsa'li and John a kiss on the cheek and followed Wyatt out.

"You sure you're up to this?" Wyatt asked. "It's a good four-hour hike, maybe longer in the dark."

"I can make it," she assured him.

Wyatt wasn't convinced she was being completely honest, but decided to take her at her word. He'd keep an eye on her and if she started to look like she was struggling he'd either stop or carry her.

Twilight had fallen by the time Wyatt and Chance reached their destination, a stand of old oaks bordered a deep lake, sheltered at the base of the mountains. They were miles from the nearest sign of civilization and it was high unlikely they would encounter anyone. For all practical purposes, they had the wilderness entirely to themselves.

Chance was shocked at herself. Here she'd just been forced into sex by some spirit inhabiting the body of the man she loved, and she was admiring his long muscular legs, tight ass and brawny arms. The fact that he was her lover filled her with a glow that was incomparable to anything she'd ever felt before.

Wyatt set about building a campfire and soon flames were dancing in tongues of gold, nearly a match to the last streaks of light slanting across the sky. She found the small brown bottle that Tsa'li had prepared and instructed her to drink when they made camp. He said it would help her body to heal and soothe her. It tasted bad enough to either heal or kill, but she drank all of it.

Wyatt spread out one of the bedrolls then turned to her, taking her in his arms.

"Chance, I don't know how to start apologizing for what happened. I swear on all that's holy that I'd never—"

"Shhhh." She raised two fingers to his lips to still his words. "I know, Wyatt. I know. It wasn't you and I don't hold you accountable. Besides, it's done. We survived and we're together. Nothing else really matters now, does it? I mean, here we are, surrounded by all this beauty, alone like there's no one else in the world. Do you really want to waste the time we have on that?"

"No, but—"

"But nothing," she said firmly. "Now, since we *are* all alone, are you going to just stand there, or are you going to kiss me?"

Wyatt felt such a surge of relief and love wash through him that it made him feel weak in the knees. With infinite tenderness he lowered his lips to hers. Chance sighed as his tongue gently invaded her mouth, and wrapped her arms around his neck, wanting nothing more than to melt into him so that they became one and the moment would last forever.

She felt the growing bulge against her belly a moment before he ended the kiss. "Sorry," he said sheepishly, "but damn, Chance, you get to me and I can't control it. I want you even when I've just had you."

"Then have me again," she suggested.

"No. Not yet. Tsa'li said your body required a full day to heal."

"Well, that doesn't mean we can't do other things, now does it? Look around. We're completely alone. We can do anything we want."

"And what exactly did you have in mind?"

"Taking off your clothes piece by piece and tasting every inch of you."

"Christ, woman," he groaned, his hands unconsciously tightening on her arms as his excitement rose along with his cock.

"Do I take that as a yes?" she asked flirtatiously.

"Yes, please," he agreed. "Take me, I'm all yours."

"I'll hold you to that, Nashoba," she threatened sexily as she pushed him in the direction of the bedroll. "Now get out of those boots and lie down."

"Yes, ma'am!" He grinned and quickly sat down to comply.

Once Wyatt laid back on the bedroll with the spare tucked behind his head, Chance knelt down beside him and reached for the top button of his shirt. As promised, each inch of skin that was revealed was given loving attention by her lips and tongue. The smell and taste of him woke a longing in her womb that spread throughout her body. She spread the shirt back to uncover him from neck to waist and trailed more kisses down his body, stopping at the button of his jeans.

Her nimble fingers unbuttoned and unzipped the jeans and her mouth took advantage of the new delights, moving through the hair that trailed down his abdomen to disappear from sight in the jeans.

"Raise your hips," she commanded huskily.

Wyatt complied and she tugged his jeans down his legs, over his feet and tossed them aside. Wyatt finished stripping off his shirt and was just casting it aside when he felt her tongue run along the length of his cock.

His body jerked when she took the head into her mouth and circled her tongue around it, flicking at the sensitive tip and tiny opening. One of her hands gripped the base of his cock and squeezed in a steady pulse as her mouth worked teasing the head of his dick and inching slowly down, taking more of it into her mouth.

Wyatt pressed his hips up, wanting to sink fully into her warm wet mouth, but she wanted control. "Not yet, big guy."

She stood and stripped off her clothes. The firelight on her slim body was a vision of seduction that had Wyatt reaching for his own cock. She lowered herself down between his legs and brushed his hand aside. "That's mine."

Kneeling down so that her firm ass was tilted up in the air, she began with his right ankle, kissing and licking her way up the inner side of his leg. When she reached the junction of his thighs, his cock jumped in anticipation. She pushed his legs farther apart and ran her tongue along the crease of his thigh then down, beneath his balls and up the other side. Wyatt groaned when her wet tongue circled his testicles, stroking one then the other, before taking one gently into her mouth to suck and pull tenderly.

One of her hands moved to grasp his cock as she continued to tease his balls. At first her stroke was light and slow. But as his balls tightened with excitement, her strokes became firmer and faster. Within minutes Wyatt's body was taut and quivering. Each time he would come close to release, she would slow, work her way up or down his body, leaving a trail of longing wherever her lips touched and left.

She teased him until twilight had transformed into night and the moon began its ascent into the heavens. Then she took him in her mouth. Wyatt ached with need and fisted his hands in her long hair, wanting to drive into her mouth yet not wanting it to end.

Chance stretched it out until it was clear that he couldn't last much longer. Her mouth tightened on him, sucking him deep into its warm interior, over and over until she felt the pulse of his climax crescendo. He groaned and gripped her hair as he shot into her mouth.

Wyatt went limp and she rose up to look at him. He was the most beautiful man she had ever seen, more perfect than she could have dreamed and she loved him beyond measure.

He raised his head and she saw matching emotion mirrored in his dark eyes. He held out his hand to her and she crawled up to curl against his side, one arm and leg across his body.

Wyatt pulled the spare bedroll from beneath his head and shook it out to spread over them. He kissed her forehead and she raised her face to his. "I love you, Wyatt," she whispered and kissed him with such tenderness that it brought tears to his eyes.

"And I'll never love anyone else," he promised.

With a contented sigh, she laid her head on his chest and stared into the flickering flames of the fire. Within minutes she was asleep.

\* \* \* \* \*

When Chance woke, she was confused. The sun was past its zenith in the sky. Had she slept that long? She rolled over and saw Wyatt coming up out of the water of the lake. Water glistened on his bronze skin and ran in rivulets from his long hair, creating tantalizing trails of liquid light on his magnificent body. He was not aware she was watching until he drew near the fire and picked up a towel he had draped over a branch.

"Hmmm, nice show," she said. "Can I get an instant replay?"

"Well hello, sleepyhead."

She sat up and stretched, the covering falling away from her nude form. "What time is it? How long have you been up?"

"For two days," he replied, drying his hair.

"Two days?" She couldn't believe it. "I slept for two whole days? Damn, what was in that stuff Tsali gave me?"

Wyatt chuckled and walked over to sit down on the bedroll beside her. "I have no idea, but it must have been good."

"Well, no duh!"

"How do you feel?" he asked.

She realized that she felt fine. Reaching down between her legs she tested to see if her pussy was still sore. It wasn't. "It doesn't hurt!" she exclaimed, and tested again by inserting two fingers into herself. "Not at all!"

Wyatt fell back on the bedroll with a groan. "God almighty, woman!"

"What?" She looked at him with wide eyes.

"You're definitely trying to kill me."

"What did I do?" She was completely confused.

He laughed. "What did you do? Well, how about sitting there with your fingers up your pussy? Christ, woman, don't you know men fantasize about that?"

Chance felt a flush work over her skin. "Oh!"

"Now don't go getting all shy on me," he said with a husky growl in his voice. "I was diggin' it."

Chance couldn't help but smile. "Well, then maybe there's more where that came from. But it's gonna cost you, Nashoba."

"Anything," he agreed. "Whatever you want is yours."

"Better be careful with those promises. I want a lot."

"The deal stands," he said and turned on his side to watch her. "Now where were we?"

Chance smiled seductively and lay back. Her hair fanned out on the bedroll, the golden strands glistening in the shaft of light streaming down through the branches of the trees.

She raised both hands to her chest and began a spiraling descent downward, pausing to cup her breasts up and together then releasing them to circle the peaking nipples, squeezing them between thumbs and index fingers. One leg bent and released, spreading wider and affording him a view of her golden-haired pussy.

While one hand busied itself with her breast, the other hand traveled down the length of her body. Fingers raked through the hair of her mons, slipped lower to separate the lips of her pussy, opening her to his heated gaze.

With Wyatt watching her with eyes hooded with lust, her own desire peaked and she lost herself in the moment.

Wyatt's eyes darkened with lust as he watched her. She was his every fantasy come to life. He lost track of time, his hand stroking his cock as she pleased herself.

With little pants of pleasure Chance stroked her hard clit, then let her hand dip lower to disappear into the wet folds, emerging wet with her own juice. She raised her fingers to her lips and inserted them into her mouth and he nearly came on the spot.

"My turn." He was eager to get in on the action, sure that if he watched much longer he'd lose his load just lying there.



"Finally," she murmured sexily and opened her arms to him. He came to her, kissing her hungrily. His tongue caressed hers and she deepened the kiss, sucking his tongue deep into her mouth.

His mouth left hers and he sat to one side, kissing her breasts and belly, working lower and sending shivers of delight over her skin. His hands moved down her hand, over the swell of her ass and beneath, just brushing her pussy from behind.

Chance held on to his shoulders as he moved lower and clamped his mouth on her sex, working his tongue in the folds, tasting and exploring. His hard cock throbbed and pulsed and she twisted to take it in her mouth. Wyatt groaned appreciatively and grabbed her to roll them both over, so that he was on his back with her kneeling above him, her pussy at eye level.

Chance gasped at the sensation of his tongue lapping at her clit and then sliding down her folds. Reveling in the sublime sensations created by his mouth, she took his cock in her mouth, sucking it hard.

His fingers joined the party, squeezing her ass and circling her anus. He lubricated one finger with her cream and gently probed her ass, all the while sucking at her clit. Her orgasm came quick and hard. Pleasure crashed down on her, and she moaned against his cock, writhing and pumping against his mouth.

With her mouth clamped firmly on his dick, sucking and drawing the come from him and her pussy weeping into his mouth, Wyatt couldn't hold back. As her body vibrated and pumped, his climax rocked him in waves that echoed throughout his body.

Chance moved off him, collapsing on her back. Wyatt felt for her hand and her fingers twined with his. For several minutes they lay perfectly still, breath and pulse slowing to normal.

Wyatt sat then stood, pulling Chance first to her feet then up into his arms. With long sure strides he walked into the lake, wading out until the water reached his chest. Chance squealed and clung to him. "Jesus, that's cold!"

"Refreshing," he corrected as he released her and she sank fully into the water.

"Cold!" she argued even though it was not all that cold.

"Invigorating" he returned with a grin.

"Chilly," she replied with a mischievous smile just before she climbed up on him and pressed him beneath the water.

Wyatt grabbed her and pulled her under with him. Their lips met and for a few moments they remained beneath the surface, surrounded by silence, locked in the kiss.

When they surfaced, he shook his hair back and grabbed her, tossing her over his shoulder to wade back to shore. He stopped and set her down by an old oak. The sun dappled their skin, sparkling drops of water casting glints of light. A slight breeze caused her skin to tingle and her nipples to harden even more.

He pressed her back against the tree and leaned into her, claiming her with a kiss that sent fire racing through her veins. His teeth bit at her earlobe and shivers ran down her body, making her pull him closer, rubbing her wet sex against him.

Wyatt grabbed her by the hips and lifted her up. She wrapped her legs around his waist and he guided himself into her wet sex. Chance gripped his shoulders, working her body against his, taking him deep inside her. His hands beneath her ass supported and guided her, up and down.

Their tempo increased, building until both were lost. Wyatt shuddered as he came, pressing her into the tree so that the rough bark dug into her skin. "I love you," he breathed as the last of the wave subsided.

Chance wrapped her arms tightly around him, wishing they could stay there forever. Never return, just stay there, the two of them, all alone.

Wyatt carried her to the bedroll and lowered down with her still wrapped around him, sitting on his lap.

"Time for us to go," he whispered against her neck.

"Not yet," she pleaded.

"Tsa'li said twilight." Wyatt had no more desire to leave than she, but knew they must.

Chance drew back to look at him. "No matter what happens, Wyatt, I love you and I always will."

"It's going to be fine," he assured her even though he was far from certain. While he was here, in the wilderness with only her, he could control the thing within him, keep it at bay. Back in the world, he was not so sure. But he had to strong for her. "Believe me, Chance. It will be okay. It has to."

"Why does it have to?"

"Because I've waited too long to have you and I won't let anything come between us. Ever. You're mine, Chance. Now and for always. Call me a pig, call me what you want, but you're mine and heaven help anyone who tries to take you away from me."

Chance smiled and placed her hand on the side of his face. "No one could ever do that, Wyatt. Because I am yours. I always have been. I love you."

Wyatt wrapped his arms around her, holding her tight and saying a silent prayer that their wishes were not in vain.

\* \* \* \* \*

It was after midnight when they reached Tsa'li's house. They let themselves in and quietly made their way to the spare bedroom. Not wanting to awaken Tsa'li, they silently undressed and climbed into the bed. Chance lay staring into the darkness for a long time, thinking about all that had happened, and wondering what was to come. Little did she know that Wyatt was doing the same thing. It was nearly dawn before either of them drifted off to sleep.

The smell of coffee woke Wyatt. He tried to slip out of bed without waking Chance, but she had a death grip on him even in sleep.

"Hmmm, coffee," she murmured then opened her eyes. "God, I'm starving!"

Wyatt smiled and rose. "Get dressed and I'll go scare up some breakfast."

Neither of them had to bother. Tsa'li and John were both waiting in the kitchen when they entered, fresh from the shower, but with Chance still wearing Tsa'li's old clothes.

