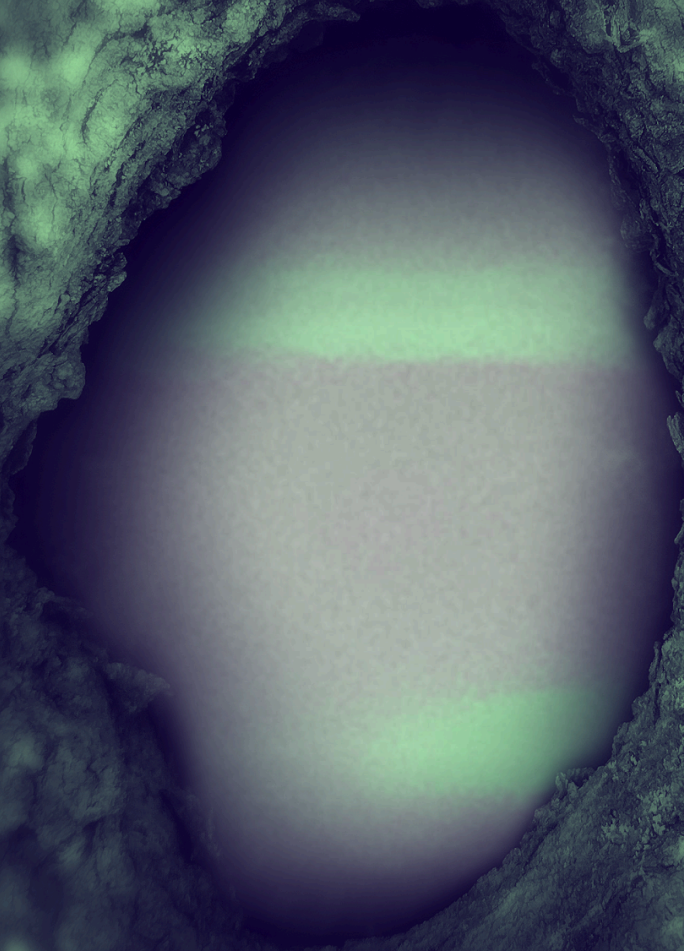


vendetta

By Assassin Beetle



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Prologue, onset of the feud

He grabbed her hand and forcefully tried to pull her toward his car. "Please, come with me!" Owen Tate begged as he tried to clear his thoughts from the liquor.

Janey Hurner tightened her lips in response and resisted. "I told you, Owen, I'm going with Sid! We're not a couple anymore!"

"Please!" he said, choking back a sob. She didn't mean what she was saying! "I love you, Janey!" How could she forget everything they had shared the last few months? All the times that she had said she loved him! What about their future they had planned together?

She tried to turn away from him, her face red with anger. He stopped her by roughly grabbing her arm with a hard jerk, causing her to stumble.

She swung around and slapped him, striking him across the face.

Impulsively, he pulled back his fist and swung, she was causing him so much pain! He thought he had opened his hand before it had made contact with her cheek, but he wasn't sure.

Falling to the ground from the impact of his fist she stared up at him in disbelief and sudden rage.

Instantly he regretted losing his temper and hitting her. "Look what you made me do!" he wailed at her. He staggered forward and tried to help her up.

"Don't touch me!" she screamed.

"Need some help?" a cool masculine voice intruded.

Owen spun around to face his best friend, rage pulsing through him. "Get lost, Sid!" he snarled.

"Sid, can you give me a ride home?" Janey asked him sweetly.

Owen felt like a huge knife had been driven into his chest, right through his heart! Sid helped her up from the ground. Owen attempted to stand between them.

Instantly he hated his lifelong friend! He hated his good looks and the way he could get any girl he desired. Owen had only one girl while Sid had numerous girls! He hated the abundance of cash Sid always had and how he could buy whatever he wanted. Owen had to struggle and sweat from every pore before he had a little money to spend! He didn't see Sid swing a fist when Owen attempted to shove him back.

Owen painfully hit the ground. He sat up breathing fast and full of the need to destroy the person walking away with his only love! "Janey!" he exclaimed in a high tone. "Don't leave with him!"

She ignored him, but he knew she had heard. He suddenly wanted to crush her for causing him so much pain!

