

A Father's Quest

By Kate Simon

Caleb Newsome waited for his call. It was Sunday and his daughter, Cammie always called on Sundays. It didn't matter what she was working on, she always called. He glanced at her pictures on his desk. One was taken the last time she'd visited his ranch. She was riding her horse Sally. She was a natural and had made it as far as the nationals. The other picture when she was a baby. She'd been the most beautiful baby he'd ever seen. Okay, he was prejudiced but his wife was a beautiful woman. Celeste Ainsley had been one the of the most eligible women in the world. That was until she decided to take a vacation on a ranch in Arizona. Three months later Celeste was two months pregnant and her mother had cut her off. Camilla Ainsley was a woman of her word. So long as Celeste insisted on humiliating the family by playing cowgirl, she wouldn't get a dime from the Duchess of Hartwood.

Celeste tried to be a ranch wife and mother. She greeted guests and tried to play lady of the manor, even though it was a ranch house. She never quite took to being a mother. He was sure, at least he wanted to be sure, Celeste loved Cammie in her own way, but it was never enough. She'd insisted they name her Camilla after Celeste's mother, but it didn't sway the duchess. Celeste would have to make due on what they made from the ranch. And Caleb refused to call his daughter after the miserable bitch who couldn't be bothered to meet her grandchild.

He'd hoped that one day Cammie would take over the ranch but in the meantime she'd been working in LA. He put his lunch dishes in the dishwasher and looked at the clock. Two p.m. and she still hadn't called. He tried calling her for the third time but it went straight to voice mail. Maybe her phone was dead. He tried to convince himself he was being ridiculous but he knew his kid. If her phone was dead she would have borrow a phone or found the nearest land line. She would never miss their Sunday call.

Caleb had two choices he could drive to LA from Tucson but that would take over six hours and it would drive him mad with worry. He booked the first flight out of Tucson and he'd be there in less than two hours. He booked the first available flight, threw some things in a bag and jumped in the car.

He looked out the window of the plane and thought of the first time he'd flown. It had been a flight to New York to identify Celeste's body. They'd been separated for six

months when she got into a car accident with the son of business tycoon. He'd crashed his Bugatti into a phone pole. He had a blood alcohol twice the legal limit. He walked away with a few scratches and community service. Celeste died instantly from a broken neck. He remembered thinking that even in death she was the most beautiful woman he'd ever seen. He'd loved her, more than anything, but it wasn't enough.

He was jostled by the wheels touching down. He grabbed his bag and got off the plane as quick as he could. He ran to the rental car stand and hit his first snag.

A skinny kid with an ill fitting jacket gave him an indulgent smile. "I'm sorry sir. All are cars are reserved."

"Yes, I know. I reserved one a few hours ago from Tucson."

"Oh, that's because you called our 800 number. They don't always know what we have available."

Everything in Caleb made him wanted to pull the kid over the counter and snap him in two. But that wouldn't solve his problem. He took off his Stetson and leaned over the counter. "Now listen to me," he looked close at his badge. "Listen to me, Steve. I reserved a car for right now. I have the receipt on my phone."

"Sir, I don't know what to say..."

"Steve, my daughter is missing. I'm here to find her. So I don't care if I have to take your car, I'm leaving here with wheels."

Fifteen minutes later he was on the 405 headed toward Cammie's apartment.

Grace Thorne sat at her desk and wondered how long the cold shoulder from her boss would last. Okay, she beat him at his poker game. More like kicked his ass but what did he expect? Should she have thrown the game to sooth his ego? That's what the men in her squad thought. Screw it. She won, he lost. He should put on his big boy pants and deal with it. In the meantime, she'd be working weekends for the foreseeable future. Captain Carter stopped in after hitting the gym in the basement. More likely it was to make sure she was either at her desk or working a case.

"Quiet day, Thorne?"

"Yes, Captain. Just catching up on some paperwork."

"Uh huh," he said as he walked into his office. A few moments later a man with sandy brown hair and scruffy goatee came into the squad room. He was wearing dusty jeans and an equally dusty jean jacket. His dark brown Stetson set off his bright blue eyes.

"Who's in charge here?" He asked half between a question and a yell. Grace pointed to Captain Carter rifling through his desk. She watched as the man shook the captain's hand and started talking. She went back to her paperwork until she heard raised voices. She looked up to see the cowboy shouting and leaning over the desk. She pushed up from her desk and opened the door to the office.

"You have to help me!" shouted the cowboy.

"There's nothing I can do."

"What's going on?" asked Grace.

"Mr. Newsome's daughter missed a Sunday phone call and he assumes this means he's daughter is missing."

"How long has she been gone?" she asked.

"I'm not sure. Cammie hasn't missed a Sunday phone call in four years. I stopped at her apartment before I came here. Her apartment is clean but her landlady hasn't seen her in days."

“She’s an adult. Adults go on trips, go out of town. She’ll turn up sooner or later,” said the captain.

“Sooner or later!?” yelled the cowboy.

Grace spoke before he leaped across the captain’s desk. “What does you daughter do for a living? Maybe I could contact her boss for you.”

“She’s a public defender.”

“She’s still not a missing person before forty eight hours.”

“Cammie?” asked Grace. “Is your daughter Camilla Newsome?”

“Yes.”

“Captain, how about I make a few calls? Jerry Stanfield might know something.”

“Fine, but if we get a case, you’re on it. No fishing expeditions.”

“Mr. Newsome, if you want to wait at my desk I need a word with my captain.”

He tipped his hat at Grace. “Caleb.”

“I’ll be right with you, Caleb.” She waited until the he was standing at her desk when she closed his door. “Captain, what’s wrong? You know Camilla Newsome. She’s one of us.”

“She’s a public defender, not one of us. We bust them. She puts them back out on the street.”

Grace took a breath. Captain Ron Carter was a first class tool, but she couldn’t do anything about that now. “Sir, I’ll make some calls. It’s like you said. Maybe she had a weekend in Vegas. Chances are someone in her office will know and we can send her father home.”

“Fine, just don’t take all day.”

Grace closed the door behind her and wondered about the date of the next poker game.

Caleb wondered who this woman was and if she could really help him. He picked up her nameplate. *Detective Grace Thorne*. He briefly wondered why she was working on a Sunday. She appeared to be in her late forties. Sunday duty seemed to be something a younger detective would be assigned.

“Mr. Newsome, let’s make some calls.”

He turned to see Grace coming up from behind him. “Caleb, please.”

“I’m Grace.” She pointed at her name plate and smiled. “But you already know that. Caleb. Please have a seat.” She grabbed the phone and called the Public Defenders office.

“Jonathan Scott.”

“Mr. Scott, this is Detective Grace Thorne. I’m looking for Camilla Newsome.”

“You aren’t the only one. She didn’t show up for court on Friday. Stanfield is really pissed.”

“Does anyone have an idea where she is?”

“If we did she’d be in contempt of court for her no show.”

“Did she talk about going on a trip?”

“How would I know?”

“Did you report her missing?”

“No, but if she doesn’t show up for work by Monday with a damn good excuse she’ll be reporting to the unemployment office. Now, if you’ll excuse me, I’m busy doing the work she’s blowing off.”

The man hung up and Grace stared at the phone. “Damn.”

“What is it?”

“Camilla didn’t show up for court on Friday.”

“What? She would have never done that.”

“I agree. I know your daughter. We meet for coffee. She’s a good kid. She’s an aggressive defender but she’s also a realist.”

“Now what? She’s definitely missing.”

“We walk across the street to her office.”

Caleb followed the detective across the street to another generic office building. She flashed her badge at the guard and pressed the elevator button.

“I really appreciate this Detective.”

“Grace,” she smiled.

“Grace,” he repeated with as much of a smile as he could manage. The doors opened and they walked into an almost empty office save for a tall, dark haired man in his thirties. He looked up from his desk and did not look pleased.

“Detective, I told you everything I know on the phone.”

“Mr. Scott...Jonathan...you’re not being very helpful. This is Mr. Newsome, Camilla’s father.”

“I said I don’t know where she is. Bringing him won’t intimidate me.”