No one had much to say during breakfast. Chance shoveled down a plate of eggs, three slices of toast and two cups of coffee. "God, that was good," she sighed. "Now, I hate to be the downer, but we need to pay attention to the matters at hand."

"Which—" she held up her hand as Wyatt started to interrupt, "means that I need to go get some things from the motel. And Wyatt, you need to take John shopping. His house is destroyed and he'll need some things. Also, you need to call the insurance company about the fire and tell them that the adjuster hasn't shown up yet. And tell Sheriff Smith that John and I both will testify to what happened."

"I'll do all that. But I don't want you going anywhere by yourself. If you have to go somewhere, I'll go with you."

"I'll be fine. But if it'll make you feel better, I'll take Wa'ya with me and we'll just go to the motel then come straight back here."

"No."

"Wyatt, don't be stubborn. I'll be fine. No one will even know it's me. Tsa'li said I could take his truck and no one will be expecting me to be driving it. I'll be back in an hour, tops."

"Let her go," Tsa'li sided with Chance.

Wyatt frowned at him. "You know, it seems like you and she are getting to be a real matched pair. Do you have any idea what could happen to her if Holling's boys grab her?"

"Can you see the future, my grandson? Do you know that is what will happen?"

"Well, no, but—"

"Then let her go."

Wyatt frowned at the look that passed between Chance and Tsa'li. There was more going on than met the eye. But he knew when he was outnumbered. "Okay," he relented.

She smiled and hugged him then turned to Tsa'li. "Could I borrow something to wear?"

He nodded and left the room. Wyatt pulled her into his arms. "Just promise me that if you see any signs of trouble you'll turn around and come straight back."

"I promise," she said and returned the embrace. "Wyatt, we're going to get through this."

"You sound so sure. Why is that?"

"Because I am. Besides, the Uluhsati told me."

"You know about the Uluhsati?" He pulled back and looked at her in surprise.

She laughed and walked to the door as Tsa'li entered with a bundle of clothes. "You'd be surprised what I know."

\* \* \* \* \*

Chance turned off the road into the parking lot of the motel. She didn't see anyone around. "Okay, you wait right here and I'll be back in a few minutes," she said to Wa'ya, giving him a rub. He lay down on the seat as she got out of the truck. There was a dark sedan parked a couple of spaces down, but she didn't see anyone in it. Going into the office she asked for another key, explaining that she had left hers in her car at a friend's house. The owner reminded her that she would have to pay for the key if she didn't return it. Chance assured her she would return it and received a duplicate.

She walked outside and looked around, then scolded herself for being paranoid. There was no reason for anyone to want to harm her. She walked to her door and inserted the key. She hadn't even turned it in the lock when a hand closed over her mouth and something hard jammed into her back.

"One wrong move and you're halfway to hell," a man's voice warned her. "You got it?"

Chance nodded and let go of the door, leaving the key in the lock. Her assailant pulled her around and nudged her in the direction of the dark sedan she had noticed earlier. She stopped and elbowed him as hard as she could. The hand dropped from her face and she made a mad dash for the truck. Just as she grabbed the door handle the man grabbed her from behind, around the waist. She kicked and screamed, still hanging on to the door.

Wa'ya was growling and snarling as Chance fought with the man. She managed to get the door open and Wa'ya bounded out. His teeth sank into the man's arm and he shook his massive head. The man screamed and released Chance, trying to get away from the wolf.

Chance hesitated, looking at what was happening, then turned and made a dive for the truck. Unfortunately she was too late. Someone grabbed her from behind and picked her up. She screamed and fought as she was carried over to the dark sedan. The back door opened and the man pushed her inside.

Chance heard Wa'ya's howl as she fell into the car. She immediately tried to jump back out. The door was slammed in her face at the same time someone in the backseat grabbed her. She lashed out, feeling the satisfying sensation of her knuckles connecting with flesh.

"Goddamn!"

She jerked her head up and looked into Greg Holling's face. "What the hell do you think you're doing?" she demanded, knocking his hand away as he reached for her.

"Let's get out of here," he told the driver.

"What about Buster?" The driver looked at the man in the parking lot who was being mauled by the wolf.

"I said get out of here!"

The driver threw the car in gear and backed out. Chance grabbed the knob to roll down the window and started turning as fast as she could. "Wa'ya!" she had time to scream before Greg grabbed her by the hair and yanked her backward.

Chance whirled and hit at him and he released her. She gave the two men in the front seat a nasty look then turned her attention back to Greg. "What's the meaning of this? In case you haven't been informed, kidnapping is a crime."

"Who's kidnapping?" Greg looked at the men in the front seat with wide eyes. "You see anyone being kidnapped, boys?"

"Not me," the man in the passenger seat replied with a laugh.

Chance paid the man no attention but continued to stare angrily at Greg. "I don't know who you think you are but I don't find this amusing and I certainly don't have to take this kind of crap from you."

"What have I done?" he asked in mock innocence. "All I did was pick you up for our date."

Chance's mouth dropped open. There was something very wrong with Greg Holling if he thought he could just go around abducting people whenever he liked. "We don't have a date."

"We do now," he said with a shrug. "What's the big deal?"

"The big deal?" she asked, thinking that he was an even bigger jerk than she had previously thought. "Did it ever occur to you that women don't appreciate being dragged at gunpoint and thrown into a car? Or do you think that's cute?"

"Whatever. By the way, nice outfit. What do you call that—early Salvation Army?"

Chance wasn't interested in her attire, although she would have preferred to be wearing her own clothes. The flannel shirt and pants Tsa'li had loaned her were miles too big. She had the sleeves of the shirt rolled up around her wrists and the pants were held on by a belt that Wyatt had poked a hole in halfway down its length.

"Stop the car!" she barked at the driver. "Right now!"

The man looked up in the rearview mirror at Greg and Greg laughed and shook his head. Chance turned to him with her eyes flashing. "I demand that you have him stop the car this instant!"

"Too bad." He leaned back and regarded her insolently.

Chance studied him for a moment. It didn't make sense for him to grab her. What good would it do him? Oh, crap! she thought. *Unless he plans on using me to get to Wyatt.*

*But why would he? He doesn't know about us. Or does he? And if he does then how did he find out? Graham Dickerson? No, he was too scared to talk. Besides Tom has guards posted at his hospital door. Then who? No one else knows...except Iris.*

Suddenly some of the pieces fell together. She leaned back and stared out of the window, ignoring Greg and the other two men as she thought about it. After ten minutes or so she turned and looked at Greg. "So what's this all about, Greg? The story I'm doing on the casino and all the trouble that's been going on?"

Greg laughed at her. "You think we really give a rat's ass about that casino? Hell, let those red bastards build it. We'll just burn it down. Yo, Jack, pass me that bottle from under the seat."

The man in the passenger seat reached under the seat and pulled out a bottle of bourbon, passing it over the seat to Greg. Greg unscrewed the top and tilted the bottle up to his mouth to take a long drink.

"Damn, that's good," he said as he lowered the bottle and extended it toward Chance. "Want a drink?"

"No."

"Suit yourself." He took another long drink. Chance wondered just how much he had consumed and if there was a chance she could get him to talk. She cut her eyes at the men in the front seat and changed her mind. She needed to get Greg alone.

"So, where are we going on our date?"

Greg laughed and took another drink. "Best place in town."

"Oh? Where's that?"

"Just sit back and enjoy the ride."

Chance didn't push it. The way Greg was drinking it would be a miracle if he was still coherent when they arrived at wherever it was they were going. She looked out the side window at the passing scenery and it dawned on her where they were headed. Remaining silent, she spent her time trying to come up with an idea of how to get the information she wanted from him and then escape.

The car turned onto the drive that led to the Holling estate. The driver didn't stop at the house but bypassed it and continued on to a smaller house set at the rear of the landscaped lawn. It looked like a guesthouse.

The driver and the man in the passenger seat got out of the car as soon as they stopped. Greg opened his door and crawled out, holding on to the door for support as the driver opened Chance's door and stepped back, leveling a gun at her as she got out.

"My, you must be used to getting stood up," she directed her comment at Greg. "Or is it that you're used to having women run out on you?"

He sneered and shoved her toward the house. Once inside he took her to one of the bedrooms. "In here."

"Thanks but no thanks."

He pushed her inside then followed. "I think you'll be comfortable here." He waved his hand around.

Chance looked around the room. There was no phone and she could see the silhouette of a man standing outside the one window in the room. "Why are you doing this?"

Greg didn't answer her. He looked at the man who stood at the doorway. "Don't let her leave this room. I have to make a call then I'll be back."

Chance watched him weave out of the room then looked at the man who stood in the doorway looking at her. Turning her back on him she crossed her arms and frowned at the guarded window. This was definitely not good.

\* \* \* \* \*

Iris answered her cellular on the second ring. "Yes?"

"It's me," Greg slurred. "We've got her."

"Excellent." She smiled. "Don't do anything yet. Just keep her there. I'll be in touch."

"Whatever you say, baby."

"Oh! By the way, John Nashoba's house seems to have burned to the ground."

Greg laughed. "Yeah, what a shame."

"So where would he go?"

There was a moment's silence before he answered. "Probably Charley's."

"Charley?"

"Yeah, Crazy Charley. He's some kind of medicine man or some shit like that."

"Do you know where he lives?"

"Yeah, why?"

"Just give me directions." She grabbed a pad and pen. "I'll fill you in later."

She scribbled down the directions then tossed the pad on the bed beside her purse. "Okay, lover, stay close by the phone. I'll be in touch."

Pressing the disconnect button on the phone she smiled to herself then released the button and dialed a number. It rang four times before a man answered.

"Davenport residence, may I help you?"

"Maurice Davenport, please."

"Mr. Davenport is not in at present, may I take a message?"

"No." Iris hesitated. "Do you happen to know where I can reach him? This is his attorney in Atlanta, Ms. Waters. It's very important."

"I'm sorry, Ms. Waters, but I cannot divulge that information. However, if you'd like—"

"I am sure that Maurice will be very displeased when he discovers that our negotiations with Turner Broadcasting have fallen through solely because you would not give me a number where I could reach him!" she snapped imperiously.

"Oh! Well...well, in that case, I suppose it would be all right. He left early this morning for Bryson. He can be reached at the estate of Mr. Winston Holling."

"Thank you." Iris hung up. She was surprised by that news. *Wonder what made him come up here?* she wondered then dismissed it. She would find out from Greg what was going on. Right now she had other matters that required her attention.

\* \* \* \* \*

Wyatt was pacing the floor like a caged animal. Ever since Chance left he had been feeling more anxious and edgy. Not to mention the fact that if he allowed himself to be still, flashbacks of what had happened in the forest would compete with older memories, such as what happened in Iraq. The images of what had happened with Iris and Chance were so emotional he forced himself not to dwell on them.

That gave the memory of Iraq control of his mind. Time and again he would see DJ and Fish as they raped the woman. And each time rage would threaten to consume him. He didn't understand why the memory of DJ and Fish kept coming to mind. Especially in light of all that was going on in the present. All he was sure of was that the memory seemed to fuel the rage that was bubbling just below the surface and the strain of keeping the rage at bay was beginning to wear him down.

"Damn!" He pressed the heels of his hands against his eyes in an attempt to dispel the images, then looked out the window. Chance should have gotten back by now. "Where is she?" he asked for the fifth time in as many minutes.

"She'll be back," John replied. "Just settle down. She's only been gone for —"

"Eighty-three minutes! She said she'd be back in no more than an hour!"

"Wyatt, just calm down." John got up and stepped in his path. "And sit down! That pacing's driving me crazy."

"I can't!" Wyatt walked around him and headed for the door. "I'm going to find her."

"Sit down," Tsa'li said from across the room.

Wyatt turned and looked at him and saw the hard mask that served as expression for Tsa'li's lined face. Suppressing a curse, he took a seat.

\* \* \* \* \*

Iris was only ten minutes away from where she had been told she could find Wyatt when she picked up her cellular from the car seat. Her call was answered on the second ring.



"Hi, honey," she said excitedly when Greg's voice came on the line. "I need you to do something for me."

"What?"

"I think I know the perfect way to get Wyatt's attention. This is sure to get him headed your way. First of all, send some of your boys over to keep an eye out at Tsa—Charley's," she corrected herself. "I want to know the moment Wyatt leaves."

"And second?"

"I want you to call me right back and we're going to act out a little scenario for Wyatt's benefit."

"What kind of scenario?"

"One that's going to send him into orbit," she said with a smile then began to explain.

\* \* \* \* \*

While Greg was on the phone, Chance was pacing the floor of the bedroom where she was under guard. She could not figure out what was going on but she had to before someone else got hurt. If she didn't return to Tsa'li's soon, Wyatt was bound to go looking for her, and when he found the truck abandoned at the motel he would know something was wrong.

She jerked around as Greg entered the room. He was holding a glass in one hand, and he appeared as if he would not be standing much longer if he continued to drink. Chance thought that maybe she could use his condition to her advantage. Forcing a smile to her face she sat down on the end of the bed. "So, what now? Or is this your idea of an exciting date?"

Greg sneered and walked over to stand in front of her. "Well, to be honest, your attire doesn't exactly inspire me."

She looked down at her clothes then shrugged. "I didn't exactly have time to change. If you'd like I'll go back to the hotel and get cleaned up and into something...more appropriate."

"Oh, I don't think that'll be necessary." He dismissed the suggestion and downed half his drink. Chance watched him suspiciously as he turned and walked to the door. "I have a call to make. Why don't you put your pretty little head to coming up with some way we can entertain ourselves?"

She wanted to spit at him but instead she remained still and silent. She had to find a way to get out of there.

\* \* \* \* \*

Wyatt was off the couch and out the door before the truck stopped in front of the house. Billy Hawkes jumped out and ran to the house at full tilt. "They've got her!"

Wyatt didn't ask who Billy was talking about. He didn't have to. John appeared at the door. "Come inside," he said, taking Wyatt's arm.

Wyatt allowed John to pull him inside but he didn't sit down. "Tell us," Tsa'li said as soon as Billy entered.