He tried again to clear the liquor cloudiness from his mind while attempting to wobbly stand. He watched her get into Sid's expensive sports car. Attentive to her needs as Sid closed the door for her, a smug smile of confidence on his face when he glanced in Owen's direction. The way Sid worked his charm filled Owen with bitter venom. She had left him because she had grown interested in the rich boy.

They both needed retribution, Owen thought. He would follow them and when they stopped somewhere to make out he would use the knife he had under his seat. They wouldn't expect him to drive a blade through them! He followed at a distance, imagining different scenarios of what he would do to them. He swerved and almost drove off the road as he tried to keep close behind. The speed Sid was going in his fancy car made it difficult to follow. Owen's car didn't have the same amount of cylinders under the hood.

He wasn't certain how or what happened next. Darkness cleared from his eyes, he sat in a ditch. A rusted farm truck pulled up and parked on the edge of the road.

An old man rolled down his window. "Need some help?" He asked, but didn't wait for an answer as he got out of his truck and began hitching a strap to Owen's vehicle. He conversationally talked the whole time he worked. Owen didn't bother to respond to the good samaritan's chatter. The man quickly had Owen's car back on the road.

He yelled out the window of his old truck and spoke again just as Owen about to get into his car. "Hey! Just heard on m' scanner, there's a bad accident up ahead..."

Owen didn't wait for the man to finish as he took off with squealing tires. A cold feeling settled in his stomach. His heart stopped when he came to the scene. The coldest feeling he had ever felt enveloped him. The two vehicles were nothing but scattered pieces of metal. Pieces that laid on the road and out in the fields. He searched frantically for his girl, unaware of his screams of agony. "Janey!" he screeched repeatedly. In the distance he saw something hanging on a fence.

A bloody mass, wearing her clothes. It seemed forever to reach her side. Being raised on a farm, animal death was commonplace, he knew immediately there wasn't a chance for her to survive. There was no hope! He wasn't able to stand as his legs gave way from the most intense fear.

His agonizing cry. "Janey!"

His mind hardly coherent from shock. Her eyes opened, certain he saw her lips move. The constant loud roar in his ears made it impossible to hear her. He swiftly moved closer, he wanted to tell her how sorry he was about everything! If he could have more time with her he would try harder to please her! He would stop drinking and not lose his temper with her ever again!

Death had its own presence as it moved closer with each second. He felt it through his fear and clouded senses.

She moved her lips again.

He looked frantically for a way to help her. Touching her and seeing her torn body, he bent over gagging and losing the contents of his stomach.

He heard a scream, not his own. He recognized the voice, Sid's!

Owen couldn't let him live after what he had done to the only person he ever loved.

Sid screamed again.

"I'll not let him live!" Owen sobbed brokenly as he met her gaze. He must extinguish Sid's life, he couldn't be allowed to live! Sid screamed another time. Owen made a move to find him.

"I'm going to kill him!" he said, hoarse and harsh with overwhelming emotions! She made a sound. He jerked back to her side. His desperate eyes met hers. "I have to!" he sobbed in anguish!

Her lips moved again, "No." he heard her say clearly.

Something changed suddenly. Her eyes no longer saw him and they became dull, soulless. Her broken body became limp. His scream became endless as unbelievable pain spilled out of his chest and throughout his body!

Prologue continued
Years Later

He awoke with a violent start, and grabbed at his chest where the most agonizing pain ripped into him! It had become so difficult to breathe with the weight of a mountain sitting on his ribs, crushing him! His left arm seemed totally numb.

With the use of one arm, he managed to get up and stumbled out of his bedroom.

"Lynn!" he yelled angrily, for his wife. He could barely speak. Where was the stupid, useless woman? He could hear her talking to someone on the phone. He tried to straighten up as he walked along the wall to the kitchen, stumbling to where she stood.

She saw him and guiltily hung up the phone. Thinking she was probably having an affair stirred his wrath more. He wanted to strike her to the floor, but he could barely move.

If Janey had lived she would've been faithful, not like the Jezebel he had married.

"Who was it?" he rasped. He wanted to scream at her, but he couldn't get air into his lungs!

She gave him no answer and turned her back on him.