Grace looked at Caleb with a slight smile. “I don’t know. Angry father, tough cowboy, arms that look like they could snap you like a twig. I’d call that pretty intimidating.”

Caleb resisted the urge to smile at Grace’s technique.

“Now, we’re going to look through Camilla’s desk while you get together any relevant cases. Any threats, her current docket, including who benefited from her not showing up in court.”

“Hey! I’m not your errand boy,” he said.

Caleb took one step closer to the man and said very quietly. “I’m here to find my daughter. You can help me and we go away or you can not help and well...trust me, son...you do not want that.”

Scott shrugged. "Fine." Her desk is in the back by the window."

Caleb followed Grace back to Cammie's desk. He would have found it on his own. There was a small vase of silk flowers, poppies mixed with desert verbena. They grew wild on their ranch and had always been her favorites. Grace pulled open a desk drawer and found her appointment book. She started flipping through the pages.

"Nothing's jumping out at me. No underlines, no red letters." She pushed the book toward Caleb. "Anything strike you as unusual?"

He fought back tears as he saw his daughter's handwriting. The notes seemed inconsequential, court dates, lunch with Sheila, a friend he'd met. "I know Sheila. She's a friend of Cammie's. They went to school together. She's in private practice."

"I didn't see a phone book. Her numbers are probably in her phone. There's probably a backup of them in a laptop."

"It might be at her apartment."

Grace nodded. "Let's go."

Grace pulled into the parking lot of the upscale condo. Caleb Newsome pulled in next to her and parked. She looked at the determination in the man's face and wondered what it would be like to have a father like Caleb. Her own father had taken a powder when she was a kid. It had just been her and her Mom until she passed five years ago. She locked up her car and followed Caleb toward the building. "Where's the landlady's office? I'll get the key."

"I have a key."

"You have a key to your daughter's condo?"

"Yeah, I helped her pick it out."

"Wow, ok. She gave you the key. That gives you authority to enter." Grace grabbed the box of files Camilla's her recalcitrant associate compiled. The home didn't surprise her. Everything was spotless. It looked like any home you'd find in the southwest. Actually, it looked like something out of Architectural Digest. There was a comfortable couch, brightly colored throw rugs and American Indian influenced pottery. She moved to the tidy bedroom. The bed was made and it looked as well thought out as the living room. She looked at a series of pictures of Camilla at various ages on different horses. "Nice place. Looks like she was quite the cowgirl."

"Still is."

"She's also very neat, precise."

Caleb managed a small smile. "Yeah, she's been like that since she was a kid. She likes everything in it's place."

Grace looked at a picture on her nightstand. It was a picture of Camilla and Caleb. They were on a patio. It looked like a fairly current picture. Caleb was wearing black jeans, t shirt and horned rimmed glasses. Grace had know idea horned rimmed glasses could be sexy. He had his well developed arms wrapped around his daughter and they were both smiling broadly. She was stunned at the emotional tug she felt at the sight. She looked at Caleb and smiled. "Sweet picture."

"That was her birthday in April. We had a barbeque with a few friends."

“You look very close.”

“It’s just been us since she was a baby.”

Grace could hear the catch in his voice. She glanced back at the picture and the light caught a smudge. Just one. She held up the frame and turned it and smiled.

“What is it?” he asked.

“A fingerprint. Just one.” She set it down and smiled.

“Who’s print? Should we get someone in here to test it?”

“We don’t need to. I know who’s it is.” She kissed her fingertip and held it just above the glass. “She kisses your picture.” She turn to see tears running down Caleb’s cheeks.

“We have to find her,” he whispered.

Grace put her arms around him without thinking. “We’ll find her.”

Caleb couldn't believe he was crying, let alone in front of a stranger. But this was his little girl, his baby. She was his world. When she was accepted at Stanford for undergrad and then law school, he couldn't have been more proud. Those years away from home had been tough on him. He'd visited her no more than he thought he should. Cammie was finding her own way in the world and it was his duty to respect her choices. He wouldn't shoehorn her into a life because it suited him. He wouldn't let what happened to Celeste happen to his girl. He realized he was holding on to Grace for dear life. He pulled out of her embrace and stepped back.

"I'm sorry."

"Nothing to be sorry for," she smiled. "Let's see what we find. Now, let's tackle those files. There's got to be something in there."

He followed Grace into the kitchen as she opened the banker's box on the table and pulled out some files. "I don't know about you, but I could use some coffee."

She looked up at him and rolled her eyes. "God, yes. I haven't had any for at least two hours."

Caleb managed a smile. "I'm the same way. I'll warn you, Cammie says what I make isn't coffee, it's rocket fuel."

"Perfect."

He pulled the coffee pot out from under the counter to add water and Cammie's phone dropped down on counter. "Grace!"

"What is it?"

"It's her phone." He picked it up and swept it open with his thumb. He smiled at the picture of her atop of Sally. He'd taken it during her birthday weekend.

Grace looked at the screen. "She's got a thirty voice mails and fifty texts."

He opened the message screen. Some were from her very angry boss. Most were from her friend Sheila. They started with "*Where are you?*" and were increasingly panicked, ending with "*Please Cammie, you're scaring me. Call me*". Caleb could

understand. He sat the phone down on the counter. "So Sheila doesn't know where she is either."

Grace covered his hand with hers. "We'll find her." He nodded and reached for the coffee machine's water reservoir.

A few minutes later he set down the mugs and sat across from Grace. He pulled his glasses from his jacket pocket as he for reached for a file. He was surprised when she pulled his glasses from his hand. She slipped them on, then closed her eyes. She quickly pulled them off and handed them back. "Wow. You really need these."

"Old guys wear glasses," he said as he put them on. He didn't quite understand the look on her face.

An hour later Grace looked up and smiled. "I may have something. Thomas Bertrand. He was a young man, only eighteen. He was convicted of murder for a drug deal gone wrong. Camilla was his public defender. I remember the case. She worked her ass off for him. She never believed he was guilty despite overwhelming evidence. She believed he was set up. She was about to file appeals."

"About to?"

"He was murdered in prison two weeks after his conviction."

"To shut him up?"

"Most likely. There was a public outcry, led by his mother, Laurel. She's a public activist, has been for years. Camilla thought Thomas had been set up to discredit her."

"His mother may blame her."

"It's possible," said Grace. "I'll go talk to her and see what I can find." She closed the file and stood to leave.

"I'm coming with you."

"No. It's too dangerous."

"I can ride with you or follow you. Your choice."

Grace saw the determination in his face. Nothing would stop him. "Fine. Let's go."

Grace knocked on the door of a small, well kept ranch home. A petite woman with short cropped came to the door. Laurel Bertrand was only in her forties but stress and grief had aged her.

“Yes?”

“Ms. Bertrand, I’m Detective Grace Thorne. I need to ask you a few questions.”

“Why can’t you police leave me alone? You threw my boy in prison and now he’s dead. There’s nothing left to say.” She tried to close the door when Caleb put his hand on the door.

“Mrs. Bertrand, I’m Caleb Newsome. We’re here to ask you some questions about my daughter, Camilla. She’s missing.”

“What? Camilla? Come in.” They followed Mrs. Bertrand into her living room and they sat on an overstuffed sofa. “What happened?”

“We’re not sure,” said Grace. “Mrs. Bertrand, you were pretty vocal about your son’s conviction as were many of your associates.”

Her eyes narrowed. “Do you think I blame that sweet girl?” She looked at Caleb. “Your daughter was the only one who believed in my Thomas. She did everything she could for my boy. It wasn’t her fault those bastards set him up.” She looked at Grace. “Whatever happened, it had nothing to do with me or mine.”

“Mrs. Bertrand...”

Caleb put his hand on Grace’s shoulder. “No.”

“Caleb, Mrs. Bertrand...”

“Mrs. Bertrand is a mother.” He stood and extended his hand. “We’ll be going now. Thank you for talking to us.”

Mrs. Bertrand took his hand and covered it with both of hers. “I will pray for your girl, Mr. Newsome.”

“Thank you, ma’am.”

They got back into the car and Grace took a breath, trying to calm herself. She was not used to civilians interrupting her interviews. “What the hell, Caleb? She may not have done it herself but she has a large group of associates.”