"I was just driving by and saw them! One of Holling's men was shoving her in the back of a car and another was in the parking lot being mauled by this huge wolf. I followed the car and when I realized they were headed for the Holling estate I headed over here."

Tsa'li nodded but didn't comment. John looked over at Wyatt who was pulling on his coat. "Wyatt, call Tom. Let the law handle this. Kidnapping's a felony. We've got him dead to right this time."

"And just what do you think Tom can do? He's got no authority in Bryson. You've been hammering me to get involved ever since I got here. Well, I'm involved so why the sudden change of heart?"

"I haven't changed my—never mind, just call the police in Bryson." Wyatt's laugh was devoid of humor. "Yeah, right. Like Holling doesn't own every one of them. I've got to go after her, Dad."

"No," Tsa'li spoke up.

Wyatt turned to him with an expression like a thundercloud on his face. Tsa'li stood, seemingly unaffected by Wyatt's anger. "It is not time."

"Not the right time? Grandfather, there's never been a more right time. I have to save her."

"Sit down," Tsa'li ordered.

"No, not this time."

He and Tsa'li locked eyes. For several long moments there was a thick silence in the room as they stared at one another. Suddenly Wyatt whirled around. The sound of a car engine came from outside. Running to the door he flung it open. Almost as soon as he did, he turned around and slammed it shut again. John looked at him in surprise.

"Iris." Wyatt's voice was almost a growl.

"What's she doing here?" John asked. "After what happened earlier I wouldn't think she'd come within ten miles of you."

"Yeah, go figure," Wyatt grumbled.

A moment later a knock sounded at the door. John got up and went to the door when Wyatt remained unmoving. "What can I do for you, Miss Waters?"

"Actually it's what I can do for you that brings me here," she said in a rushed and anxious tone. "Can I come in?"

John stepped aside for her to enter.

"Get out!" Wyatt shouted as soon as she walked in.

"Wyatt, please," she pleaded with him. "I just want to help."

"Help? With what?"

She looked from him to John. "I was at my hotel, packing to leave and I got this call on my cellular. I recorded it and came straight over. I think all of you should hear it."

John looked from her to Wyatt then back at her. "What kind of call?"

"From Greg Holling."

Wyatt's eyes narrowed suspiciously. "Why would Holling call you?"

"Apparently he found out that I'm your attorney," she replied as she pulled a cassette from her purse. "Will you please listen to this? Please, Wyatt. I know that you're angry with me and you have every right to be. What I did was wrong. I wanted you and I didn't stop to think about the consequences of my actions. All I could see was how I felt about you and I let it overrule my good sense. I know that you don't care about me and that it's Chance you love. Just like I know that I've caused you both a lot of pain. I just want to make up for it. Please, I won't ask any more of you. Just listen to the tape. It's important."

He hesitated for a moment then nodded. Taking a small player from her handbag she put the tape inside and hit the play button. A moment later everyone could hear the voices.

"I'm sorry to make you wait," Iris' voice came first. "I had left the water on in the bathroom. What can I do for you Mr. Holling?"

"Let's just say that I'm calling to do you a favor, Ms. Waters."

"What kind of favor?"

"Let's just say I'm going to save you from the same fate that awaits Ms. Porter."

"Look, Mr. Holling, I really don't have time for this so if you'll excuse me—"

"You listen to me, you Indian fucking slut! If you want to keep your ass in one piece I'd advise you shut your fucking trap and open your ears. I know you're working with those goddamn Indians, and so do a lot of other people—people who don't like the idea of whites getting mixed up with animals. Like Ms. Porter. See, she made the mistake of taking sides with those savages. She even climbed in bed with one. Now, she's gonna pay."

"What are you talking about? Where's Ms. Porter? What have you done to her?"

"Nothing—yet. But you can bet your ass I'm going to. In fact, I'm gonna take a lot of pleasure in it. When I get through fucking that bitch I'm gonna give her to my boys and when they've had their fun I'm gonna slit her fucking throat."

"You do realize that as an officer of the court, I'm duty-bound to report this conversation to the authorities, don't you?"

"You go right ahead, Ms. Lawyer Lady. See how far it gets you. See, I own the law around here, so it doesn't mean shit what you do."

"Mr. Holling, you have to let Ms. Porter go. Surely you must realize that you can't get away with this?"

"Oh, but I can. See, when I'm finished with that bitch, I'm gonna make sure her body's found at Wyatt Nashoba's. Right where he buried her after he raped and killed her. So, you see, Ms. Waters, if I were you I'd pay attention to what happens to people who try to fuck with the Holling family."

"You're insane!"

"Take my advice, Ms. Waters. Get the fuck outta Dodge while you still can."

The tape ended and Iris turned off the player then looked at Wyatt. "You've got to do something!"

He looked from her to his father. John seemed pale and Wyatt could see the concern in his eyes. Billy looked like he was scared to death. The only person in the room who appeared to be unaffected was Tsa'li. He was sitting in his rocker, staring at Iris.

"Didn't you hear what he said?" Iris blurted. "For god's sake, Wyatt! You can't just let—"

"Get out," Tsa'li's sharp voice cut her off.

Everyone turned to look at him in surprise. He stood up and walked to stand in front of Iris. "Get out of my house. You are not welcome here."

"But..." Iris stammered. "But, I'm only trying to help."

"Those who come offering help do not arrive wearing a mask of deceit."

"I don't know what you're talking about! I only came here to try and—"

"Leave this house!" Tsa'li's voice rose like thunder.

Iris turned and fled. Wyatt turned to Tsa'li with a perplexed expression on his face, as did John. Tsa'li returned to his seat by the fire then looked over at them.

"What did you mean by that?" John asked.

"Does it not strike you as odd that this woman who has only known Chance by the name of Daven Porter suddenly shows up with a tape, calling her Chance? And how is it that the son of Winston Holling found out this woman was involved with our family? More importantly why would Greg Holling call this woman on her cellular phone if he were trying to reach her at the hotel?"

John and Wyatt looked at one another in surprise. Wyatt was the first to speak. "He's right."

"There's something more going on here than meets the eye," John agreed. "The question is, what?"

"I don't know and right now I don't care," Wyatt stated. "I'm going after Chance."

"No, you are not," Tsa'li spoke up.

Wyatt was tense as a strung bow when he turned to him. "Yes, I am. I'm not going to argue with you about this, Grandfather. I have to—"

"Billy, I need a favor." Tsa'li ignored Wyatt and looked at Billy Hawkes. "I want you to try and find out what is going on at the Holling estate. You will need help. Tell your friends that it is at my request you do this. Find out all you can then return here."

Billy nodded and looked at Wyatt. "Maybe you better listen to him, Wyatt. He's smarter than the rest of us, you know? He sees things."

Wyatt didn't reply and after a moment Billy left the house. Then Wyatt turned to Tsa'li. "Grandfather, I know you think what you're doing is the right way but I can't just stand by while Chance is in danger. You heard what Greg Holling said on that tape! He's going to rape and kill her. Are you willing to sit back and do nothing while that happens?"

"She will not die."

"Oh?" Wyatt raised his eyebrows. "And how can you be so sure of that?"

"Have you lived so long in the world of the white man that you have forgotten all that I taught you?" When Wyatt did nothing more than frown, Tsa'li sighed. "I know what I know. Ulusati confirms it."

"And you expect me to risk Chance's life on something a crystal told you?"

"You should have been more attentive when I tried to teach you," Tsa'li scolded him. "There are some things that man is not meant to understand but merely accept. The power of the crystal is such a thing. I would not risk the life of the Woman with the Eyes of Wolf, my grandson. She is the future of our family. You must trust in this. No harm will come to her."

Wyatt stared at his grandfather for a long time. He had never known Tsa'li to be so insistent before. He had also never known Tsa'li to be wrong. At last he gave in. "All right, I'll wait. But not for long."

"It will not be long," Tsa'li assured him. "Soon the time will come when you will go for her."

"And I guess you're going to tell me when the right time is," Wyatt said, his voice still tinted with scorn.

"You will know," was all Tsa'li would say.

Wyatt looked from his grandfather to his father. John shook his head slightly as if telling Wyatt not to argue with his grandfather anymore. "I need to go to the house," Wyatt said.

"What for?" John asked.

"To get some things. When the time comes, I'm going prepared."

John didn't comment but watched as Wyatt left. He took a seat on the couch and closed his eyes then opened them again and stared at the flames in the fireplace for several minutes. Finally he turned to Tsa'li. "You're sure that she won't be harmed?"

Tsa'li didn't answer. He turned his head to one side as if listening then stood. "There is no more time."

"No more time? What does that mean?"

The sound of the front door shattering answered his question.

\* \* \* \* \*

Chance was almost to the point of panic. She had held Greg off since she had first been brought there, hoping that he would keep drinking and get plastered enough to pass out. As luck would have it, he drank only enough to stay disgustingly drunk and persistent in his advances.

She had tried to talk to him, to get some idea of what he was up to, but the only thing he had said was that he was going to get rid of everyone who stood in his way and it would all be his. She had no idea what that meant but she was trying to find out as he continued to pursue her around the room.

“Come on, baby,” he crooned drunkenly as he edged closer to her. “This isn’t the time for talk. I’m in the mood for something more physical. Come on over here to Greg and I’ll make you forget all about that Indian. Come on, just one kiss.”

Chance grabbed the chair at the desk and slid it around in front of her as he moved closer. “Greg, just listen to me! Let’s just sit down and talk, okay? What did you mean when you said you were going to get rid of all of them? Who were you talking about?”

“I don’t wanna talk!” He grabbed the chair and slung it across the room. “I wanna fuck!”

“Well, that’s just too bad!” Chance punched him as he made a grab for her. “I don’t!”

Greg stumbled back from the blow and shook his head. “You fucking bitch!” he shouted as he started for her again. “No Indian fucking bitch says no to me!”

Chance dodged to one side as he lunged at her. Greg fell face first into the desk and wobbled around trying to get his footing. She didn’t wait to see what he was doing, but made a mad dash for the door. Unfortunately she made it only as far as the living room before two men grabbed her. She kicked, squirmed and screamed as they tried to drag her back down the hall to where Greg was leaning against the doorframe of the bedroom, shouting obscenities.

Sure that she was about to be raped, Chance fought harder. She managed to kick one of the men holding her in the knee hard enough to make him stumble. Seeing an opportunity she yanked as hard as she could, hoping to dislodge his hand from her arm. She never saw the blow that came from behind her. The second man grabbed his handgun from his belt and clubbed her in the head.

Just as she thought she was going to break away, darkness closed in around her.

\* \* \* \* \*

Wyatt could sense that something was wrong before he opened the back door of Tsa’li’s house. There was no conscious thought as his body shifted immediately into battle mode. All of his senses were alert and his body was tensed and ready to spring into action.

His anger and anxiety rose as he searched the small house, only to discover it empty. He didn't see any signs of a struggle. There were no signs of violence at all aside from the front door which looked as if it had been kicked in.

On the door was tacked a folded sheet of paper with his name printed on it. Wyatt pulled the paper from the nail and unfolded it.

*Now I have all three. I'll trade their lives for yours. You know where to find me.*

There was no signature, there was no need for one. Wyatt knew who the note was from. Winston Holling. He crumpled the paper and let it fall to the floor. In place of anxiety and hot anger there was a cold, calm rage building inside him, the kind of rage he knew all too well. It was the feeling that always preceded someone dying.

Leaving the house, Wyatt headed for the Holling estate. It was time to settle the score once and for all.

\* \* \* \* \*

Winston and Maurice Davenport were sitting in the den of the main house, having brandy and cigars when the butler showed one of Greg's men in.

Winston turned and looked at the man impatiently. "What is it?"

"We have all three of them, sir. Nashoba and the old man are in the barn. There's three men guarding them."

Winston looked at Maurice to see him nodding in approval. "Excellent," he told the messenger. "Keep them there until we're ready. In the meantime—"

"You said three," Maurice interrupted. "Who is with them?"

"Uh, well, no one," the man replied. "I mean, the two men are in the barn. That reporter's in the gatehouse."

"Reporter?" Maurice looked at Winston. "I wasn't told anything about a reporter."

"It's just some CNN snoop that's involved with Nashoba." Holling passed it off. "Nothing to worry about. Greg will take care of her and make it look like Nashoba did it." He turned to the man who stood waiting. "Ask Greg to come to the house."

The man nodded and left the room and Holling turned back to Maurice to find him looking pale and nervous. After a moment Maurice downed his brandy and wiped the sweat from his upper lip. "What's the story with this reporter? Have you spoken with her? Why exactly is she here and which Nashoba is it that she's involved with?"

"She's just some bimbo that's here to do a story on the casino deal, and she's been asking a lot of questions. It was Greg's idea to grab her. He said she'd make good bait. It's Wyatt she's been porking and from what I hear they've been going at it pretty strong."

Maurice's pudgy face paled a bit more. "Does she have a name?"

Holling gave him a puzzled look. It was not like Maurice to be so nervous. He was always the one who seemed to have ice water in his veins and suddenly he was acting

like he was afraid of one little woman. "I don't know! What difference does it make? She's just a little nobody. It isn't going to make any difference in our plans. My god, you're acting like an old maid. Come on, man, have another drink."

Maurice did not respond at all. In fact he didn't move as Holling fetched the decanter and carried it over to refill his glass. Holling frowned and put the decanter down on the table. Maurice's nervousness was contagious, for he found himself suddenly feeling anxious.

"Excuse me for a few minutes," he said as he put his glass down beside the decanter. "I need to check on something."

Maurice didn't acknowledge him in any way. Holling hurried from the room and headed through the house. For some reason he had to see this reporter for himself.

\* \* \* \* \*

Stinging cold water brought Chance around. She gasped and sputtered as the water poured down on her face. Greg's face was the first thing she saw when she opened her eyes. He was kneeling above her. She tried to sit up and realized that her hands were tied to the bedposts, as were her feet.