He clenched his teeth in fury, he wanted to hit her with his fist, put her in her place! Instead his legs grew limp. He stumbled to a chair and fell heavily into it! He fought to breathe while she continued to ignore him. If he could gain back his strength, he could use the chair he was sitting on and hit her with it! He would knock her down!

He needed to crush her skull because she had been poisoning him! That had to be the reason he was in so much pain! He had already eaten an entire bottle of antacids that day! He would just stop eating her food! How long before he got better?

"The fence is down between our land and the Branon's." Lynn said quietly.

Sid Branon, were they having an affair? He felt no surprise knowing her behavior.

"I need to just kill you and be done with it!" he gasped hoarsely as pain intensified and ripped anew through his body. His eyes watered from the ache that tore his internals apart.

She stared at him in shock, hurt in her eyes.

"I'm faithful and a good wife, how could you say that, Owen?" she said with a soft sob.

He needed to get away from her. She suffocated him with her pathetic emotions! He got up and stumbled toward the door.

She followed whining behind him.

"Owen, you look awful, maybe you should see a doctor!" She continued to whine as she moved to assist him. He drew back his fist to hit her when she came close enough. She jerked back to avoid his swinging fist and he fell into the wall with a loud thump. He caught his balance, nearly falling to the floor.

"Doctor!" he snarled, "you're trying to poison me!" Once outside he managed to stumble to his truck and get in. He completely ignored her yacking. His hand clumsily slipped on the gearshift as he backed up. He tore down the drive, throwing up a large trail of dust and gravel. He didn't care if the gravel hit her. The thought of her pain gave him satisfaction.

It was dusk as he parked in the driveway of the person he hated most on the planet.

Sid stepped out onto his porch, sending through Owen the need to decimate the man! Controlling his rage had grown harder every time he saw him!

Owen stared at him, when had Sid gotten so old? His face was full of wrinkle lines and his hair graying white! Not that many years had passed, Owen argued with himself! They were the same age, he refused to believe he looked that old!

"Owen," Sid said mockingly as Owen stubbled out of his truck. "Let me guess why you are here. My herd helped themselves to your water."

"You cut the fence again, you bastard!" Owen snarled, added as many foul words as he could before he ran out of breath.

Sid actually had the nerve to laugh.

"You don't have any proof." He said, stepping off the porch and approaching.

"You no-good wanna' be rancher...." Owen spewed a sulfurous line of curses! He had to stop because he couldn't catch his breath. "...stop using my springs.. no water sources.." he was forced to stop, the pain under his ribs would not let him breathe at all and his body grew weaker.

Sid dryly laughed.

"You're so pathetic! I don't know what Janey saw in you!"

All the years that had passed and he could still stir Owen's rage with her name.

Sid smirked at his response.

"You killed her!" Owen screamed wildly as he grabbed his fist to his chest where the trainload of pain resided suddenly.

"You killed her," Sid mimicked Owen's words, tone, and gasping sound.

Owen stumbled forward with the intention of smiting the life out of Sid!

"I wanted to kill you then but Janey said 'no'." Owen gasped, barely a whisper. He was surprised to see something flicker in Sid's eyes. "I'll kill you, now!" Owen hissed, enraged in a way he never had before!

"You're such a worthless bastard, griping and boohooing over some dead broad! She wanted me, not you.."

Owen made a choking, gurgling sound and fell at Sid's feet!

"You're the one who brought all that liquor," Sid said with a sadistic laugh while standing over him. "You're the one who killed her!"

A loud roaring filled Owen's ears and he could no longer hear Sid. Something hacked away at his other senses. He tried to speak but found he couldn't move.

He swam in pain, the kind that couldn't be imagined! Fear suddenly struck him and filled him with terror! He knew he was mortal but he had never thought of dying!

He knew at that moment he wouldn't live to see another sunrise!

He wished he could've taken Sid with him! Looking up at him, Owen tried to speak, the words coming out in gasping whispers. "I'll keep a place . . warm for you . . next to me . . in hell!" A startled look skittered across Sid's face before it hardened.

Darkness clouded Owen's vision. He thought of his children, the wrong he had done to them! The heinous, selfish path he had taken with his life. Profound anguish and remorse filled him!

The blackest darkness came, surrounding the pain and wrapping him into infinite tightness. Time slowed and stopped as death took all he needed for existence.