“No, Grace. It’s not her.”

“I’ve been a cop for twenty five years...”

“And I’ve been a parent for nearly thirty. I could see the pain in her eyes. She was telling the truth about Cammie. Even you said she never believed Bertrand was guilty. She had nothing to do with Cammie going missing.”

Grace stared at Caleb for a moment. He was right. Damn him. She nodded and started the car. “Okay, lets go back to Camilla’s and start over. We’ll figure something out.” They had just turned on to a side road near Camilla’s apartment when they were cut off by a black sedan. The car made a hard turn in front of Grace’s car forcing her to hit the brakes. “What the fuck?!” she yelled. The driver jumped out of the car and took aim with a large handgun. “Get down!” she shouted as she reached for her gun and opened her door. Her windshield shattered as she took aim from her behind her door. She focused on the shooter just as he focused on her. Grace was a fraction of a second faster, and that was all it took. She fired and the shooter went down. Moving around her car with her weapon still in front of her, she saw the shooter was down and he wouldn’t be getting up again. Ever. She walked back to her car and saw a much paler Caleb. “Are you okay?”

“What?”

“Are you hurt?”

He seemed to shake himself free of his shock. “No. I’m okay. What the hell?”

Traffic started to back up and spectators were starting to gather. She opened her trunk and pulled out an evidence bag. She took a quick picture of the shooter’s gun with her phone before she picked it up and secured it in her trunk. Normally, she’d never move the weapon but with no back up on site and crowds gathering, she couldn’t protect the scene alone. She called in the shooting as she kept an eye on the crowd. They sat in silence for a few minutes before they heard the sirens.

“Grace, what the hell happened?”

“I’m not sure but the one thing I do know now is Camilla’s disappearance had nothing to do with her cases.”

“How can you be sure?”

“Because he was aiming for you.”

Grace sat in Captain Carter's office explaining what had happened in the last few hours. He'd been called back in. On a Sunday. He was not a happy man.

"You couldn't just talk to the guy and send him back to Phoenix."

"Tucson."

"Excuse me?"

"The Newsomes are from Tucson, not Phoenix."

"Don't push me Thorne. You had a shoot out on a public street."

"He cut us off and fired on us. I was defending myself and Caleb."

A knock on the door interrupted them. Anne Parish entered with an IPAD. "I've got your shooter. His name is Henry Burke. He's a British National."

"Wonderful. An international incident," said the captain.

Another knock at the door interrupted Grace's snarky reply. Caleb opened the door and came in. "I can't sit out there any more. What's going on?"

"Mr. Newsome, this is a police matter. Let us handle things."

"A guy just tried to kill me." He glared at the captain. "You can try and shut me out but you won't succeed."

"Caleb, sit down," said Grace. "Anne was just about to fill us in. The shooter was a British National named Henry Burke. Does the name sound familiar?"

"No, not at all."

"When was the last time you were in England?"

"I've never been out of the country."

Anne held out the IPAD. She showed them a video of Burke coming through customs Thursday evening. They watched as he walked in past the counter and joined another man. "This man is Jack Donovan. They traveled together from Heathrow. Only Donovan returned to Heathrow on Friday night."

“Mr. Newsome, two men came all the way from England. You must know why,” said Carter.

“I’m telling you, I don’t know. The only connection I have to England was Camilla’s mother and she’s been dead for twenty eight years.”

“Her mother?” asked Grace. “She never spoke about her.”

“That’s because she doesn’t remember her. She left us when Camilla was barely two. Celeste died six months later.”

“Tell me about her mother,” said Grace.

“She was a guest at the ranch when we fell in love. She tried but she could never make the transition from social butterfly to ranch wife.”

“Social butterfly?”

“She was a jetsetter before she married me. Celeste Ainsley.”

Grace gasped. “Lady Celeste Ainsley?”

“Yes.”

“Holy crap. Camilla is royalty?”

“Well, technically. I think her title would be Lady Camilla of Hartwood. But Celeste’s family wanted nothing to do with us and frankly I’ve never given them much thought.”

“Well, some one has been thinking about you.”

Caleb looked at Anne and pointed to her IPAD. “Can you see if my daughter took a flight?”

“Yes.” She clicked a few buttons and turned the screen back to them. There was a picture of Camilla going through customs with Donovan. He had a tight grip on her arm.

“Oh, Christ,” he whispered.

“It looks like your daughter left under her own power,” said Carter.

Grace grabbed Caleb's hand before he throttled him. "Captain, she obviously didn't leave of her own free will. Someone is trying to stop Caleb from finding her."

"Yeah, well it's a matter for Scotland Yard, now. I have to call the British Embassy."

"Captain..."

"That's all, Detective." They walked out of Carter's office before Caleb had a chance to deck him.

Caleb rode down in the elevator down to the lobby. He barely noticed Grace was still with him. He pulled out his phone and looked up the first flight to Heathrow. "Can you get me a cab? I need to get my car and get to the airport."

Grace touched his arm. "These are bad guys. We don't even know why they took her. You can't run in there without a plan."

"She's my daughter."

"I understand but going at them without any idea why they took her isn't going to help her or you. Let's go back to Camilla's place. We can figure it out from there."

They got back to Cammie's and Caleb grabbed a water bottle from the fridge. He held it up to Grace and she accepted it. He grabbed a bottle for himself. "I never thanked you."

"What?" she asked.

"For saving my life." She gave him a smile that made his heart skip.

"You're welcome."

He managed a genuine smile. "And thank you for stopping me from decking your boss."

"I'm sorry about that. I would have loved to have seen you flatten the putz."

"Not a fan?"

"He's a bureaucratic suck up. I won't miss him when I retire."

"Retire?"

"My paperwork is in. I'm done at the end of the month."

"Really? You don't seem old enough to retire." She smiled again and the affect on him was confusing.

“I knew I liked you for a reason. I’ve done my twenty five without getting myself killed. I’m tired of dealing with men like Carter.” She smiled and patted his chest. “That’s enough about me. Let’s find your girl.” She grabbed Cammie’s laptop and powered it up. Caleb sat next to her and they both looked at the screen. “Good. She doesn’t have an opening password. Okay let’s start with the only English connection we have, her title.” She plugged ‘*Lady Camilla of Hartwood*’ into the browser. Caleb inhaled sharply when she came up with only one reference to the ‘American’ royal and a picture of Camilla as a child.

“This was right after Celeste was killed.”

“A car accident, wasn’t it?”

“Yeah, her boyfriend of the week was driving his Porsche too fast.”

“Do you think it could be his family?”

“I doubt it. He walked away without a scratch.”

“Then it has to be England. Did Celeste have any family?”

“Not immediate family. Extended family, I don’t know. She was an only child. Her father died when she was a child. The only one left was her mother, the Duchess. I don’t even know if the old bat is still alive.”

Grace typed in “Duchess of Hartwood” into the browser. Dozens of articles popped up. “The old bat is still alive,” she said. The most recent articles came showing the eighty year old duchess at different social events. Caleb had the feeling he was looking at Celeste at eighty. Her mother had obviously been a beautiful woman. “There are reports here about her being recently hospitalized.”

“Not that unusual for a woman her age.”

“No, it’s not.” Grace clicked on a picture of the Hartwood estate. “Holy shit! It’s a freaking castle.”

“Yeah. Celeste used to talk about living there. She said it was almost as cold as her mother.”

“This place is enormous. Three hundred rooms on five thousand acres! It’s only forty five minutes from central London. It must be worth a fortune.”

“So what why would they want Cammie?”

“The grandmother has been ill. Maybe she wants to finally meet her grandchild?”

“I could see that if all they did was strong arm her on to a plane, but why come after me?”

Claire pointed at the screen. “I’m afraid you’ll only find those answers here.”

“I need to book a flight.”

“Do you have a passport? You said you’ve never been out of the country.”

Caleb’s heart sank. “No. What am I going to do? They take weeks. I need to get to her.”

“I might be able to make a call. I have a friend who might be able to expedite it.”

“Please, Grace. I need to get to her.”

She covered his hand with hers. “I’ll do what I can.”

Three hours later Caleb was back at Cammie’s and looking at his new passport. “I don’t know how you pulled this off.”