Greg leered at her and waved a sharp hunting knife back and forth in front of her face. Chance couldn't stop the sharp intake of breath as she saw the knife. "Greg, this isn't necessary," she tried to reason with him. "You don't have to do this. Let me go. You don't want to do this."

"Like hell, I don't," he laughed at her.

"Please," she pleaded with him.

"Oooh, I like the way you beg," he taunted her and lowered the tip of the knife to the top button of the old flannel shirt she wore. "But I think you can do better."

Chance bit her lip to keep from making a sound as the tip of the knife slipped in between the buttons of her shirt and lifted it up. One slight move of Greg's hand sent a button flying. "Come on, baby," he crooned as he moved the knife lower. "Let's hear you beg."

She almost complied she was so afraid. But she could not let him have the satisfaction of knowing she was terrified. Summoning her courage, she spat in his face. "Go to hell!"

"You goddamn slut!" Greg swiped at the spittle on his face then stuck the tip of the knife up under her chin. "I'll fucking make you beg!"

Chance couldn't stop the small sound from escaping. The tip of the knife was cutting into the flesh under her chin and she was scared. Greg's free hand moved inside her shirt to grab one breast. Chance did scream as his fingers cruelly pinched her nipple.

"That's better." He grinned. "Scream, baby. Come on, scream loud."



That is exactly what she did. She couldn't help it. It felt like he was pinching her nipple off.

"What the hell's going on?" They both heard the shout from the door.

Greg moved away from her and turned to the man who was entering the room. "Just having a little fun. What's the big deal?"

Winston Holling moved to stand beside the bed. He looked at Chance for a few moments before recognition flared in his eyes. "Jesus fucking Christ!" he exploded and turned on Greg. "You stupid jackass! Do you know who the fuck this is?"

"Daven Porter!" Greg shouted back at him. "The reporter. Have you suddenly gone senile? We talked about this, remember?"

Winston grabbed Greg's arm and steered him out of the room. "You moron!" he hissed as soon as they were out in the hall. "That's Maurice's daughter!"

"Maurice Davenport?" Greg's eyes widened in surprise then he shook his head. "No way. She's just some —"

"She's Chance Davenport, you dumb fuck! I've seen her goddamn picture enough to know. Goddamn! Maurice is going to shit a gold brick! I might have known you'd find a way to fuck things up."

"Me? You can't dump this shit on me! You're the one —"

"Shut up!" Winston pushed him up against the wall. "Now listen to me, boy. There's no way I'm going to let Maurice know that we've roughed up his precious daughter. You know how goddamn picky he is about her. What we're going to do is tell him that we grabbed her because we found out that Wyatt was going to kill her to get even with Maurice. As much as he hates Wyatt, he'll fall for it."

"Why does he hate Nashoba? For that matter, why do you?"

"That's my business. Now, you get in there and untie her and make damn sure she's cleaned up proper then bring her to the house. I'll smooth the way with Maurice. You got it?"

Greg nodded silently and after a moment Holling walked away from him. Combing back his hair, Greg entered the bedroom. Chance was staring at him with daggers in her eyes. He smiled and started cutting her free. "Hey, I'm really sorry," he apologized then laughed as if it were all a big joke. "Really, I wasn't going to hurt you, I was just having a little fun. Besides, I had to keep you here. It's the only place you're safe."

"Safe?" Chance jumped up as soon as the last of the ropes were removed. "This is the last place I'd consider safe."

"But it's where your father thinks you'll be safe."

"My father?" She looked at him in surprise. She had overheard bits and pieces of his conversation with Holling in the hall, but not enough to make any sense of it. "What does my father have to do with this?"

"Why don't we go ask him?" Greg motioned toward the door. "He's at the main house waiting for us."

Chance's first inclination was to run as fast and as far as she could. If Maurice was there, it was a sure bet that he and Holling had something awful planned. But she found it hard to run from a fight, especially one that had been building up for so long. "Fine," she agreed, which seemed to surprise Greg. "Let's go."

He ordered his men posted at the gatehouse to join the others who were standing guard around the perimeter of the grounds then led Chance to the main house. Seeing all the armed men who were patrolling the grounds made Chance more than a little nervous. She hoped she could get word to Wyatt that she was all right before he found Tsa'li's abandoned truck and started looking for her. With all the men Holling had posted, there was no way Wyatt would make it to her without being killed.

Her thoughts were centered on worries for Wyatt as she followed Greg inside the house. She paid no attention to the opulence around her, but followed him mutely as he led her to the massive den at the rear of the house.

As soon as they walked into the room she saw her father bolt to his feet from a chair near the fireplace. "What in god's name are you doing here?" he demanded angrily.

"I think a better question would be, what are you doing here?" she asked in return.

"I happen to have business with Holling. Not that it's any of your concern."

"What kind of business?" She walked across the room to face him. "Arson, murder? Do you have any idea the kind of atrocities that are being committed against the Cherokee?"

"Atrocities?" He cocked his eyebrows at her. "Young lady, you have no concept of what true atrocities are. Why those redskin bastards are—"

"That's insulting!" she cut him off. "And how dare you stand there and call—"

"That is enough!" he shouted then lowered his voice when everyone turned and gave him a surprised look.

Chance smirked at the expression on Winston's and Greg Holling's faces then looked at her father. "Enough of what? What is it you're afraid I'm going to say, Father? That your friends here are killing people in cold blood or that the murders they commit are premeditated? Better yet, maybe what you're afraid of is that the truth will—"

"I said that's enough! I will not tolerate this kind of behavior from you. I'm calling the airport and having my plane stand by. One of Winston's men will drive you there and you will return to the estate in Charlotte and wait there for me to return."

"No, I won't do any such thing."

"You—" Maurice's face flushed bright red in anger. "You what? Did I hear you defy me?"

"Yes, you did. I'm not going anywhere until all of this is settled and the people responsible are brought to justice. So save your commands for someone who'll follow them. You see, Father, I'm not some ignorant afraid child anymore. I know what you really are and I'm not going to let you get away with it. In fact, I'm going to—"

A stinging slap cut off the rest of her words. "How dare you! I should have known something like this would happen the morning you called looking for that...that bastard whelp. He's been nothing but trouble from the moment I first laid eyes on him. But you, oh, you just couldn't stay away from him, could you? Chasing him around like a bitch in heat the entire time you were growing up wasn't enough for you, was it? You just had to come up here and wallow in the filth again. If I had known I would have—"

"Shut up!" Chance yelled loud enough to startle everyone with her outburst. Maurice stopped talking but his mouth hung open in surprise.

"You can say what you like about me," she said in a cold calm tone. "But I won't tolerate you speaking that way about my husband. You've caused him and his family enough hurt and it ends now. Do you hear me, Father? It ends."

Maurice's lips were moving but no sound was coming out. His eyes were wide and his face had lost some of its color. Chance found a measure of satisfaction in seeing him that way. He could not seem to find his voice.

"Your husband?" Winston Holling, however, had no trouble with his voice. "Are you telling me that you're married to that son of a bitch?"

Chance turned on him with her eyes flashing. "Don't ever let me hear you say that again! Especially you, Mr. Holling. After all you've done, you have no right at all. All of this is your fault. Wyatt was just an innocent victim. But you—" she turned and glanced at Maurice, "and you. Both of you are the lowest, most vile, and poorest excuses for human beings that I've ever seen. You both deserve to rot in hell for what you've done."

"You're married?" Maurice rasped, finally finding his voice. "Goddamn you to hell, you're married to that Indian?" His last question came out in a full-fledged shout.

"Yes!" she shouted back at him. "I'm married and I'm going to stay married and there's not a thing you or anyone else can do about it."

"You're lying!"

"You wish."

"This is just your way of getting back at me. You think if you tell me you married that bastard it'll hurt me. But your little scheme won't work. I don't believe you."

"Then how about me?"

Everyone turned in surprise at the sound of John's voice.

"How did you get in?" Winston yelped in surprise.

"Your guards aren't very efficient," John replied calmly.

Just then a man ran into the room behind John. "Sorry, Mr. Holling!" he panted and raised his gun at John's back.

Winston frowned angrily as Maurice looked over at John with narrowed eyes. John smiled in return. "It's true. She and Wyatt were married not long after she came here. Tsa'li and I were present as witnesses along with two of Wyatt's friends. They are married, Maurice. Just as they were meant to be. Despite all that has happened in the past, all that'd been done to prevent it, fate was stronger. Chance and Wyatt were

meant to be together. Their love was stronger than your hate. And now it is that love that will defeat you. You can't stand against Wyatt. You are surely doomed unless you stop this madness."

"Let me tell you something, you ignorant bastard!" Maurice took a step toward John. "You and your bastard son can both go straight to hell for all I care. In fact, that's just where you are going. Just as soon as the old man gives me the crystal, I'll put a bullet through all your heads."

"So that's what all this is about?" John asked. "Well, then you're fighting a losing battle. Wyatt doesn't have the crystal. He never had it. And Ts'ali will go to his grave before he gives it to you. So you go ahead, Maurice. Kill me. But it won't get you that crystal."

Chance walked over beside John. "Wyatt'll never let you harm his father and you don't stand a chance in hell against him."

"I'm sick to goddamn death of Wyatt Nashoba!" Maurice shouted. "Have been since the day that Indian bastard child set foot in my house."

"Then why did you let him stay?" Chance asked.

"Well, why the fuck do you think, Chance? Are you that fucking stupid?"

Chance stared at her father in shock as it all became clear. "It was the crystal. Oh my god! It was you. You and Holling. You killed Sarah! You were trying to get it from her and she wouldn't give it to you. And since Ts'ali would never have given it to you, you figured Wyatt could. That he would know where it was."

"But the whelp would never tell me," Maurice confirmed her theory. "No matter how good I was to the little bastard he kept to his story of not knowing where it was."

Chance cut her eyes over to John and could see the shock and pain on his face.

"You?" he croaked. "You and Holling? You're the ones who killed my Sarah?" After all these years, the shock of finally knowing the truth overwhelmed John. He had considered the possibility from time to time during the years, but never wanted to believe that it could be true. Knowing was almost like a physical blow.

Maurice didn't have a chance to respond to John before Chance started in on him. "You're despicable, Father, and I feel sorry for you when Wyatt gets here. He'll break you in half. And I'll cheer him on. You deserve it. You betrayed John's friendship, killed his wife and tried to use his son to further your own greedy ambitions and you didn't care who got hurt in the process. Not even your only child. You deserve everything that's coming to you, but I'd advise that you make peace with whatever you hold holy now, because sure as sunrise, Wyatt's going to send you straight to hell where you belong."

"Oh, I don't know about that," Greg, who had been silent up until that point, spoke up. "I think I just might have a thing or two that will change things considerably."

Chance turned to see him smiling smugly. He walked over and leaned down close to her ear. "Just so happens I have hubby's granddaddy all nice and cozy in the barn. And I made sure the boys left Wyatt a note so he'd know just where to come."

Chance looked up at him with narrowed eyes. "Then say your prayers, white boy, 'cause you won't live to see dawn."

Greg laughed in her face. "Is that so? Oh, of course, I forgot. Wyatt Nashoba, the Navy SEAL, the big bad-ass who can take on an entire army single-handedly. Well, here's a newsflash for you, honey. I've got a dozen armed men just waiting for a glimpse of your little hubby and a ten-thousand-dollar purse to the man who brings me his head on a platter. So, if I was you, I'd start thinking about how I looked in black, 'cause sure as shit, you'll be a widow by morning."

Chance turned to her father. "You have to call this off. If you don't, people are going to die and it's going to be on your head. Stop it now, while you can."

Maurice seemed to regain some of his former composure. He poured himself a healthy glass of brandy and swirled it around, watching the light from the fire play on the liquid. "Greg's right," he said arrogantly. "Your bastard Indian will be dead by morning and then I won't have to worry about my only child being reduced to living in squalor and bearing half-breed whelps. No, I don't think I'd like to stop it just yet, dear. Not until I see Wyatt's lifeless body, that is. And he will surrender, you know. He always did have to play the hero for you and that's what's going to kill him. When he sees that we have you, he'll surrender. And then – well, then he'll die."

Chance knew it was no use to argue with any of them. They were all set on killing and nothing would deter them from the path they had set down.

Greg looked as if he was about to speak but Winston jerked his head toward the door. "Come on, let's go see to the old man."

Greg walked to the door of the den but before he could leave the room Chance spoke up, "And what makes you think you can keep me silent if you kill John and Tsa'li?"

Winston and Maurice both looked at her and Greg paused. "I know the truth. And even if you kill him you'll still lose because I'll go public with what I know and both of you will be lucky if you're not executed."

Maurice looked as if he were about to erupt. His face was red and veins stood out in his forehead. Greg looked from him to Winston, then at Chance. "Just what're you talking about?"

She turned and looked at him, then glanced at his father. Winston was watching her with an anxious expression. She turned to Greg. "You mean you don't know? I'm surprised. I thought you and your father were so close. And yet now I find that you're not so close as you thought. No, in fact, he's been keeping the most important part of all this from you – the reason he's doing all this."

Greg watched her expectantly as she paused and took a seat on the couch, facing the door. "Pay her no attention," Winston scoffed. "She's trying to pull your chain, boy. Trying to rattle you, that's all."

Chance laughed softly and Greg looked from her to his father. "So what it is she thinks she knows?" he asked. "If it's nothing then why —"

"Excuse me," the butler stepped into the room. "Master Greg, there's a lady here who insists on seeing you. I tried to tell her that you are —"

"Get out of my way!" Iris Waters brushed by the butler and marched into the room. "Well, well, it looks like the gang's all here." She smiled like a cat who had cornered a canary.

Greg immediately crossed the room to stand beside her. "Dad, this is Iris Waters, the woman I've been telling you about. Iris, this is my father, Winston Holling, and his business associate Maurice Davenport. Oh, and that's Maurice's daughter —"

"Chance," Iris interrupted him. "Yes, we've met."

She turned away before Chance could speak and looked at Holling. "I'm so glad to finally meet you in person, Mr. Holling."