Years Later

Liana Tate moved with stiff, sore muscles as she threw the wire cutters down in the rusted truck bed. She shook head as she viewed the fence line. The timeworn fence seemed too old and decaying faster than she could make the repairs.

She pulled off her old hat and used her shoulder to wipe the sweaty grime on her face. She knocked at the dust on her hat before placing it back on her head. She tightened the loose ponytail at the back of her neck. A gusty breeze blew at loose brownish strands lightened by the sun giving her brown hair the color of dark honey.

She doubted anyone would remember her birthday today. She tried to not feel depressed with the thought she had no one in her life that cared. She wondered if she would spend the rest of her life struggling to keep a rundown ranch going and never do anything with her life! She couldn't help feeling defeated. She felt so tired of working with no results! Like a hamster in a wheel going nowhere!

Using her worn leather gloves she swatted at the dust on her jeans. Jeans so worn with holes that it would be indecent to wear them to town. Jeans that she had owned in her teens. She didn't have money to buy new clothes, which left her wearing what she had.

She walked back toward the house, she would have to change before going to town.

Her horse, Cinny, saw her and came up to the fence. The cinnamon colored horse was the last precious gift from her father, before he had died. Cinny waited for her to approach, expecting to be petted. She brought her head over the fence and leaned. Several posts leaned outward from the horse's pressure.

Liana wished her brother, Jas had been there earlier to help her with the work. He seemed to be gone most of the time, she frustratedly thought. He could've helped inoculate the calves yesterday, but he had disappeared! He left again after breakfast with an argument that he didn't need to help with fixing the fence! He refused to say what he did all day and anger grew as she thought of how many chores she did anymore without his help!

She ran the palm of her hand along Cinny's neck and kissed the tip of her soft velvet nose. "I'm sorry but I don't have any treats for you." Liana said with disappointment. The old horse hardly ever got treats from her.

The thought of food made her own stomach rumble painfully. She decided that she would go into town and celebrate. Buying something to eat instead of making it at the house. She couldn't recall the last time she had eaten in town.

Apprehension filled her with the possibility of seeing Moss Branon. The thought of seeing the bully caused her to tense up. He would harass, humiliate, or irritate her every time she saw him!

She didn't remember all she had said to him after her fathers funeral. She wondered if the reason for his behavior had something to do with what she had said back then. He had tried to speak with her, but she had been so struck with grief that it made everything impossible to remember! He shouldn't have come to see her during that time!

She hated the Branons because they had killed her father! She felt positive about that! Tears came to her eyes as she thought of Owen. The Branons were murderers, she thought justifying her hatred! Tears ran as she thought of her father.

She wiped her face across the top of her shoulder to dry off the watery wetness on her cheeks. She despised the Branons, hated the sight of them with every trace of her blood! Seeing, hearing, even thinking of them made her stomach churn painfully with negative emotions. She reconsidered going to town to eat because he might show up. She didn't want to see Branon on her birthday! Seeing him would ruin it!

She decided he wouldn't affect the way she lived! She would go to town and eat at a restaurant! Looking down at herself she knew she would have to clean up first. She didn't bother to fix the leaning fence where Cinny had tilted it. She hoped the horses would remain behind the flimsy barrier as she walked toward the house.

When she finished showering she stepped in front of her closet. She had so little to pick from. Her washed thin shirts had small holes and so did her jeans. She found a pale green t-shirt and after pulling it out of her closet she saw a couple of tiny holes.

She sighed and wondered again if she would ever get ahead working a rundown ranch.

She needed to sell her half of the property and move away! The plan sounded really good and sent a thrill through her! Thoughts of selling and leaving lingered in the back of her mind. She needed to tell Jace her idea, if he ever showed up so they could actually talk.

Finding a thin old flannel shirt to wear loose over the t-shirt, she pulled it on. She grabbed a pair of jeans, one with the least amount of holes and stains. It didn't matter how she appeared to others feeling positive she would never meet a prince charming. She reflected morosely how few men she had dated, she never had time or energy.

If she sold her half of the property she could move away and meet men! She could work regular hours at a real job and date like a normal woman her age! Was it even called dating anymore?