“Twenty five years on the force. I’ve met a lot of people.”

“This is more than you met someone. You helped people.”

“I did my best.”

“Like now,” he said with a soft smile. “Do you have a passport?”

“Yeah. Why?”

“I could use your help in England. I’ll book two tickets.”

“I would have no jurisdiction and no weapon.”

“You have the skills. Can you get away from Carter?”

“I’m not scheduled for the next two days.”

“Please, Grace. I need you.”

She smiled. “Looks like I’m going to England.”

Cammie Newsome sat in her overly upholstered prison. She couldn't believe twenty four hours could make such a difference in her life. Yesterday she was reviewing a case at her kitchen table when there was knock at her door. She saw two, well tailored men through her peep hole. She kept the chain on as she opened the door. "Can I help you?"

"Lady Camilla, we have a message from your grandmother, the Duchess of Hartwood."

She heart raced at the mention of the Duchess. All she knew about the woman was what she'd seen online. That, and the woman disowned her mother and wanted nothing to do with her. She'd been curious about her mother's side of her family but she'd never told her father. He'd been father and mother to Cammie her whole life. She thought investigating her English roots would say to her father he wasn't enough. She'd never do that. "Sorry, not interested." She closed the door and they knocked again.

"My Lady, please hear us out. We've come all the way from London to deliver your grandmother's message."

She sighed against the door. Maybe the woman finally wanted to recognize her. She opened the door and let the men in. "Come in. But stop calling me My Lady. I'm an American."

The man indicated to the kitchen table. "May we?" She nodded and they each took a seat. "I'm Burke and this is Donovan. We have been employed by your grandmother to give you this letter." He pulled a letter out of his jacket and handed it to her.

"Why come all this way? Why not just call me?"

"I believe she was concerned she wouldn't be well received." He indicated the letter. "Please, My...Ms. Newsome."

"Fine." She opened the letter and marveled at the type of cursive handwriting rarely seen.

Dear Camilla,

I know this letter is a long time coming. I'm an old woman and near the end of my time. I would like to get to know you before it's too late. You need to see your heritage. Your mother may have turned her back on Hartwood but it's not too late for you to learn its ancient history.

My men will arrange your transportation. I look forward to seeing you,

Camilla, Duchess of Hartwood

"That's it?" she asked. "This wasn't a request, it was an order." Cammie put the letter back in the envelope and handed it to Burke. "I'm not interested. I'm sorry you had to come all this way." She caught the look between the two men. Donovan stood and walked to the door. Donovan locked the door and put on the chain. Cammie rose from her chair. "What are you doing?" she yelled.

"Be quiet and listen," said Burke as he pushed her back down in her seat. Donovan returned to his seat. "You will be returning with us on the late flight to London."

"No, I will not."

Burke pulled out his phone and pulled up a photo. He turned the phone toward her and she felt faint. "My father," she gasped. Burke page through several more pictures of her father working on the ranch, riding his horse. She felt the tears running down her face. "You bastards."

"You may now go pack. Donovan will accompany you. I will remain behind to keep an eye on your father. If you attempt to contact anyone, including your father, well...it would not end well for him."

Now she was sitting in her overdone bedroom. They didn't bother to lock her in. Donovan explained that the landlines had been disabled. The fifteen foot gates were protected by armed guards. All the staff had been given time off. She was welcome to

walk the grounds but there were five thousand acres and she'd never find her way out. Even if she could, she wouldn't. Not after they showed her Dad's picture. She had no doubt they would follow through. Her best bet was to figure out what they wanted from her. She was startled when the door opened and Donovan walked in.

"The duchess has return and wants to see you."

"I'm not going anywhere. She can come up here."

Donovan moved quickly, grabbing her arm and twisting it behind her back. "You insist on making things hard."

"If you damage me I doubt my grandmother would be pleased." She felt his grasp lessen. She'd found something she could use. As scary as these people were, they were afraid of the duchess. "Fine. Take me to her." She walked in front of Donovan as he led her downstairs and a long corridor. Without him she would have be lost in the maze of corridors and doorways. He opened the door and stood aside for her. He closed the door behind her leaving her alone with her grandmother. The woman turned from the window and looked at her. Cammie was surprised at how strong the resemblance was to her mother. This is what her mother would have looked like if she'd lived to eighty. She was a classic English beauty, with fine porcelain skin. Despite her age, she had few wrinkles. Her hair look professionally styled into an elegant twist and her clothes were first quality. But even with all that effort there was something off about her. She reminded Cammie of a puma, beautiful and deadly.

"Well, my dear, it's good to finally meet." She looked Cammie up and down. "You look like her."

"I look like my father," she insisted.

The woman shrugged and walked to a tea set. She poured two cups and handed her one. "Lemon?"

"Are you kidding me? You had me kidnapped and the life of my father threatened. Now you want to pretend like this is a normal visit with grannie?"

She set the cup down hard enough to make them rattle. “Do not call me that. You may address me as Your Grace or Grandmother. That is all.”

“There is nothing graceful about you.” She was not surprised when the woman slapped her. Cammie smiled. “Like I said...”

“Fine. I thought we could do this with a bit of civility. I shouldn’t have expected better from an American.” She hit a button on an intercom. “Martin, join me in my library.” A tall man with sandy blond hair and very expensive suit came into the room. He took her hand before it was offered and gave her a smarmy smile.

“Lady Camilla, it’s a great pleasure to meet you. I’m Martin Bennett, your mother’s solicitor.”

“My name is not Lady Camilla. It’s Cammie Newsome. I’m an American and I’ve been kidnapped. Please call the American embassy.”

His fake smile disappeared and he looked at her grandmother. “She may make this difficult.”

“It’s of no importance. It will be done.”

“What will be done?!” Cammie demanded.

Martin leered at her. “Our wedding.”

Cammie’s head reeled. She couldn’t believe what she was hearing. “Our what?”

Her grandmother looked at her as if she were giving a servant orders. “This Saturday you and Martin will be married in a small ceremony in the formal garden.”

“Are you insane? Why would you think I’d agree to this?”

“Because you have no choice. It’s time you take your responsibilities to this family seriously. Your mother never did.”

“You can’t expect me to marry a total stranger.”

Martin slipped his hand on her shoulder. “We have a few days to get to know each other.” Cammie grabbed his hand and twisted it until he collapsed on the floor, swearing.

When she finally released him he pulled himself to his feet and grabbed her by the hair. “I will turn you into a proper lady before Saturday.” Cammie pulled back her hand and drove it into his nose, breaking it. Blood spurted all over his very expensive suit. His scream turned high pitch. Her grandmother came to his side.

“Get up. You’re getting blood on the carpet.” She reeled on Cammie. “You are Lady Hartwood. Start acting like it.” Cammie grabbed her grandmother’s arm. “How dare you man handle me!”

“You listen to me, old woman. From what I see, my mother was right to get away from you. You may be used to everyone acceding to your demands but you’ve never dealt with me. Nothing stops me. Not the death of my mother, nothing. Do not underestimate me.” She turned on her heels, walked out of the library and headed back to her comfortable prison cell.

Cammie was used to going up against tough opponents in court. She could spot a hidden agenda from a mile off. She’d realized something. They needed her for Saturday. If they did anything to her father, they’d never get her cooperation. She had five days to figure out what her grandmother really wanted.

Grace sat down in her seat while Caleb took the seat facing her. They were curved seats, facing each other. "Business class. Nice."

"It's all they had. I wasn't sure what I was getting." He opened a door next to his seat and found a remote. "What is all this stuff?"

She came around to his seat and showed him his TV, his call buttons and how his seat folded out to a bed. She pressed a button and a screen rose between their seats. "That's the privacy screen so you don't have to look at me for ten hours."

"I think you can leave it down for now."

His smile threw her. She was helping a father find his daughter. She wasn't on a date. They both got comfortable and waited for take off. His pale face touched her heart. He may be a big strong cowboy but he wasn't a frequent flyer. She reached over and took his hand. "It's okay. We'll get there and we'll find her."

"Thank you, Grace."