Winston walked over and shook her hand. "Ms. Waters. I'm pleased to meet you as well, however, this is something of an inconvenient time, if you'll excuse me for being blunt. Maurice and I have some business we have to attend to and we really don't have time for social —"

"I know all about your business."

Winston looked from her to Greg in surprise. Greg put his arm around Iris' waist. "She's been helping me. In fact, if it weren't for Iris we wouldn't have been able to get the jump on —"

Chance bounded across the room before Greg could finish. "So you have been helping them! Just exactly what kind of help have you been giving them, Ms. Waters?"

Iris smiled smugly at Chance and stepped around her to walk over to Maurice who was standing silently on the other side of the room. "Maurice Davenport," Iris said as she looked him over. "Well, we meet at last."

Maurice's eyes were narrowed as he looked at her. "Have we met before? You look very familiar."

"Do I?" Iris raised one eyebrow then turned away. "Well, as I said, I do know all about your trouble with the Nashobas. As a matter of fact, I'm positively intimate with the entire affair, wouldn't you say, Chance?"

"Why?" Winston suddenly asked.

Everyone's attention was on Maurice except Chance, who was staring fixedly at Iris.

"Why what?" Iris asked.

"Why are you interested in what's going on?" Winston asked Iris. "What's in it for you? Has my son promised you something?"

Iris smiled and cut her eyes at Maurice. "Let's just say I'm honoring a promise I made to my mother a long time ago."

"Your mother?" Winston exclaimed. "What in the world does your mother have to do with anything? Who exactly is your mother, anyway? Do I know her? Have we had business dealings—"

The rest of his questions were cut off as one of his men entered the room. "We can't keep the old man in the barn. Short of killing him, that is. Every time we turn our backs he gets untied and we have to chase him down. What do you want us to do?"

Winston looked at Maurice who was still staring at Iris with a perplexed expression on his face. Chance looked at her father and noticed as well. Then she looked at Iris who was smiling as if she were holding all the cards in a poker game. Suddenly it all clicked into place. All of the things Tsa'li and John had told her made sense. She knew who Iris was.

"Goddamn Indians," Winston grumbled. Then he looked at Maurice. "I think it's time we settled our business with Tsa'li once and for all. Come on." He looked at the man who held the gun on John. "Bring him!" Next he looked at Iris. "If you'll excuse us, Ms. Waters, Maurice and I need to borrow Greg for a little while. Make yourself comfortable, have a drink."

"Why don't I accompany you?" she suggested.

"I think that's a good idea," Greg spoke up. "After all, she's been instrumental in helping us get this far. Let her be in on the end."

"I don't think that's a good idea," Maurice argued. "She can stay here until we've finished."

"I think she should go," Chance said. "She should be with you when Wyatt finds you. After all she was so instrumental in your little plans. I know how much that's going to mean to him."

Winston snorted and looked at Maurice. "This is ridiculous. Get your loud-mouthed daughter and bring her with us. We can't take a chance on her trying to escape." He turned to Greg. "You want your lady friend with you? Fine, then bring her. But remember this, both of you. You're as much a part of this as anyone and if you try to use any of this against us, you'll end up just like Nashoba. You got it?"

Greg shrugged and looked at Iris. "Why, I wouldn't have it any other way," she said sweetly. "Shall we?"

Maurice took Chance's arm as everyone started out of the room but she jerked away from him. "Don't touch me."

He didn't say anything or attempt to take her arm again. In silence they all went outside and made their way to the rear of the estate to a large barn. Men were posted at every corner of the structure with additional patrols roaming the grounds. Winston nodded to the man stationed at the door and the man stepped aside for them to enter.

As soon as Chance walked in she saw Tsa'li sitting with his back against one of the stalls. She ran to him. His hands were tied behind his back and his feet were lashed together. Immediately she started to untie him.

"Stop!" Winston shouted at her.

She whirled around and looked at him. "Or what? Are you so afraid of two unarmed men, Mr. Holling? You've got your army posted around this whole damn place and you're still afraid. What do you think they're going to do?"

"Forget it." Maurice put his hand on Winston's arm as Winston started toward Chance.

She turned her attention back to Tsa'li. "Are you okay?"

He nodded and rubbed his wrists. "They left a note for Wyatt. They are setting a trap for him."

"I know. Are you sure they didn't hurt you?"

He shook his head. "They would not dare. Without me they cannot find that which they seek."

Chance's eyes met his. She knew what he was talking about. Winston and Maurice wanted the crystal.

When he was untied she stood and faced their adversaries. "Unless you have a death wish, you'll let us go. Wyatt's coming and there's nothing you can do to stop him. No one has to die. Just let us go."

"When hell freezes over." Greg laughed and looked at Iris. "Right, honey?"

"Right, lover," she crooned then looked at Chance. "You all deserve to die and that's exactly what's going to happen. Your brave warrior can come but he won't get here soon enough. By the time he does all he'll find is your dead bodies."

Gunfire came from outside the barn and everyone jerked in surprise. Greg ordered one of his men to go outside and check it out then shoved John over to stand beside Tsa'li and Chance. "Keep your gun on them," he ordered another man. "If any of them twitches, shoot them."

The man who had been sent outside ran back in. "There's a mob of Indians at the rear of the estate. Our boys are holding them off but they don't know how long they can keep it up. What'd you want us to do?"

Greg cut his eyes over at Maurice before answering. "Call the men posted at the east gate and have them back up the guys in the rear. If the redskins won't give up, kill 'em."

The man left again and Greg turned around. Iris and Chance were staring at one another hatefully.

"Marisa, why are you doing this?" Chance was the first to break the silence. "Your fight isn't with us, it's with them." She gestured at Winston and Maurice.

"What did you call me?" Iris' face reddened as it twisted into an ugly visage of rage. She whirled to look at Greg. "Kill that bitch! Kill her!"



"In due time," Winston barked.

Iris turned on him with an enraged expression but Greg took her arm and leaned over to whisper in her ear. She was tense for a moment then seemed to relax. Greg smiled and nodded to his father.

Winston walked over to stand in front of Tsa'li. "Give it to me."

Tsa'li didn't speak or move. He didn't acknowledge the demand in any way.

"Give it to me!"

Again Tsa'li did no more than stare at him.

Winston's face flushed bright red and he drew back his fist to hit Tsa'li but Chance stepped in the way. "No!"

Tsa'li gently moved her aside. "The power is not for you," he directed his words to Winston. "It will not answer to evil."

Winston's flush deepened. He turned and ran to one of the armed men and snatched the gun from his hands. Before he could take aim at Tsa'li, Maurice intervened. "Hold on, he's no use to us dead and without him we'll never find it."

Everyone looked at Winston to see what he would do. Iris reached into her purse and pulled out a handgun. Chance was the only one to see her raising it and she dived at Iris.

Both women went down in a tangle. Iris screamed and hit at Chance as Chance tried to wrestle the gun from her hand. It went off and Greg jumped to one side. "Goddamn!" Winston shouted and tried to get a hold on one of the women to break up the fight.

Chance broke Iris' hold on the gun and Winston snatched it up. Greg grabbed Iris and pulled her up, still kicking and screaming.

"What is it with you?" Chance shouted as she climbed to her feet. "Why are you here and what do you want?"

"What do I want? I'll tell you!" Iris screamed. "I want to see you suffer. I want to see you beg and cry and plead for the lives of these worthless Indians. I want you to see everyone you love die before your eyes and know that you're the reason for it. Then I want you to die. But not fast, no, not fast. I want you to die slow, an inch at a time."

"Just one minute!" Maurice intervened. "No one is killing my daughter and if you think otherwise then you're badly mistaken. Greg, I think perhaps you'd better get your lady friend out of here before I have to do something you might not like."

Greg looked at Maurice and smiled widely. "I don't think so, Maurice."

"You don't think so?" Maurice exclaimed in surprise. "Winston, I demand that you —"

"You can't demand anything," Iris cut him off then nudged Greg. "Now, lover."

"Boys?" Greg called out. The two armed men leveled their weapons at Maurice and Winston.

“Put those guns down!” Winston ordered.

The men didn’t speak, nor did they obey. “Did you hear me?” Winston shouted. “I said put your weapons down!”

“Sorry, Mr. Holling,” one of the men said. “But we don’t take orders from you anymore.”

Winston turned to Greg with a furious expression on his face. “What is the meaning of this? Have you lost your mind?”

Greg pulled a handgun from behind his back and smiled. “No, as a matter of fact, I think I’ve finally found it. So, shut up and listen, old man. This is how it’s gonna be.”

## Chapter Twelve

Wyatt crouched behind the cover of the trees, watching silently. There were two men patrolling the entrance of the estate. Both were armed with automatic weapons and both had radios clipped to their belts.

As he watched, he considered his best course of action. He would have to take the men out one at a time, in a way that would attract no attention. He didn't want anyone to be forewarned of his arrival. His rage rose like the swell of a wave, threatening to drown him in its heat.

Backing a little farther into the trees he struggled to control the rage. He needed a clear head and rage only clouded his thinking. But rage was not his only worry. He could feel Walker's presence like a physical sensation. He could even hear Walker's voice in his mind, ceaselessly hammering at him to give in and let Walker out.

Wyatt knew that no matter what he could not let Walker take control. If that happened there would be no chance for any of them. Walker didn't care about saving Chance, his father and grandfather. He cared only for violence and killing and the bloodlust was making him stronger with each passing second.

"No!" he whispered harshly, before he was aware he had spoken. "This is my fight!"

The sound of mocking laughter inside his mind threatened to overwhelm him. Only by focusing his thoughts on Chance and his family could he push Walker back enough to function. When at last he was reasonably certain that Walker was sufficiently quelled, he crept from behind the trees. Like a shadow, he moved silent and swift.

He was on the first guard before the man knew what was happening. Wrapping one arm around the man's neck and covering his mouth with the other, Wyatt dragged him into the trees. Just a little more pressure on his throat and the man was unconscious. Pausing long enough to securely tie and gag him, Wyatt then left him hidden in the trees and made his way around behind the second of the guards.

He could hear the static of the man's radio as a tinny voice came over it. "Any sight of Nashoba?"

"Not yet," the man replied.

"How about you, Joe?" the voice on the radio inquired.

Wyatt saw the guard turn when there was no reply. "Joe?" he called out in the direction the guard had been moments before. "Hey, Joe!"

Wyatt sprang from the darkness as the man started forward. The man grunted as he went down under Wyatt's weight. "Sam!" the voice on the radio called. "Sam! Joe! What's going on out there?"

Wyatt slammed his fist down into the base of the guard's head and felt the man go limp. Grabbing the fallen radio he pressed the transmitter button. "Everything's okay. Joe just had to take a piss."

"Well, keep your eyes open! We got redskins out the ass 'round back. No telling how many more of 'em are out there," the voice on the radio ordered.

"Will do," Wyatt replied and tossed the radio aside so that he could tie the second guard. Apparently Billy and the men with him were keeping Hollings' men occupied for the moment. He finished securing the ropes around the unconscious man and pulled him over to the side of the entrance where he was out of sight then climbed up over the iron fence that protected the property and dropped lightly to the ground.

Had anyone been watching they would only have seen a dark form moving silently along the edge of the tree-lined drive. What could not have been guessed had he been seen was that Wyatt was fighting an inner battle as he made his way toward the house, one that he could not afford to lose.

\* \* \* \* \*

Inside the barn everyone was looking at Greg in disbelief as he sauntered around, waving the handgun. "You see, Pop," he sneered at Winston. "Plans have changed, thanks to Iris. She's the one who made me see that being your errand boy just doesn't cut it. Why should I play second fiddle to you when I can have it all?"

"You conniving, underhanded little—"

"Uh, uh, uh." Greg wagged the gun back and forth as if admonishing a child. "Don't interrupt while I'm talking. It isn't polite."

Chance inched over close between Tsa'li and John. John was watching Greg and the two armed men apprehensively but Tsa'li was watching the whole thing impassively, as if he were watching a play being enacted before him. Chance cut a look at Iris who was watching Greg with a secret smile on her face. Chance wondered just what Iris was thinking.

"Now, like I was saying," Greg continued. "Plans have changed. When our little hero, Wyatt, shows up to save the day he'll find not only his father and the old man dead by your hand," he directed the comment to his father. "But his lovely little whore, as well." He nodded in Chance's direction. "See, she's going to die at the hands of her dear father who was so enraged at the idea of his precious little princess being married to an Indian that he killed her in a fit of anger then couldn't live with what he'd done so turned the gun on himself."

"You're insane!" Maurice bellowed.

"Insane?" Greg laughed. "I prefer to think of it as brilliant. I mean, after all, Maurice, just think. Everyone knows you've hated Wyatt for years. Just the thought of him fucking your little girl is enough to drive you over the edge. And as far as the rest of you," he waved the gun around at everyone. "Well, when the authorities arrive I'm

going to have to tell them how Wyatt came in here and started a fight and everyone ended up dying—except me and Iris, of course. Fortunately, I was able to kill Wyatt before he could kill me. And then—” He laughed and spun around excitedly. “Well, then, not only will I be the hero, but I’ll have everything.”

“That’s crazy!” Maurice argued. “Why kill me? Think about it for a minute. There’s no need to kill me. You’ll inherit Winston’s estate but mine will go to Patricia. Now, think, Greg. What if you altered your plan a little? Suppose everything went as you outlined except for one small alteration. Suppose I survive, trying, of course, to save my daughter, who unfortunately dies. You’ll have Winston’s stock and you and I will be partners. And you’ll need someone with experience and the right contacts to get you ahead. I could be a valuable asset to you.”

Winston turned on Maurice. “You son of a bitch!”

“First rule,” Maurice replied. “Look out for number one.”

“You’re forgetting just one thing,” Iris spoke up.

“What’s that?” Maurice asked.

“Me,” she said with a smile.

Maurice looked at her with confusion on his face and she laughed. “Wouldn’t it be something if Mother was here to see you now? I bet she wouldn’t find you so irresistible anymore.”