She quickly brushed her hair and brought it back into a ponytail. After pulling on her boots she walked to her truck, hoping the old vehicle would start. She got it started and drove to town.

She began to grow tense as she parked next to the only restaurant in the small town. She glanced around looking for Moss's flashy brand new truck and didn't see it parked anywhere. Her stomach ached and she rubbed at it unconsciously. Feeling safe she exited her truck.

She breathed deeply the scent of food as she entered the restaurant. Rarely having a full course meal anymore, she felt certain she could clean off everyone's plate. She walked towards an empty seat.

She said a few "hellos" to people she knew but they acted like they couldn't hear her! Ignoring their rude behavior, she reflected over the fact that the individuals were likely loyal friends of Moss Branon. She felt weary thinking how everyone picked his side! The Branons' killed her father, why did they think she deserved their snobbish treatment?

The waitress stopped at nearly every table before reaching Liana's side. Another loyal friend of his or maybe one he had an affair with, Liana guessed. He had more relations with women in a year than most men did in a lifetime. The thought of his affairs repulsed her, it drove deeper the thought, she needed to sell and move away!

Who would want to buy a rundown ranch? If she sold her half of the property she could move away and make a fresh start somewhere. If she paid off all the creditors there wouldn't be money leftover for her to use for living somewhere else!

A fleeting thought came to her, what if she sold the place to Moss? With Sid's water shortage and her land having plenty, maybe the contention between them would stop. She felt sure the

fight between them had started over water. Her father had bought the land before Sid could, leaving plenty of water for the stock he owned.

If she committed such a crime, Jas would hate her forever, selling to the enemy! She didn't know where the traitorous thought had come from. Selling to the enemy! Maybe, she worked too hard and too many hours to save the ranch!

After a very long wait the waitress brought her plate of food and dropped it on the table. The cold chicken and the mashed potatoes with gravy seemed too cold to eat. Was the cook one of his loyal friends too? Tension tightened in her stomach as she mused over the rudeness of the small town.

It would have been nice to have Jas there to share her birthday dinner and maybe treat her better. If she bothered him, he would become ill-tempered and start fights with her! He likely at the library, on the computer. She knew better than to bother him. His moods had grown worse and she didn't know how to handle his rebellion.

She had to do his work on top of hers. The few times she had chased after him and brought him home he had gotten angry and refused to do anything.

Misery over the way everything seemed in her life at the moment took away her appetite for the unappealing cold food. She pushed her bangs back in her frustration. Her hand came away grimy with visible dirt. She had showered, how could she still be dirty? her frustration mounted. Leaving her plate to wash the grime off her hand she walked past the other customers she knew and again, ignored completely.

She left the restroom after cleaning up and immediately froze upon hearing his loud voice echo in the restaurant. Tension blossomed in her belly and froze her veins. She became immobile as a chill prickled down her spine. Feeling as his prey she wondered if she should sneak out the backdoor to avoid him. It had to be her imagination but at times it seemed like he followed her around! Why did he like harassing her? His ranch was huge, surely he was too busy to be following someone around just to give them a hard time!

Cringing hard, she tried to sneak back to her seat and go unnoticed by him. Her stomach tightened like a rock when she heard her name fill the restaurant. Less than sixty seconds and he had started on her! What was wrong with him?

"Liana!" he boomed.

She could feel every eye in the restaurant turn toward her and silence filled the air. Her skin burned in embarrassment as she tried to ignore the bully. Why did he have to make a scene and draw everybody's attention? Why didn't he just ignore her like she ignored him? Her special birthday meal suddenly seemed unappealing.

"Why don't you come over here and join us, birthday girl?" he bellowed loudly.

A strange indescribable feeling coursed through her, followed by shock. Her hate felt weakened. What suddenly happened to her?

Why did he have to be the only one to remember her birthday? She heard one of the men in the booth with him snicker and the other man laughed at something Moss said under his breath. He was ridiculing her, she knew with certainty, she felt a twinge of hurt that came out of nowhere. Normally he had some female hanging on his arm, she intensely hated seeing them!

Flustered she sunk down in her seat, she disliked being the center of everyone's attention. She disliked being the brunt of everyone's gossip. She wanted badly to escape. The silence in the room told her that they waited for action between a Branon and a Tate.