Caleb took Grace's hand and felt her strength. It was about more than saving his life. She'd become his tether. Without Grace he'd surely have spun out by now. Instead they had a idea on how to get Cammie back. His heart leaped as he heard the engines start up. "Why did you become a cop?"

"Excuse me?"

"Tell me about yourself. Take my mind off the fact that I never fly longer than Tucson to LA."

Grace smiled. "Sure. Well, it was just me and my mother. Dad took a powder when I was six. She worked her ass off to keep a roof over our heads so I tried my best at school and kept my nose clean. I felt I owed it to her. After high school I studied Criminal Justice then went through the Academy."

"Did you ever want to do anything else?"

“No. Maybe it was watching TV. When we were kids cops were always the good guys. I wanted to be one of the good guys.”

“You succeeded,” he smiled.

“That may be the nicest thing anyone has ever said to me.”

Caleb found he was still holding her hand. Something about Grace was quietly chipping away at his heart. The flight attendant interrupted them with wine and menu selections for their dinner. He thought to himself he should not be enjoying even a small part of what was happening but he had to be honest, at least with himself. He wished he'd met Grace under different circumstances.

Grace attached her phone to the plane's Wi-Fi and pulled up her email. She opened one from Anne Parish. The woman was an IT genius. “Hot damn!”

“What is it?” asked Caleb.

“You owe Anne Parish some flowers.”

“The woman with the IPAD?”

“Yes. I asked her to look for any connections between Burke and the Duchess.”

“She found it?”

“That she did. She found payments to Burke from a Martin Bennett. Bennett is the solicitor of record for Hartwood Estate.”

“So we have the proof.”

“We have the proof.”

“I don't know how to thank you.”

“It's my job.”

“You're on a flight to London to help a crazy father find his daughter. That's more than your job.”

Grace couldn't help but smile. "I'm glad to help. Camilla is special."

"I agree, but then I'm prejudiced. How did you meet?"

"We both go to the same coffee shop near the courthouse. I went in one day at the tables were full. She offered me a seat at her table. We started meeting once or twice a month for coffee. Sometimes we'd talk shop but mostly we'd talk about life," she chuckled. "And the sorry state of our love lives."

"Sorry state?"

"She didn't tell you?"

"I tried to keep my distance on some things. I wanted her to have her own life."

"Because of her mother."

"Exactly." He looked hesitant. "Is there anything you can tell me?"

"Like if she was seeing someone?"

"Yes, but I don't want to violate any confidences."

Grace smiled. "She wasn't seeing anyone. She said she wasn't meeting her kind of man."

"Her kind?"

"She said she was looking for someone who was strong and loving. Someone who'd support her ambitions. And it wouldn't hurt if he was smoking hot. I told her she was setting the bar too high but now I know why she had such high standards. It's you."

"Excuse me?"

"You showed her what a good man is supposed to be. There aren't a lot of you out there. You're a tough act to follow, Caleb." She smiled when he blushed. "And you also have that smoking hot thing going on." She giggled when he fluoresced bright red.

He tried to hide behind the airline magazine he was flipping through. "And the sorry state of your love life?"

“Shut up and read your magazine.” She smiled as she pulled her blanket over her shoulders, deciding she really liked Caleb’s chuckle.

The movement of the attendants serving the second meal stirred Caleb awake. Thanks to complete exhaustion, he’d managed a few hours sleep. The fold out bed was surprisingly comfortable. He looked over at Grace who was curled up in her small bed, her blonde hair spread over her pillow. He found himself wondering what it would be like to wake her up in his bed. He smiled and reached for her shoulder. “Hey, sleepyhead.” When she rolled over and smiled his heart skipped. He needed to get it together. She was a police detective and, maybe, a friend. But he had to admit, his daughter’s love life wasn’t the only one in a sorry state.

“Hi. Are we landing?”

“Soon. They’re serving food.”

“Oh, good.” She sat up and folded her blanket. “Did you sleep?”

“I did, thanks.”

“Good. You need your rest.”

Caleb suddenly felt old.

They quickly made it through customs and found their rental car. Caleb was glad he didn’t need to intimidate this rental agent. He started to plug in the address of Hartwood into the GPS when Grace stopped him. “What?”

“We need to go here first.”

They pulled into the parking lot where the GPS had directed him and he stared at her. “Home Depot?”

Cammie spent the last few nights walking the halls, trying to memorize Hartwood's layout. She'd found a portrait of her grandfather, Charles. It had been done when he was a young man. He was tall and very handsome. She realized she had his cheekbones. As much as she wanted to explore her history, she needed to find out the real reason her grandmother had set this all up. During one of her wanderings she'd found Martin's office. She waited until she was sure he'd left the estate and her grandmother was asleep. She walked into his office and saw five hundred years of history. Artwork, heavily paneled walls, all of it looked authentic. She looked at his desk and smiled. The one thing an ancient desk wouldn't have was good locks.

After a few minutes using an antique rat-tailed comb to fiddle with the lock, the drawer popped open. Most of the files were related to the management of the estate. There were contracts for renting the estate for weddings and for movies. She found payroll records for the staff, supplies and a variety of current bills. Nothing jumped out at her as out of the ordinary. She opened another drawer and found a modern, metal file box. A few minutes with her metal comb and she popped the lock. She opened the box and pulled out files, yellowed with age. She started reading and smiled at the sight of '*Charles Ainsley, Duke of Hartwood*' at the bottom of a document. Thirty minutes later she left Martin's office, smiling with her new best friend, a metal, rat-tailed comb, tucked in her waist.

Caleb sat in his car off the main road looking at the Hartwood castle. It was bigger than he'd even imagined. The grounds seemed to go on forever. "How the hell are we going to get in there? There's a guard station."

"How long since you've been in a bar fight?"

"A very long time. Even if it wasn't, how are we going up guards who possibly have guns?"

Grace ignored that obvious downside to his question. "Park behind that tree and then we walk up to the gate. We're angry tourists with a broken down car. Just follow my lead."

He pulled in behind a large oak and turned off the engine. Grace had gotten him this far, he was going to trust her. He followed her up the main road towards the gate.

"Remember," she whispered. "Follow my lead." She moved ahead of him on the road and started to yell. "I told you to get the road service on the rental, but no! You had to save a few bucks!"

"Don't blame me! You're the one that HAD to see a freaking castle!"

Grace stood in front of the gates and started banging. "Hello! Can someone help us?" A well muscled guard came to the gate.

"We're closed."

"I'm sorry. Our car broke down and Mr. Wonderful over here wouldn't pay for the upgrade to our cell phones so we can't call for help."

Another guard joined him. "Hartwood is closed."

"Please!" Grace cried. "There's no one around for miles. We just need to call for a tow." The guards looked at each other and the second one nodded to the first. He opened the gate and Grace looked at Caleb. "Well, come on!" He followed close and saw she was waiting for him to get inside the gate. She maneuvered the first guard by putting herself between him and the second guard. "I can't thank you enough." Then she hauled her arm back and nailed him square in the chest. He fell a few steps back and pulled backed to

return her strike. Caleb turned to the second guard and struck his jaw as hard as he could. He could see he was dazed but that was all. Caleb ducked as the guard took a swing at him. He struck the guard in the stomach who fell backwards, striking his head on the guard station. The man didn't move so he turned to Grace. He watched as she whipped out some wicked Bruce Lee moves on the guard. The man fell to the ground and she rolled him on his stomach, pulling his arms behind him. Then she pulled her Home Depot purchase from her waist, long electrical ties. She bound the man's hands and then his feet. She tossed the ties toward Caleb.

"Tie your guy up."

He bound the other guard and they pushed them both into the guard house. They looked at several monitors and spotted an older woman in a library. The conscience guard started yelling for help.

"What do we do about him?" Caleb asked.

Grace shrugged. "Who's going to hear?"

They closed the door, locking the guards inside their station. He smiled at Grace. "Remind me to never to piss you off."

"Noted," she smiled.

Cammie wandered the grounds. She'd walked through the formal garden but it seemed too perfect for her. She preferred things that grew naturally, like the poppies on their ranch. She liked the surprise of color where you least expected.