“What are you babbling about?”

“My mother!” she shrieked. “Doris! Remember her?”

For a moment Maurice’s face paled then flushed hotly. “Doris didn’t have a child.”

“Oh, but she did. After you tossed her aside like yesterday’s news.”

“Lies!” Maurice shouted. “And even if she did have a child it wasn’t mine.”

“Baaah!” Iris sounded off like a berserk game show buzzer. “Wrong answer. The correct answer is, she was pregnant with your child when you dumped her and DNA will prove it. So, you see, *Daddy*, my plan is foolproof. You and the princess die and I collect everything. There’s just one thing I want to know. Why? She loved you and you destroyed her.”

Winston laughed, drawing a hard look from Iris. He cut a gloating look at Maurice, now ready to play his own card. “Why, that’s not a mystery. Sure Maurice liked Doris. He sure as shit liked getting between her legs. But marry her? That’s a laugh. She had nothing and Maurice had his sights set on high-dollar living.” He directed his attention to Chance. “Why the hell do you think he married your mother? She’s the one who made him a rich man.”

Chance glared at her father hatefully, and opened her mouth to let loose a barrage on him, but Iris beat her to the punch.

“She wasn’t good enough for you? That’s it? She didn’t have money so you just walked away? Well, damn you to hell, you bastard. Because now, you’re going to die and I’m going to take everything.”

"I'll kill you, you rotten bitch!" He seemed to recover from his shock and made a grab for Greg's gun. Before he could reach it, Iris snatched the gun away and turned on him, firing twice. The first bullet hit him in the stomach. He jerked once as a blossom of red stained his shirt, and the second bullet found its mark on the right side of his chest. He fell backward from the blast with blood splattering from the wounds.

No one moved as he hit the floor. His bubbling breath was all that was heard from inside the barn for several long seconds until Iris' voice cut through the silence. "Now, it's your turn," she said and fired three rounds into Winston Holling.

He was dead before he hit the floor. Iris looked at him for a moment then turned and smiled at Chance. "Well, sister dear, looks like you're next. But don't worry, I wouldn't think of killing you until your lover gets here. I want him to see you die."

"Sister?" Greg exclaimed.

Chance looked over at him to see him looking at Iris in confusion. She turned and looked into Iris' eyes. What she saw was a woman who was completely obsessed, a woman who would stop at nothing to get what she wanted. Turning away, she looked toward the door. Suddenly she hoped more than anything that Wyatt didn't show up.

\* \* \* \* \*

Wyatt heard gunfire coming from the rear of the estate just as he reached the main house. A man appeared around the corner, running in the direction of the noise. Wyatt stepped out of the shadows just as the man drew near. A strangled gargle was all that escaped the man's lips as he ran into Wyatt's outstretched arm. He hit the ground still gasping for breath and looked up in fear. His mind barely had time to register what was happening before Wyatt's fist sent him soaring into darkness.

Dragging the limp form behind the row of neatly trimmed boxwoods that bordered the house, Wyatt tied the man then stood and listened. He could hear voices as two men approached from the rear of the house. They sounded as if they were headed in the direction the gunfire had come from.

Crouching down, he made his way along the side of the house until he came to the corner. Stopping, he looked around. Moments later two men passed within feet of where he hid. Letting them get several yards ahead, he emerged from his hiding place and followed.

As he silently stalked them, listening to them talk to one another, a memory surfaced in his mind, something he had tried to put behind him. An image of DJ and Fish with the woman prisoner at the terrorist compound in Iraq flashed in his mind's eye. He could hear them laughing as they held the terrified woman down with a knife at her throat and raped her.

The familiar rage that always accompanied the memory began to build within him. Wyatt shook his head, trying to push the memory aside. He could not let himself fall victim to the fury. That would only provide Walker the avenue he needed to escape into

the foreground, and this was one time Wyatt needed to be in control. There were lives depending on him.

As the men he followed made their way past the garage, Wyatt saw his opportunity. Breaking into a sprint he drew in close behind them. Before they heard his footsteps he had launched himself into the air.

One of the men turned just in time for Wyatt's fist to meet the bridge of his nose. Blood spurted a split second after the crunching sound of cartilage and the man staggered back and fell. The second man went down under Wyatt's weight. He tried to use his rifle as a weapon but could not bring it around to fire. Wyatt sat up and grabbed the rifle, pressing down on it as the man tried to use it as a level to push him back. He could see the fear in the man's eyes as his strength faltered and the rifle moved lower.

Gritting his teeth, Wyatt pushed hard and the man's strength gave way. One more push and he was choking and retching as the weapon pressed against his throat.

The man with the broken nose climbed to his feet, trying to focus. Wyatt heard him and knew that he had to put him out of commission before he could sound an alarm. Forgetting about the rifle, he released it and used his fist on the man he had pinned to the ground. One punch and the man was out. Then Wyatt turned on the other, rolling off the unconscious man and sweeping his foot around to knock the other's legs out from under him.

The man grunted and started to cry out. Wyatt kicked out and the sole of his boot met the man's nose. This time when the man went down, he didn't get up.

Taking a look around, Wyatt didn't see anyone moving about. He bounded to his feet and continued around the garage. Ahead in the darkness he could see lights. Staying as hidden as possible, he continued until he could see the two men who stood guard outside the entrance of the barn. For a moment he stayed perfectly still. There was a good chance there were men posted at the rear of the barn. If he rushed the guards at the front it would attract attention. He had to find a way to distract them from their post.

\* \* \* \* \*

Chance looked at Iris again and they stared at one another for a long time. "Nothing to say for once, princess?" Iris broke the contact.

Chance looked over at her father's body. She wanted to feel grief but there was nothing but a hollow empty feeling inside her. Maurice had not loved her. She had known that since she was a child. She had been a decoration to be put on display when it served his purpose but little more.

She thought back to how it had been when she was a child. She had wanted to love her father. For years she had tried. But her love had never been accepted and whatever feelings she had for him had died when he had her unborn child murdered. Now she could only grieve for what might have been had they been able to be a real family.

The thought of family made her turn and look at John and Tsa'li and she realized that for the first time she did have a family, a family she loved and would do anything to protect.

"Aren't you going to tell Greg about your real plans?"

"What real plans?" Greg looked at Iris.

"Didn't she tell you?" Chance smiled.

"Don't pay her any attention," Iris ordered. "She's desperate and will do anything to save her worthless skin."

"And what about your plans with Wyatt?" Chance asked then cut her eyes at Greg as if she had let the cat out of the bag. "Oh, sorry. I guess you don't know about that, either, do you?"

Greg looked from her to Iris. "What's she talking about?"

"Nothing. She's just trying to throw you off. Pay her no attention."

"That's right," Chance said. "Why listen to me? After all, you can trust her completely, can't you, Greg? I mean, I'm sure she's told you all about trying to seduce Wyatt."

Greg looked at Iris suspiciously. "I told you all about it!" she snapped. "I was just throwing him off guard so he wouldn't suspect I was part of your plan. She's just pissed off because he was so damn interested. Seems like our highness can't keep her lover satisfied and it wounds her little ego to know that he wanted me more than he wanted her."

Chance laughed and drew Greg's attention as well as Iris'. "What's so funny?" he asked.

"Your girlfriend," Chance answered. "She really does have a problem. You should consider convincing her to seek professional help. Wyatt never wanted her. In fact, he turned her down flat. And Iris," she turned her gaze, "just for your information, he's not my lover. He's my husband."

"Husband?" Iris' eyes widened in surprise. "Husband? That rotten—"

The sound of gunfire outside made everyone jump. "Check it out!" Greg ordered his men who stood guard inside the barn. "And give me a gun."

One of the men pulled a handgun from his belt and gave it to Greg as he passed. With the other, he continued to the door. Both of them stepped outside. Within moments the people inside could hear the sounds of a struggle.

Greg smiled at Iris. "Looks like wonderboy's here."

She flashed him a smile in return then looked at Chance. "Well, looks like your husband made it just in time to see you die."

The sounds outside abruptly stopped and for a few seconds no one spoke or moved. Then Greg called out. "Boys? Bring him on in. There's some people who want to see him."



The barn door opened and Wyatt stepped inside. Greg whirled around, taking aim at him with the handgun. "Don't move!"

"Or what?" Wyatt raised his hands, each of which held a weapon. In his right hand was a 9mm semiautomatic pistol, in his left he gripped a military assault rifle.

"Or die," Iris said in a brash voice, raising her gun. "You're outnumbered."

Wyatt cut a look at her and smirked. "Outnumbered? I don't think so. It looks to me like it's a fair fight." He wiggled the weapons in his hands. "Two against two."

Greg looked nervously at Iris who was staring at Wyatt with eyes narrowed and a calculating expression on her face. Without warning she turned and fired twice. One shot passed through John's right shoulder, sending him crashing backward into the gate of one of the stalls. The other bullet found its mark in Tsa'li's thigh. The old man stumbled and fell to the ground.

Wyatt's finger was already tightening on the trigger when a bullet grazed him high on his left arm. Greg's hand shook as he held the gun trained on Wyatt. "One move and you're dead."

Chance had thrown herself down beside John as soon as he fell. She looked up from where she kneeled, busy trying to stop the bleeding from John's shoulder. "No!" she shouted at Greg.

Iris bounded over and jammed her gun in the back of Chance's head. "Put down your weapons," she ordered Wyatt. "Or she dies."

"No!" Chance screamed. "Don't do it! They'll kill you." She knew that Greg and Iris would not let any of them live. For their plan to succeed they would have to kill everyone. The knowledge that she was going to die filled her with an irrational courage and determination. At that moment she didn't care anymore. All that mattered was saving Wyatt.

Turning suddenly she struck out, hitting Iris' arm. The gun went off and she heard the sound of an enraged roar coming from the other side of the barn. Along with everyone else, she looked in Wyatt's direction.

Wyatt was lost in a world of his own. Seeing the gun pointed at Chance and hearing it go off had sent him hurtling into a black void of rage. Inside the void he was captured in another time. In the blink of an eye he saw the truth of a memory long buried.

The woman was lying on her back on the floor with her arms above her head. D.J. was kneeling on her hands and holding a knife at her throat while Fish was pumping away between her legs.

Wyatt's eyes took in the welling blood on the woman's face from fresh cuts and the lacerations that ran down her legs and a cloud of black rage billowed inside him. His eyes burned as if they were on fire and a pressure swelled in his chest. Without warning he felt blackness begin to build around him.

Suddenly he felt himself being sucked deep within. The fury was so strong that it was like a physical sensation. He could taste and smell it. It grew and swelled and took on substance. Overwhelming pain took control of him, making him paralyzed with agony. It felt as if his entire body were being torn apart, like something was growing inside him that was too small for his skin. He wanted to scream but his voice was no longer his to control.

Abruptly it ended. Wyatt could see what was happening before him. He could see the knife cut into the woman's flesh as DJ applied more pressure. He could see her struggle against Fish as the rape continued and he could feel her fear and pain. He wanted to put an end to what was happening but he couldn't make his body respond. It was like someone else was controlling him.

"You always were too weak," a voice spoke to him that he realized with surprise came from his own lips. "It was always up to me, wasn't it? You were never strong enough to do what had to be done."

Wyatt felt such a profound shock race through him that he was sure he'd lost his mind. The voice was his brother's. He didn't understand how that could be. Walker had been dead for over twenty years. And yet it was Walker.

Feeling like a captive audience, Wyatt could only watch as his own body moved under Walker's control. He felt his hands reach out and grab Fish by the back of the neck, pulling him off the woman and holding him aloft.

"Hey, man!" DJ protested as Wyatt held Fish dangling off the floor. "What the fuck's the matter with you? We was only having a little fun."

"Put me the fuck down!" Fish shouted. "You crazy Indian motherfucker!"

That was the last thing Fish ever said. Wyatt saw his other hand move. He tried to stop the blow but he couldn't. Fish's body convulsed once as the iron-hard fingers tore through the flesh and muscle of his diaphragm. A gurgling scream of agony cut the silence but lasted only a moment. Wyatt's hand emerged holding a quivering heart.

Fish's lifeless body fell to the floor. "Jesus fucking Christ!" DJ exclaimed in shock. "Get the fuck away from me!"

He pulled the woman up in front of him, holding the knife to her throat. "Get the fuck back!" he warned as Wyatt advanced. "I mean it, Magnet. One more step and the bitch dies."

Wyatt screamed at his body to stop. He could not risk an innocent life. But Walker could not be controlled. Now that he had drawn blood he was consumed with the lust for more death. A harsh laugh was all the reply DJ received.

Two steps more and the woman was between Wyatt and DJ, whose eyes were wide with fear. Wyatt saw his own hands reach out. At the same moment, the knife moved. A brief scream and a sudden jerk of her body signaled the woman's death as DJ slit her throat and turned the knife on Wyatt.

But his attack was countered and moments later DJ was lying dead beside the woman.

Feeling as if he had just relived the entire event, Wyatt blinked. Now he knew the truth. Walker had not just suddenly appeared. He had been with him all along. That knowledge infuriated him. He had been used to commit murder, just like someone would use a gun or a knife, his body had been used to kill.

"Wyatt, no!" he heard Chance shout. "Don't let him out. Fight him!"

But the rage had swelled too big to be suppressed and that was exactly what Walker needed to take control. Wyatt felt himself being pulled backward. It was like he was freefalling into endless night as control was stripped from him.

"What the fuck?" Greg involuntarily took a step. He never got an answer. One moment Wyatt was standing three yards away and the next his hand was wrapped around Greg's throat.

Walker wrenched the gun from Greg's hand and jammed it under Greg's chin. Two sharp reports accompanied the jerking of Greg's body. Walker flung the corpse aside and looked at Iris who had her gun trained on Chance.

"One step and she's dead," Iris warned.

"Go ahead. She means nothing to me."

"But—" Iris was thrown off by his attitude. "But I thought—"

"She's not my woman," Walker said and looked at Chance. "Isn't that right? That is what you said, isn't it? That you only love Wyatt."