They weren't vigilant in watching her. She kept an eye out for the man, Donovan, because he seemed a danger. But she'd only ever seen him in the house with Martin. They let her wander the grounds because they knew she couldn't go anywhere. The grounds were too big to escape. Even if she did, they'd taken her passport and her money. The few staff that were on duty avoided her. Having gotten to know her grandmother, she didn't blame them. Cammie wouldn't put them at risk by involving them in her problem.

She had hope that someone at the wedding on Saturday would listen to her. If not she had her friend, Mr. Rat-Tail. If no one objected to the marriage, he would.

She walked down a path to the tree line. This was more like it. She leaned up against a tree and inhaled. It had a fresh, rich scent but it wasn't quite as nice as Arizona. When she wanted to be alone with her thoughts she'd climb one of the palo verde trees on the ranch. She was pretty sure her dad knew. She'd come back in the house with skinned knees and elbows but he never pushed. It wasn't that he was too easy on her. He made clear his expectations. She was expected to do her best in school, respect her elders and play by the rules. Dad was the definition of old school. She remembered the time she and a couple of her friends took some horses out without asking and got lost. They were in the desert overnight until her father found them. She'd never forget the look on his face. It wasn't anger. It was fear mixed with disappointment. She'd promise herself she'd never make him feel that way again. Even after she spent the next two months grounded and mucking out stalls every day.

Cammie turned to the large oak and pulled herself up on one of the branches. She climbed high enough to get a view of the great lawn. She could see the gazebo where her grandmother expected her to marry that sleaze, Martin. She wondered if her mother ever climbed trees. And she wondered if she'd ever get home again.

Caleb followed Grace to the main door. "You ready for this?" he asked.

"Let's go get your girl." She banged on the door and stood back. They were both surprised when Donovan opened the main door. He looked equally surprised and Caleb took advantage of it, pushing the man into the hall before he swung. "Caleb!" she called.

"No! He's mine!" he yelled back as he took a shot to the stomach. Caleb pulled the man's legs out from under him and he fell with a sickening thud on the marble floor. He jumped on him and started to pound into his face.

"Caleb, stop!"

"He hurt Cammie."

"This won't help her." She grabbed two more ties out her waist band and handed them to him. He rolled the man on his stomach and bound his hands behind his back and then his feet.

"What the hell?!" They turned to see a tall, sandy blonde haired man walk into the main hallway. He had a bandage over his nose and black and blue eyes. His eyes widened. "Newsome."

Caleb stood and walked toward the man. "Let me guess. Martin Bennett," he hissed. Bennett tried to back out of the room but he grabbed him by his arm. "Where is my daughter?"

"I don't know."

Caleb pulled back his fist. "Tell me where my daughter is."

"I don't know! She's not a prisoner here. She can come and go as she pleases."

"Seeing as you had to have your henchmen kidnap her from LA, I highly doubt that." Caleb twisted his arm behind his back. "Where's the duchess?"

"I don't know!" He pushed his arm higher and Martin screamed. "Okay, Okay. She's probably in her library."

"Take us there."

Martin led them to a door and nodded. "She's in there." Grace opened the door and Caleb pushed him through.

"What is going on?!" the duchess demanded. She saw Caleb and gasped. "You!"

"Yes, it's me," he looked at Grace and turned Martin to face her. "Would you?"

"No problem," she smiled. She pushed him into an armchair and bound his arms and legs with the ties.

Caleb got close to the duchess. "I'm here for my daughter. Where is she?"

"How would I know?"

"Bennett's already confirmed she's here."

She looked at her lackey and shot him daggers with her eyes. "Fool!"

"Where...is...Cammie?"

"I don't know. She wanders. She won't sit with us. I tried but she's incredibly rude."

"Rude?" he gasped. "You..." He was close to snapping the old woman's neck when Grace put her hand on his arm.

"Caleb, no. She's not worth it. I'll keep an eye on these two and you go look for her." She pulled out some more ties and pushed the woman into her desk chair.

"How dare you!"

"Shut up," said Grace as she secured the woman's arms and Caleb walked out of the room.

Cammie looked out at the lawn and saw a figure walking around the garden. She couldn't recognize him at this distance. She didn't think she'd seen him before. He didn't have any tools with him. He looked lost. He was looking around and moving closer, out of the garden. She thought she heard his voice. He was calling for someone. Maybe she should back further into the woods. Then she heard it. The high pitched whistle she'd known all her life. When she lost track of time outside, she'd forget about everything except her horses. That whistle would call her into dinner. And only one man sounded like that. She scrambled down the tree and started running. The voice got louder and her heart pounded.

"Cammie! Cammie!"

"Dad?! Dad!" she called. She saw him stop and look at her. He broke into a full on run. "Dad!" She threw herself into her father's arms. "Daddy! You found me." she sobbed. He held her tight and kissed her head. He put his hands on her face and looked into her eyes.

"Let me look at you. Cammie, baby, are you okay?"

"I'm okay, Dad."

He placed kisses on her cheek. "Are you sure?"

"I am, Dad. I promise." She wiped her eyes and smiled. "How did you find me? How did you get in here?"

Her father smiled. "I had a little help."

Cammie saw Donovan tied up on the floor and she looked at her father. "Dad? Was that you?"

"Well, yeah," he smiled.

"Nice."

He led her toward her grandmother's library and she hesitated. "Don't worry, sweetheart. We have it handled."

Cammie gasped when she walked into the library. "Grace?"

Her father smiled. "Say hello to a little help."

Grace smiled, "Hey, Camilla." She gave her a hug. "You're freaking royalty and never said anything."

"I never really thought about it." She looked at her grandmother and Martin, now tied to chairs with plastic strips. "Until them."

"What the hell happened? Why did they do this?" she asked.

"I didn't do anything and this is an outrage!" said the duchess.

"Shut up, old woman," Cammie snapped. "The brought me her to marry him." She nodded toward Martin. He struggled against his ties.

"Why would they think you'd agree to that?" asked her father.

"Two men came to see me in LA, the one in the hall and another one. They said they'd flown all that way just to deliver a message from my grandmother. I thought maybe," she looked at her grandmother with tears in her eyes. "Maybe she wanted to know me." She shook her head. "But no. It wasn't a request, it was a command to come with them. Apparently she wasn't used to anyone telling her no."

"She didn't know you at all," said Grace.

Cammie gave her a small smile. "They had a back up plan." She looked at her father. "They had pictures of you, Dad. They were following you. One of the men, Burke, stayed behind. They said if I didn't go through with it," she tried to control the hitch in her voice. "They said you would suffer the consequences." She caught a look between her father and Grace. "What?"

"It's okay, sweetheart."

"Tell me."

"I went to LA to find you. That's how I met Grace. We were on our way back to your place when he cut us off." He paused. "Grace saved us both."

“He tried to kill you?! Was he arrested?” She saw Grace glance away and her father took her hand.

“She had no choice.”

Camille turned on her grandmother. “You bitch!” Her father held her back.

“Tell me the rest.”

She looked at her father and tried to steady herself. “I knew there had to be more. They wouldn’t have gone to all this trouble for just me. I started roaming the halls at night looking for answers.” She nodded toward Martin. “That’s when I found his office and the real reason for all this.” She smiled when he blanched. “I found the will of my grandfather, Charles Ainsley. Apparently he didn’t think any better of his wife than anyone else. He left her only a modest income. He left Hartwood to my mother.”

“Didn’t he have to?” asked her father.

“No. Unlike many estates, this one is not entailed, meaning it doesn’t have to be left to the biological heir.”

“So with Celeste gone, they needed you for keep hold of the estate.”

“No.”

“No?”

“No, I don’t own Hartwood.”

“Who does?” he asked.

Camilla grinned. “You do.”

“What?!”

“When Mom died you were still legally married.”

“She’d filed papers.”

“They hadn’t been finalized which made you Mom’s legal heir. Martin’s grandfather, then his father were the solicitor’s for the estate. When Mom died Martin’s father must have agreed to keep the secret.”

“Why? It’s not like I wanted it.”

“This is one of the few estates like this that’s profitable.” She smiled at Martin. “I reviewed the books. Hartwood is one of the most popular wedding venues in the country. Movie company rentals, concerts and some small farms on the edges of the estate, this place is worth hundreds of millions. They’ve been denying you the income that is legally yours for twenty eight years.”