"Yes. And so do you, Walker. He's your brother."

"He is a hindrance!" Walker shouted then looked at Iris. "Go on, pull the trigger. Kill her. Kill all of them. It saves me the trouble."

Iris studied him for a moment then lowered the gun. "Walker, listen to me. You and I—we're two of a kind. We're strong and fearless and we don't need the kind of love these weak pathetic fools offer. Just consider what we could do if we work together. Think of what we could accomplish."

Walker sneered at her. "What do I need you for?"

"I know my way around," she said. "I have contacts. I can open doors for you that would otherwise remain closed."

"She's lying!" Chance exclaimed. "She planned all of this, Walker. She's Maurice's daughter. He left her and her mother when he married my mother and she's been bent on revenge ever since. She doesn't care about you or anyone else. All she wants is to make us pay for something we had no part of. Iris feels like she was cheated and she blames us for it. She wants to hurt us because Maurice hurt her. You can't trust her. You know that. If you trust her she'll turn on you. She'll make sure the police hunt you down for what happened here and you'll be the one who pays while she goes on her merry way. Walker, you know I'm telling you the truth. You know Iris can't be trusted. Look what she did to you last time, how she tried to use you."

Walker looked at her for a moment. Just as he opened his mouth, Tsa'li spoke up. "The Woman with the Eyes of a Wolf is right, my grandson. This woman, Iris, she does not wish to help you. Listen to the space between her words and the lies shout to be heard."

Walker turned on him. "And you, old man, I suppose I should listen to more of your foolishness?"

"Walker, he's right," Chance said as she moved over beside Tsa'li. "You know he is. He's your grandfather, he loves you. Please, let this end now. There's been too much death already."

A flicker of emotion seemed to cross his face and hope swelled within her. For just one moment she saw Wyatt looking at her. Then the light died and Walker was once more in control. He gave her a hard look before returning his attention to Tsa'li. "Give me what I want and I will let you live."

Tsa'li shook his head. "It is not for you. Only one who possesses purity of spirit may be named Keeper of the Uluhsati. You have no love within you. You are poison to the nature of the crystal."

"Where is it?"

Tsa'li did not answer. He merely stared at Walker without expression. Chance was afraid that his silence would provoke Walker into action and she knew that if Walker hurt Tsa'li, Wyatt would never be able to live with it.

"Walker..." She started toward him but Iris cut her off, pushing her as hard as she could so that Chance stumbled back into Tsa'li and knocked him back down.

Chance knelt down beside Tsa'li as Iris turned to Walker. "Can't you see what they're doing? They know Wyatt can hear them and they're feeding him, helping him grow strong from their words so that he can overcome you. Are you going to let them get away with that or are you going to kill them and take what's rightfully yours? Are you truly a warrior or are you as weak as that ineffectual fool, Wyatt?"

Chance looked up and saw the play of conflicting emotions on Walker's face. She was taken off guard when he suddenly reached out and grabbed her. Tsa'li reached for her but Walker jerked her to him. Wrapping one arm around her neck, he pulled her up against him and placed the barrel of the gun against her temple. "Give me the crystal or she dies."

John struggled to rise but slumped back against the stall rail, holding his injured shoulder. "Walker, please," he begged. "Tsa'li wasn't lying to you. You can't possess the crystal. Its power will turn on you. It will destroy you. I beg you, let Chance go and give up this dream of revenge. You can't hold your brother hostage any longer. What was done cannot be undone. It was an accident, a silly fight between two brothers that ended tragically. If I could undo it, I would. But no one can. You don't belong here. Let go of your hate and release your brother so that your soul can return to the Spirit World. Please, Walker, I love you. Do not condemn yourself."

Walker pulled the hammer back on the pistol as his eyes moved from John to Tsa'li. "What will it be, old man?"

Tsa'li pulled himself up, standing shakily on his wounded leg. "I cannot give you what I do not have."

"Where is it?" Walker's voice rose to a shout.

"I have it." Chance's voice was soft.

Reaching inside the pocket of the old jeans she withdrew a worn pouch. From it, she took the crystal.

"Give me that!" Iris pounced on her, snatching the crystal from her hand.

"It's mine!" she shrieked, dancing around with the crystal. "It's all mine and all of you can go to hell."

"It won't do you any good," Chance said. "Iris, you can't win."

Iris laughed at her. "You're so pathetic, you know that? You don't even realize that I already have. See, I have everything."

"You have nothing."

"Nothing? You think so? Well, what do you call everything your father owned? Is that nothing?"

"You'll never touch his estate, Patricia's too greedy, she'll spend every dime fighting you."

Iris laughed again. "Well then, it'll be a short fight because as of now she's broke." She smirked at the confused expression on Chance's face. "You don't think I'd kill him before I made sure I'd inherit everything, do you? See, I've been real busy. When the attorneys get around to settling the estate they'll read the will that specifically states that everything he owns goes to his legitimate daughter."

"That kind of leaves you out then, doesn't it?"

"Actually, it leaves you out. See, I made sure that they'll find a marriage certificate with the names Maurice Davenport and Doris Stillwater. The date is one year before I was born. So, you see, princess, not only was your father a lying cheat, he was also a bigamist. His marriage to your mother and to that bitch Patricia were both illegal and you...well, you're a bastard – a penniless one to boot."

Chance stared at her for a moment. "I guess you think you thought of everything. But you're forgetting one thing."

Iris raised her eyebrows and Chance gestured to Walker. "You may inherit Maurice's estate but Walker will never let you keep the crystal."

"Then Walker can go to hell." Iris pointed the gun at Walker. At the same instant she fired the ground shook beneath their feet. The shot missed its mark and everyone stumbled around, trying to stay on their feet. Chance ran to Tsa'li who knelt down beside John. The sound of the horses neighing in fear and pounding their hooves blended with the creaking and cracking of wood as the shaking grew stronger.

"We must get him outside," Tsa'li said.

Chance nodded and took one of John's arms as Tsa'li took the other. Between them they managed to get John to his feet. All around them the barn was being shaken apart. Iris was trying to make it to the door but she couldn't stay on her feet. Every few feet she would be thrown to the ground as the earth buckled and split. Even Walker was finding it hard to stay upright as he chased Iris and the crystal.

Stumbling and staggering, Chance and Tsa'li supported John between them. For what seemed an eternity they fought their way toward the door. "What's happening?" Chance screamed as the roof started to give way.

"The crystal calls to its owner," Tsa'li said. "We must hurry."

Chance saw Iris make it to the door and disappear outside with Walker on her heels. By the time she and Tsa'li carried John outside she could see Iris a few yards away, fighting to stay on her feet as the earth rolled and churned.

"Here." Tsa'li indicated an old oak that stood near the barn. Chance helped him settle John so that his back rested against the massive trunk. She looked at Tsa'li. "What do we do?"

"It is time for the Uluhsati to be returned to its world," Tsa'li told her. "You must give it to the original Keeper when he appears."

"The original Keeper?" she shouted, trying to be heard over the sound of sudden rolling thunder and explosions as lightning streaked from the cloudless sky. "Who is the Keeper?"

"You will know," Tsa'li said.

"I will? Why me? I'm not Cherokee, I can't—"

"It must be you."

"Why?"

"Because of the life you carry inside you." He put his hand over her belly.

Chance stared at him in shock. "What?"

"You carry a child within you. A son."

Her heart jumped at his words. "How do you know?"

"I know."

Chance didn't think to argue with him. If Tsa'li said it, it must be so. But that didn't do anything to ease her fear. "What must I do?"

"First you must take the crystal from those who seek to pervert its power."

Chance looked over to where Iris was backing away from Walker as he steadily advanced on her. She turned back to Tsa'li. "What about Wyatt?"

"Protect the Uluhsati," was his reply.

Chance had no idea how she was supposed to do that, but something in Tsa'li's eyes and voice told her that everything depended on it. "I will," she promised, hoping that her words were not empty. Then turning, she ran toward Iris.

Due to the wind that howled and the storm that raged around them, Walker didn't hear her approach. She ran past him and dived at Iris. The woman went down with Chance on top of her but she didn't give up. Chance's head whipped back as Iris bashed her in the temple with the crystal. She felt warm blood rush down her face as her eye swam but held on to Iris with every ounce of strength she had.

"You can't have it!" Iris shouted. "It's mine!"

Chance punched Iris in the face then grabbed her hand as Iris' head rocked from the blow. Just as she got her hand on the crystal to pull it away, Walker grabbed her by the hair and hauled her up. Chance would not let go of Iris or the crystal and Iris ended up being pulled along with her.

Walker used his free hand to wrap around Iris' throat. She gagged and wheezed as his fingers tightened but refused to release the crystal that Chance was trying to pry from her hand. Suddenly all three of them were sent sailing through the air as a bolt of light hit the ground at their feet. Iris lost her grip on the crystal and it landed several yards away, between her and Chance.

They both spotted it at the same time. Iris started scrambling on all fours toward it. Walker grabbed her leg and yanked her back. She kicked at him like an enraged bull and slowed him from making his own move for the crystal as he had to deal with her. That gave Chance the advantage. As Walker was shoving Iris out of his way she made a mad dash for it. They both dived at the same time but Chance was closer. Just as her hand closed around it Walker landed on top of her.

"No!" she screamed as he reached for the crystal in her hand. "Wyatt, no!"

For a split second he froze. Their eyes locked and Chance didn't understand what she saw. She thought she saw the perpetual hate within his eyes disappear. It was almost as if she were seeing a side of Walker that had been buried for a long time. But she could not take the time to think about it. Using the opportunity the moment provided she squirmed and kicked free. Turning so that she faced him, she moved back in a crablike fashion, watching him warily.

"Give it to me," he shouted over the sounds of nature that buffeted them from all directions.

Chance shook her head. "It doesn't belong to you."

"Give it to me!"

She backed up as he started toward her on hands and knees. Movement behind him diverted her attention for a moment. Lightning danced like a ballet of erratic puppets just off the ground as leaves swirled and dived in the wild wind. Chance's eyes widened as the lights began to coalesce. Her body froze as the form came to life.

Walker stopped, looking at her strangely. When she didn't seem to notice him he turned and looked behind him.

The scene was something from a nightmare. Swirling lights danced through the air, seeming to draw a sinuous outline in the darkness. As the lights merged, the outline took on form and substance.

Chance stood up as the Uktena came to life. It looked like a cross between a giant serpent and a dragon, almost like the dragons from Chinese mythology. Its body was long and sinuous, with glistening scales that danced with every color of the spectrum. Its neck was long and its chest narrow. Two short legs with three front toes and one rear pawed the air. Two longer legs were positioned at the rear of its body, similar to the front legs, but thicker and with longer claws on the toes. Its tail seemed to be miles long. It whipped through the air and beat against the ground as the creature turned its head to look at the humans who stared at it in disbelief.

Chance had never imagined anything that looked like the creature. Its head wasn't like a serpent. It had an elongated snout similar to an alligator with rows of razor-sharp teeth, yet it gave the appearance of being almost equine in nature. Its eyes were alive with color, changing from one to the next almost too quickly to see. Two twisting, curved horns protruded from its bony head.

Chance looked around and saw that Tsa'li and John had not moved from their position at the oak tree. Both men were watching the Uktena with an expression of awe on their faces. Iris had managed to get to her feet and was inching her way around toward Chance and the crystal. Walker seemed to be mesmerized by the creature.

The Uktena turned its eyes to Chance and she felt her heart jump in her chest. She knew now what Tsa'li meant by returning the crystal to its Keeper. She could see the slight indentation between the horns on the creature's head where the crystal should be. The question was, did she have the courage to put it there?

As if reading her thoughts, Walker turned and looked at her and held out his hand. "Give it to me."

"No." She shook her head and pushed herself up. "It doesn't belong to you. It doesn't belong to any of us."

Walker made a move toward her and she reacted without thinking, running straight toward the creature. It roared as she drew near and she stopped, looking up at it. "I only want to give it back to you," she whispered.

"No!" Walker raced at her.

The creature snapped its tail sharply as Walker came up behind her, hitting him from one side and sending him flying through the air like he had been shot from a cannon. He crashed into Iris who was trying to inch her way closer and both of them rolled over and over until at last they stopped in a tangle on the ground.

Chance looked back at the Uktena and raised her hand. "Please," she whispered, offering the crystal. "We know it doesn't belong here. Take it home where it will be safe."

"No!" she heard Iris scream behind her. The Uktena roared as Iris climbed to her feet and leveled her gun at Walker. "I'll kill him!" she threatened Chance. "Throw it to me or he dies!"

Chance looked from her to Walker who was eyeing Iris warily. Then she looked at the creature that seemed to be waiting to see what she would do. Finally she looked



back at Walker. "Wyatt, please, if you can hear me, please help me. I have to return it. Please, I need your help."

Walker started to rise. As soon as he did Iris pulled the trigger. Chance screamed as she saw him fall back and the creature roared again. Iris screamed as the Uktena suddenly lunged for her with its wide mouth opened. The end of her scream brought the end of the storm.

Chance looked around. Iris was nowhere to be seen. She could see the rapid rise and fall of Walker's chest and knew that at least for the moment he was alive. Then she looked up at the Uktena as it turned its head to her. "It isn't his fault," she said as the massive head lowered close to her. "He couldn't help what happened to him. He doesn't mean to be evil, he's just confused. Please, if you have the power, please help him be whole again. Help him to overcome the darkness that threatens him. He doesn't deserve to suffer. He doesn't deserve to die."

The Uktena's breath was hot against her as it regarded her. Chance didn't know what to expect but she knew on some instinctive level that it did not mean her any harm. "Are you sure that is what you wish?" she heard a soft rasping voice in her mind.

"Yes," she answered. "More than anything."

"Then it shall be." It curled its tail around in front her. She climbed up on it and it raised her between the enormous horns. She laid the crystal in the circular depression and saw the glistening scales tighten around it. The creature lowered its tail and she climbed back off and backed away.