“Lies!” yelled the Duchess. “All lies.”

She leaned into her grandmother. “I know you don’t care about my life but did you even look at who I am? I’m a public defender.” Her grandmother looked confused. “I’m an attorney. I can read contracts and wills. It doesn’t matter whether it’s English law or American law. I understood what I was reading.”

“But why now?” asked Grace. “Caleb would have never known.”

“We can thank Martin for that. My guess is he’s a social climber. If I married him he’d be Lord Hartwood.” She nodded towards her grandmother. “When she dies, I’d become the Duchess and he’d be the Duke. She must have agreed to the plan to keep her secret.”

“You bitch! You aren’t worthy to be my duchess,” Martin shouted.

Cammie walked over to him and flicked his broken nose with her finger. He cried out and his eyes watered. “Shut up.”

“What happened to him?” asked Grace.

Cammie smiled. “Ah, that was me. He was rude.”

Her father smiled and put his arm around her. “That’s my girl!”

Grace interrupted their hug. “Guys, we should call the police. Sooner or later those guards are going to free themselves.”

“Excuse me?” asked Cammie.

“We had to get past the guards at the gate,” said her father. “Grace kicked some serious butt.”

Grace smiled. “I couldn’t have done it alone. Your father is pretty badass.”

Cammie hugged tight around her father’s waist. “I knew that.”

Caleb couldn't seem to let go of Cammie's hand. An hour later they'd repeated their story to the local inspector, Perkins. The guards and Donovan had been taken in for questioning. Perkins confirmed with the LAPD that Burke had been killed in his attempt to kill him and Grace. Cammie showed Perkins the will that proved he owned Hartwood. He couldn't think about that now. All he could think about was his girl was safe.

They returned to the library where Perkins' associate was sitting with the now freed duchess and Martin. "Arrest them," shouted the duchess. "They assaulted me and tied me to the chair."

"You will have your turn to speak," said Perkins. "Lady Camilla, you realize if I take your grandmother in, it will cause a scandal."

"You're probably right." She turned to her grandmother. "Arrest her ass. She had me kidnapped and ordered my father's murder."

Caleb watched as the police took the duchess and Martin into custody. Grace followed them out of the library, leaving him alone with Cammie. "Are you okay, baby?"

"Yeah, Dad. I'm just so glad you're here. Can we go home now?"

"Not yet," said Grace as she returned to the room. "I was talking to Perkins. They need us to stay put while they investigate. I don't think it will take long. These guys aren't exactly criminal masterminds. I told Perkins the link we found between Burke and Martin. They found your passport and ID in the Martin's office. They confirmed your ID and as far as they're concerned you're Lady Camilla. This is your home, so you can stay here. I assume there are a couple of spare rooms where your father and I can crash."

Cammie smiled. "A couple."

Caleb wandered the long hall. He was exhausted but he couldn't sleep. It was all too much to take in. Cammie had taken to being Lady of the Manor. She called in the staff and told them what had happened. Rather than being shocked or resentful, they were cooperative. He suspected they were relieved. The staff made them a wonderful meal and made up rooms for him and Grace. He walked into the massive kitchen and found Cammie sitting at the long kitchen table.

"Couldn't sleep?" he asked.

"No. Looks like I'm not the only one."

"How about some tea? I found some delicious shortbread cookies."

"Sounds good." He watched as she poured him some tea and set out a plate of cookies. She was tired, yes, but something else was wrong. He knew his kid. "Thanks, sweetheart." He took a sip and then a bit of the cookie. "Oh, these are good."

"Told you," she smiled.

"Now tell me what's wrong."

"Well, my grandmother kidnapped me and tried to kill you."

"That's not all. Tell me, please."

Cammie shook her head and smiled. "I never could hide anything from you."

He reached for her hand. "Baby, you can tell me anything." His heart skipped when she started to cry. "Cammie, what is it?"

"I lied to you."

"About what?"

"That I never thought about them or this place. You never talked about Mom, so I looked her up on the net. I saw her pictures." She pushed the tears off her cheeks. "She was so beautiful. I can see why you fell in love with her. I stopped reading the articles about her. For the most part, they weren't very kind. I used to look Hartwood up on the

internet. It looked so beautiful. I used to imagine Mom here when she was a child. I wondered what her life was like.”

“Why didn’t you tell me?”

“You worked so hard to be a good father. I thought if I said I wanted to know about Mom and her history that I’d be saying you weren’t enough. I never wanted you to think that. You’re the best father I could have ever had.”

Caleb wiped the tears from his eyes and pulled his daughter in arms. He didn’t like talking about Celeste but he never realized he’d been depriving his daughter of something she needed. History. “Sweetheart, I’m so sorry. I should have talked to you about her a long time ago.”

“What was she like?”

They sat down and he held her hand. “She was the most beautiful woman I’d ever met but it wasn’t just her looks. There was something magical about her. She was so graceful and delicate.” He held up the tea cup. “Kind of like this.”

“She came for a vacation.”

“Yeah, I think she was looking for something different. Her life was so structured. That’s why she came to the States.”

Cammie smiled. “And she fell in love with a cowboy.”

He could feel his face warm. “I couldn’t believe she would even look at me twice. We happened pretty fast and we got married. Then you happened. Her mother was furious and cut her off.” He squeezed her hand. “She tried, Cammie, she really did. She tried to be a good mother and a good wife but she had no frame of reference. She felt completely out of her element. You were about nearly two when she came to me in tears. She told me she couldn’t do it anymore. She’d planned on coming back to see you, but…”

“The accident.”

“Yeah.”

“She broke your heart.”

All he could do was nod. "Cammie, I'm so sorry if I let you think you're mother didn't want you. She loved you so much. She loved you enough to let you stay with me. She knew I could give you the life she never could."

"You did, Dad."

"Thank you, sweetheart." He took a breath and tried to calm himself. "Have you thought about what you want to do now?"

"What do you mean?"

"About this place."

She smiled at him. "It's not mine."

"It's not mine. Not really."

"Oh yes it is. You're Lord Hartwood. Eventually, you'll be the Duke. You always loved John Wayne. Now you get to be The Duke."

Caleb chuckled. "We're not going to solve any of this tonight. Why don't we get some sleep."

"Okay," she smiled. She picked up the tea cups and plates and started to wash. He smiled to himself. This was Cammie. Even when he was still running the ranch for guests and he had a staff of people who would clean up after her, she always took care of herself. She did then, she would now. His girl would be fine.

Caleb saw Cammie back to her room and kissed her goodnight. He should have known she'd want to know about her mother but he'd been unwilling to revisit that pain. He'd been selfish.

He got a few hours sleep and then walkws down to the kitchen. The staff hadn't arrived yet so he was alone in the big kitchen. He made himself a coffee and wandered toward the garden. He was surprised to find he wasn't alone.

"Grace? Did you sleep okay?"

"I got a few hours."

"Same here."

"It's just been a hell of a few days." She walked along the path, admiring the roses.

"It sure has." He took a sip of his coffee and set it on a small table. "Did you talk to your captain?"

"Yeah. He was not too pleased but he gave me a week to clean up the details with the locals. He said I was to, " she put up her hands in air quotes. "not let this mess wind up on his desk."

"Mess?! You saved my life and probably saved Cammie's life too. I can't imagine she would have survived long after her marriage." He put his hand on her shoulders. "You deserve a medal. You're a hero."

She chuckled and patted her hand on his chest. "Thanks, Caleb. I'm just glad everything turned out okay."

She started to pull away when he covered her hand with his. He leaned down and gave her a soft kiss. It was a kiss he couldn't have ever imagined just a few days ago. She looked up at him and smiled.

"Well, hello cowboy." She gave him another kiss.

They heard a cough behind them. "Ah, good morning," said a smiling Cammie.

They pulled apart, blushing like teenagers. "Good morning, sweetheart," Caleb said as he kissed Cammie's cheek.

"Hi, Camilla," Grace said as she picked up her coffee.

“Are your rooms okay?” She waved her at Hartwood. “I have a few more to choose.”

“It’s fine, Cammie,” said Caleb. “Tell me what’s really going on.”