The Uktena looked around at everyone then back at her. She smiled at it and it raised its head to the heavens. A brilliant shaft of light split the night from above surrounding the Uktena. A moment later the light seemed to spring upward, disappearing like a shooting star into the heavens.

## Chapter Thirteen

The night seemed strangely still. No night creatures sang in the trees, no breeze moved the bare branches. No one moved. Tsa'li and John still sat beneath the spreading branches of the old oak, staring silently at the spot where the Uktena had been. Chance looked like she was in shock. Her eyes were wide and unblinking as she stood rooted in place like a statue.

Wyatt lay on the ground, fighting the fury of the other inside him at failing to claim the crystal. He could feel the wound in his chest. The pain was white-hot. His blood was warm against his cold skin. The thought entered his mind that he was dying.

Strange as it was, that brought no fear, only regret—regret that he would never have the opportunity to tell the people he loved how much they meant to him, that he would never have the chance to have a family of his own, and regret that he would never be able to make up for what had happened to his brother.

A sensation like being whirled around on a carnival ride made him grimace and close his eyes. The sensation ceased as suddenly as it had started and he opened his eyes. Immediately they grew round.

All around him was a thick white mist. It was like standing in the clouds. He started to try and sit, knowing that the movement would cause the pain to intensify. To his surprise there was no pain. He looked down and saw his blood-drenched clothes, then put his hand to his chest. He could feel no wound.

“What’s going on?” His voice sounded hollow and hoarse.

“You tell me,” a voice answered from within the mist.

Wyatt gasped as the figure came into view. His brother stopped in front of him and stared into his eyes for a long time. “What do you want?” Wyatt asked when his brother didn’t speak. “My life, is that it? Well, maybe you’ve already got it. I’m dead, aren’t I?”

His brother didn’t answer and Wyatt took a step closer. “I didn’t mean to do it. I really didn’t. I just didn’t want you to—”

“It’s time you remembered things the way they really happened,” his brother interrupted and held out his hand.

Wyatt looked down at the offered hand then into his brother’s eyes. “Come on,” his brother urged. “It’s time, brother—for both of us.”

As soon as their hands clasped, a whirlwind seized them and sent them spinning through time and space. When at last it stopped, they were standing atop the small hill overlooking the pond where Walker had died.

Wyatt shook his head and looked away but his brother nudged him and nodded in the direction of the pond. “Come on, it’s time you faced it.”

"No." Wyatt shook his head. "I don't want to see. I know what happened. I remembered. I-I killed you."

His brother nudged him again. "Come on, surely you aren't afraid? Or are you?"

The jibe had the anticipated result. Wyatt frowned and started down the hill toward the water. By the time he reached the muddy bank, his brother was beside him. They had no more than come to a halt when both of them were transformed. In the blink of an eye they were boys again. Walker was hold Winny Holling under the water and Wyatt was scaming at him.

"Walker, stop! You're gonna kill him!"

Walker laughed and pushed Winny down harder. Wyatt tried again to dislodge his brother but once again Walker lashed out. Wyatt felt like he was in a bad dream. Winny was flailing around a lot slower. If he didn't do something he would drown.

"Walker, stop it!" he shouted. "I mean it. Let him go!"

Walker smiled and pulled an old knife from his pocket. "Or what?"

"Put that down!"

"Put it down!" Walker laughed. "Well, okay."

Wyatt screamed as he saw the knife flash down. A moment later a red stain blossomed in the water. Winny's arms quit waving and Wyatt knew he had to save him. Without thinking he dived at his brother, knocking him off the drowning boy. Walker grunted as Wyatt knocked him into the water. They both went under and came up sputtering. Walker made a swipe at him with the knife. The tip caught on his right jawbone, slicing the skin. Wyatt cried out in pain and moved back but Walker just laughed and came after him.

Seeing his brother coming for him with the knife made anger rise inside him. He stopped retreating and faced his brother. "Stop, Walker. I mean it. Stop."

But Walker would not stop. He kept coming. Wyatt screamed as he felt the knife cut into his arm and he jumped on Walker. They both went under, kicking and hitting as they fought for the knife. Wyatt grew dizzy, desperate for air. But Walker would not let him rise to the surface. Black spots danced in front of his eyes and he felt like his lungs were going to explode.

Just as the dark spots began to coalesce into a solid shroud, Wyatt felt a burst of energy. Using every ounce of strength he had he pushed Walker down under him and put his feet on Walker's back. Pushing hard, he propelled himself up.

Air rushed into his lungs and he gulped greedily. After a moment it occurred to him that Walker had not come up. Thinking that Walker was trying to scare him into thinking he was hurt, he kicked at him under the water. Walker still didn't surface so Wyatt ducked back under the water and grabbed him by the jacket and pulled him up.

Walker's face broke the surface of the water and Wyatt screamed. He scrambled back up on the muddy bank, trying to get away from the sight of his brother's wide eyes and gaping mouth. His foot slid and he fell. Twice he tried to get up and twice he

slipped in the mud. His heart was pounding so fast it felt like it was going to explode. He started to push himself up when he felt a touch on his shoulder.

Flopping over on his back he looked up. His brother stood over him with his hands extended. "But...but..." Wyatt looked from his brother to the pond. His body was still floating face up in the shallow water. Fear made him scream and start to scurry back, crab-like.

"You don't have to be afraid." His brother came toward him. "Walker, it's okay."

Like the shattering of glass from a high-pitched tone, Wyatt's memories cracked. The walls fell, revealing the real memories that had been so long hidden. The past vanished and the two grown men once more faced one another.

The man who thought he was Wyatt looked into the eyes of his brother. "I didn't mean to do it, Wyatt. I was angry because it felt like you were against me and-and..."

"It's okay," the real Wyatt smiled when his brother's voice failed. "I know it was an accident. That's why I stayed, to protect you."

"Protect me? By making me angry and full of hate and —"

"No, by giving you a place to hide from it."

Walker stared at him for a long time. "Then it wasn't you! It's been me all along. I'm the one who's responsible for all the deaths. It was always me."

Wyatt shook his head. "No, it was the Other."

"The Other?"

Wyatt nodded and looked off to one side. Walker's eyes turned in the same direction and after a moment he saw it. A ghostly form moved toward them. It stopped and Walker's heart jumped in his chest. A warrior from the past stood proudly before them. Wyatt looked over at his brother then at the Warrior. "You can't have either one of us. It's over. It's time for you to leave this plane. The time for bloodshed has past. This is a new age. It's no longer your time. We'll fight the battle our own way."

The Warrior looked from him to Walker then back again. "You cannot drive me away. Not so long as there is room for another within him."

Wyatt put his arm around Walker's shoulder. "But there isn't. Not anymore."

Walker turned and looked into his brother's eyes. For the first time in his life a feeling of peace and completeness filled him. He smiled and nodded, then looked at the Warrior. "My brother's right. There isn't any room for you. Leave. Your time here is ended."

The Warrior stared at him for a moment then turned and started walking away. Walker watched as the form became as thin as air and finally vanished. He turned to Wyatt. "And what about you? Where will you be?"

"Where I've always been. Where I was meant to be. It's over, Walker. Now we can look to the future. Now we both can start to live."

Walker opened his mouth to tell his brother thank you, to tell him how much he loved him, but before he could get the words out Wyatt was gone and he was once more lying on the ground outside Winston Holling's barn.

Chance ran to where Wyatt lay. His shirt was covered with blood and his face seemed pale. He sat up as she knelt down beside him and pulled his shirt open. His skin was unmarred. There was no sign of a wound. In amazement she looked up at him. "He did it," she whispered. "The Uktena saved you. God, I was so afraid I was going to lose you. I was scared that—"

"You'll never lose me. There is no more darkness. It was as Grandfather said, the power of love conquered it."

"Then you..." She hesitated for a moment. "You don't hate your brother or what he did? You found a way to love him again."

"Yes."

She thought about it for a few seconds. She wasn't sure how he had managed to discover love in the midst of all the violence but she was grateful that he had and did not want to tempt the fates. This was one time she was glad just to accept things as they were and not question it. Something Tsali had said popped into her mind and she smiled.

"I think I might have a surprise for you."

"Oh?" He raised his eyebrows. "What kind of surprise?"

She put his hand on her stomach and he looked up at her questioningly. She looked over to see Tsali smiling at her then turned back to him. "We're going to have a baby."

"A baby?" He looked at his hand on her stomach then up at her.

A stab of anxiety ran through her. "That's okay, isn't it? I mean, you want a child, don't you?"

"Our child?" He smiled gently. "Yes." He took her in his arms and kissed her deeply.

The kiss was like waking up from some horrible dream. Winding her arms around him, she returned it eagerly. It took several seconds for it to dawn on her that something was different. Not that she wasn't moved by the kiss. It was all she wanted and more. But there was something that was different in the way he felt and the way he held her. She drew back and looked at him with a puzzled expression. "But...why didn't you..." she stammered in confusion. He seemed like the man she loved but something was different—something in the set of his mouth, the expression in his eyes. "The transformation," she finally continued. "Why didn't you change back to your real self?"

"This is my real self."

Chance stared at him for a moment then looked over at Tsa'li and John. Neither one of them spoke. "I don't understand," she finally said. "Every other time you've changed back to the way you were before. Why not now?"

"Because now I have control. I won't have to fight anymore."

"Then he's gone?"

"Gone? No," he said as he took her hands. "He'll never be gone, but there won't be any more trouble."

She blew out her breath. "You're not really making any sense. Would you mind explaining to me exactly what you mean, starting from the beginning?"

He looked over at his father and grandfather. Tsa'li helped John to stand and they both walked over to them. Chance looked up at John, who was smiling, then at Tsa'li. Tsa'li knelt down beside her.

"The day Winny Holling died, one twin left this world—the child we knew as Wyatt. He died by his brother's hand. But Wyatt was a child of love. He could not hate his brother for what had happened. He understood that they were never meant to be two separate people. By an accident of nature, the egg within their mother's womb split and created two men where there should have been one. And so they lived in the world of man as two halves of the same whole, each separate and each incomplete. Upon the physical death of the child Wyatt, the spirit was made whole again."

Chance frowned at him and shook her head. "But-but...I don't understand. If their spirits joined then— This doesn't make sense. I thought Walker was responsible for all the rage and violence?"

Tsa'li smiled and put his hand on her shoulder. "The boy you knew as a child, the boy you called Wyatt, grew into the man you now call husband. But that boy was not only Wyatt, he was Walker as well."

She looked at Wyatt who nodded. "It's true. After Wyatt died he came to me and told me it was okay and that I didn't have to be sad or afraid because he would always be with me. But I was afraid—afraid of what would happen when everyone found out I had killed him. So, I lied. I told them Walker had died and that I was Wyatt. I thought they believed me."

Chance looked up at John and Tsa'li. "Did you?"

"No," John answered her question. "And we almost said as much. Fortunately, Tsa'li realized what had happened and counseled us otherwise. We knew we had to wait for him to come to the truth in his own time."

She looked around at them one by one then jumped to her feet. "Either I'm really dense or none of this makes any sense! If Wyatt— Walker killed Wyatt, but Wyatt became part of Walker then what made him have all those...episodes? Why all the violence and rage? Who's responsible for that?"

"The Other." Walker stood and faced her.

"The Other?"

"A Warrior from long ago who did not cross over," Tsa'li said. "His time was one of war and bloodshed. His life was dedicated to protecting the People against their enemies. He saw in the boys a chance to live again. It was their battle against him that kept them both together and apart for all these years."

Chance was stunned. "You mean there were...there were three of you? But...I thought—"

"I didn't realize it," Walker said. "I didn't know my brother was here helping me fight against the Other. I didn't realize that he's always been a part of me and that we were battling the enemy together."

"And now?" she asked.

"Now the battle is done and he's gone."

"Gone where?"

"I don't have an answer to that. I just know that he won't bother us anymore."

"And Wyatt?"

He put his hands on top of her shoulders and looked down into her eyes. "He's still right here," he said, his voice soft. "We both are."

"Both of you," she said doubtfully. "There are two of you."

"Yes and no."

She frowned up at him. "What does that mean?"

"Don't you see? That's how it was meant to me. We were always two halves of a whole. It was only by becoming joined as we should be that we were able to defeat the Other. Now we're complete. Now we're one."

She shook her head. "I'm not sure I follow you. In fact, I'm not sure I could if you explained it more. But I know that understanding takes time and thanks to whatever happened at least we have that."

"Then you still want me?"

She looked into his eyes and smiled. Whether she ever understood the truth, or how two spirits could make one man, it didn't matter. Whatever he called himself, whatever name he used, he was still the man she loved.

"No..." she smiled mischievously, and paused. "I want both of you."

He laughed and gathered her up in his arms. When he released her, she turned and her eyes met Tsa'li's. He nodded and she smiled, wondering if a hundred years into the future there would be stories about what had happened and if so, what those future generations would think of the story of the ancient warrior who came to life to save the People, of the man with two souls. Her hand moved to her stomach and she thought of the life that grew within her and the man who had fathered it. She suspected there was yet more to be written in the unending saga. The Wolf Tale was not yet done.

*The End*

## **About the Author**

Ciana Stone has been reading since the age of three, and wrote her first story at age five. Since then she has enjoyed writing as a solitary form of entertainment, and has just recently come out of the closet to share her stories with others. She holds several post graduate degrees and has often been referred to as a professional student. Her latest fields of interest are quantum mechanics and Taoism. When she is not writing (or studying) she enjoys painting (canvas, not walls), sculpting, running, hiking and yoga. She lives with her long-time lover in several locations in the United States.

Ciana welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and email address on her author bio page at [www.ellorascave.com](http://www.ellorascave.com).



## **Also by Ciana Stone**

Mind Games



Discover for yourself why readers can't get enough of the multiple award-winning publisher Ellora's Cave. Whether you prefer e-books or paperbacks, be sure to visit EC on the web at [www.ellorascave.com](http://www.ellorascave.com) for an erotic reading experience that will leave you breathless.

[www.ellorascave.com](http://www.ellorascave.com)