She sighed and looked at Grace. “My father would make a great cop. He can tell what people are thinking.”

“I’ve noticed.”

“I was wondering when you have to go back.”

“My captain has given me a week. The local police are going to want to talk to all of us again.”

Caleb put his arm around his daughter. “I’ll stay as long as you need me. I can have Walter and Janet take care of the ranch until I get back.”

Cammie sighed and put her arms around his waist. “Thanks, Dad.” He kissed the top of her head. He looked over at Grace. He wasn’t sure he understood the look on her face.

In the six weeks since Cammie had been taken, she'd never left Caleb. She'd taken a leave of absence from her job so they could settle Hartwood. As Grace predicted, Martin was happy to throw the duchess under the bus. They'd been convicted of embezzlement, kidnapping and solicitation of murder. At first he thought she was staying close because of the legal matters. Now, he had his doubts. She'd taken up residence at the ranch and she'd said nothing about going back to work. Not that he minded. He was happy to have his girl with him.

"Hey, Dad."

"Hey, sweetheart. What's up?"

"I was just on the phone with the estate manager, Andrews. Remember when Perkins said there'd be a scandal?"

"Yeah."

"Well, he was right. The trial made national news coverage. There's been paparazzi at the gates and he's had to up security."

"I guess that's to be expected."

"What wasn't expected has been the minimal support the duchess received. There were very few people who were willing to come to her defense."

"How am I not surprised?" he smiled.

"Andrews is telling me we have gained a lot of support. Public opinion is behind us for what we went through. There is a lot of interest in the "American royalty." There have been a number of requests for TV interviews with us."

"Us?"

"Yes, us. I keep telling you dad, you're Lord Hartwood. Of course they're interested in you. You're the American cowboy royal. Everyone wants to meet you."

"I don't know, Cammie."

“You don’t have to think about that now.” She took a breath. “There is something I want to talk to you about. There are things that have to be done, decisions to be made. If you don’t want to be a part of Hartwood, you’ll have to sign some papers to give me the authority to act.”

“Of course.”

“You don’t have to decide right away.”

“Sweetheart, I know you can handle it.”

Cammie smiled, “Thanks, Dad.”

Cammie sat on her back porch and sipped some ice tea. She’d convinced her Dad to go for a ride. She normally wouldn’t hide something from her father but she thought this was best.

“Hello?”

Cammie turned and smiled. “Grace!” She jumped to her feet and gave her a hug. “It’s so good to see you.”

“It’s good to see you too.”

“Come, sit.” She poured her an ice tea. “Are you a free bird yet?”

Grace smiled and took a sip. “Yup. Officially retired as of last week.”

“Any plans yet?”

“Not yet. How are you doing?”

“I’m okay. Hartwood has been keeping me busy.” Cammie smiled when she heard hoof beats. She saw the look on Grace’s face and she knew she was right.

“Is that...?”

“It sure is.”

Caleb opened Harley up to a full gallop. It felt good to be back at the ranch. Here he felt like himself. Lord Hartwood. Ridiculous. He'd been born on this ranch. He'd helped his parents run it as a vacation ranch, while being a single parent himself. He'd run it for a few years after they passed but finally decided it was time to retire and enjoy his life.

Things had changed. Cammie had been settled in her life as an attorney. Now her life had been upended. Was he being fair asking her to take on what was technically his responsibility? He should be thinking about his responsibility and not about what Grace was doing. He hadn't tried to contact her after they got back. After all they'd been through it seemed like she'd probably need some time. In all the years since Celeste, he'd never met a woman who'd ever captured his attention like Grace. She was smart, beautiful and a total badass.

He turned Harley toward home. He saw someone was sitting on the patio with Cammie. He couldn't help but smile. He pulled Harley to a halt and jumped off his back. "Grace?"

"Hello, Caleb."

Cammie grinned. "Grace has come for a visit."

Grace look startled. "You didn't tell him?"

She ignored Grace and grabbed the horse's lead. "I'll take Harley to the barn. You say hi to our guest." She walked off with Harley.

"It's good to see you again, Grace. I'm sure Cammie is happy you're here."

"It's good to see you too. You do realize your daughter has set this up. I think she may feel guilty for interrupting us back in England."

He smiled and walked closer. "Oh, yeah?"

"Yeah. So are you going to say a proper hello?"

He pulled her into his arms and gave her the kind of kiss he'd been thinking about since that morning in the garden.

Grace pulled back and smiled. "Well, hello cowboy."

While Grace was getting settled in a guest room, Caleb excused himself to the kitchen where Cammie had volunteered to make dinner. “Explain yourself, young lady.”

“I kept waiting for you to call Grace, but you never did.”

“Did you think maybe she didn’t want to see me again?”

Cammie grinned. “Not even for a second. Especially after she saw you riding in on Harley. She had to pick her jaw off the floor.”

“Since when did you turn into a matchmaker?”

“Since you obviously feel the same way about her and I didn’t want you to miss out on someone as wonderful as Grace.”

“I’d be angry with you if you weren’t right.” He smiled and kissed her forehead.

After their lovely dinner, Cammie insisted on doing the dishes while Caleb show Grace around the ranch. They walked outside and Caleb walked her down to the stable. He rubbed his hand down his horse's nose. "This is Harley."

She matched his motion and rubbed Harley's jet black nose. "Hello, boy. You're such a handsome fella." She laughed when the horse nodded. "Modest, isn't he?"

He led her to the next stall and a beautiful palomino. "This is Cammie's horse, Sally."

"Hey girl." She rubbed Sally's nose. "She's beautiful."

"Do you ride?"

"I've never been on a horse."

Caleb shook his head. "Oh, no, no. We have to change that."

"You'll teach me?"

"I'd be happy to." He saw the same look on her face that he'd seen before. He took her hand in his. "What's wrong?"

"Cammie's right. You'd make a good cop. When Cammie invited me I thought twice about coming."

"Why?"

"I've never seen a parent have such a close relationship with their child. I don't know if there is room in there for me."

"Grace, I'm out of practice for a relationship. I know that I've been thinking about you since the day we met."

"You've been thinking about me?" she grinned.

"Of course I have. You're an amazing woman." He said and gave her a kiss. "Were you thinking about me?"

"A badass cowboy with dreamy blue eyes? Yeah, I was thinking about you."

He grinned pulled her close. "Yes, it's only been Cammie and I since she was a baby and we are very close. But if you're willing to take a chance on us, I guarantee there is room for you in our lives."

Caleb looked out his bedroom window to the formal gardens. Hartwood had become such a part of Cammie's life that they decided to split their time between Arizona and England. He'd done his best to help Cammie with the workings of the estate including what he was promised was the only interview he'd have to do. The publicity had generated more business for the estate including lots of weddings. Today's wedding promised to be the best one yet. A knock on the door brought him back from his thoughts.

"Dad?"

"Come in." He smiled at her antique lace dress and her hair was curled down her back. "Sweetheart, you look beautiful." He took her hand. "You look just like her."

Cammie gasped and her eyes welled. "Thank you, Dad. You look very handsome. Are you ready?"

"Thanks, sweetheart. I'm ready."

"Don't forget your hat."

He smiled and grabbed the black cowboy hat that went with his black suit and silver vest. He walked up to the gazebo and waited for Cammie to walk up the aisle. She joined him and stood by his side. The music changed and the guests stood. He couldn't see anyone else as Grace walked up the aisle. She was wearing a long lace dress and had her hair twisted up with small flowers from the garden in her hair. She joined him at the front of the aisle and handed her bouquet to Cammie. He took her hand and whispered, "My God you're beautiful."

"Well, hello, cowboy. You're looking mighty fine today." She leaned up and gave him a kiss. "I love you, Caleb."

"I love you, Grace. Are you ready to take on this old cowboy?"

She grinned. "Hell yes."

The wedding of Lord Hartwood and Ms. Grace Thorne was the most celebrated wedding since Harry and Meghan. People gathered at the gates to cheer the happy

couple. Caleb and Grace had the guards opened the gates and they walked through the crowds, shaking hands and accepting congratulations. Cammie followed and thanked everyone for celebrating with them. Hartwood finally had a real family.