She desperately wanted to not look in his direction but her rebellious eyes roamed toward him. Stylish short dark hair, clean shaved handsome face, broadness of shoulders, shirt carelessly unbuttoned at a muscular tan neck, snug jeans revealing virility with expensive boots and cologne. She thought she could smell the cologne from where she sat. She hated herself for looking, because he saw her glance and had been watching her.

"Are you going to keep pretending to ignore me, beautiful?" his loud tone coaxing.

Enticement hit her like a fist and took her breath away. She visibly shuddered with the new emotion and feeling toward him in such a particular manner. She immediately denied the emotion. He probably called all women beautiful!

Feeling more strain in his presence than she could handle, much more than normal. She would have to leave her birthday dinner that she had splurged to buy and quickly get away.

She hurried past his table, the only other way out was the back door and she wasn't turning tail. He wasn't going to push her around!

She was suddenly flying through the air and landing hard on her back. She momentarily lost her breath in the fall and remained immobile in stunned shock. For a fraction of a second she thought he had tripped her but knew it was a puddle of melted ice because she could quickly feel it through her thin old clothes. Her skin burned like fire in embarrassment and humiliation, especially with everyone watching. Only in nightmares had she ever been so embarrassed.

Moss moved before she could, the toe of his shiny boot caught her open flannel shirt and pinned the hem of it to the floor. Stunned in disbelief kept her still as she gasped up at him in raging shock.

"Quick Milly, grab a broom! I caught a big rat by the tail and I think it is from Tate's ranch!" he boomed to the waitress. The sudden burst of rolling laughter in the room was profound.

Rage blinded her and she could hear her shirt rip as she tore away from the sole of his boot. Never had she been so degraded! So humiliated! She had no one who would stand up against moneybags, Moses Branon!

She came at him with her fists flying. He was going to pay! How she despised him! She wanted to hurt him in such a way that he would suffer, forever!

His chin jerked back at her first fist strike to his face. Regret immediately filled her for hitting him. She didn't want to physically hurt him! For some reason it caused her to feel emotionally hurt and she didn't understand why.

His movement was a blur and she found she could no longer strike him again as he put his hands on her. She snarled in fury but found she could not scream. His arms swiftly wound around her like dirty ropes, pulling her up against his rock hard body. Choking painfully she tried to not breathe. She didn't want to notice how she really liked his scent and being held up against his warm solid body. Her blood pounded hard at her temples and she moved her fingers to dig her nails into his muscled arm. She intended to rip his skin completely off where her fingers rested. An invisible force caused her to slide her fingers across his arm instead. Once free, she planned on killing him, she promised herself, trying to ignore how she wanted to relax in his arms! Hate needed to override every emotion she had, she told herself! She suddenly fought to get free.

"Liana, calm down." His tone tender as his hold loosen so she could move. He gently turned her. A whirlwind of emotions hit her, none defined. Hearing the way he had just said her name and the way he was touching her, caused her to feel an intense need to get away before it was

too late. He shifted her from him slightly so he could examine her. His warm brown eyes scrutinized her face.

"I hate you!" She snarled in fury! She would die before acknowledging any attraction towards him. Her breath came in gasps. Her words seemed to wound him deeply. The knowledge that she could hurt him did something to her insides and seemed to grow. Odd and foreign feelings.

She needed to get away! She frantically struggled! She could feel how pale her face had become, like all the blood had left it. She suddenly felt close to passing out. She moved quickly out of the bench, his hands fell limply away.

She avoided the partially melted ice and raced out of the restaurant. Her hand shook so hard when she put the keys in the truck that she had to try multiple times. She worried he might come after her which gave her the strength to move quicker and get away. She threw the truck in gear and sped off. She had no concrete thought or emotion that was clear. Reasoning became very slow to return. She couldn't outrun the emotions that had taken hold of her mind.

She parked the truck and huge racking sobs ripped through her. Fague memories swept through her mind, things he had said after her father's burial. The deepest hurt in his eyes lingered from that time. She put the truck in gear and drove aimlessly. Occasionally wiping at the tears that fell. She grew overwhelmed by the turmoil inside her.

She had no idea how long she drove but when she saw the gas gage was nearing empty she pulled into a gas station. She dumped out her purse, looking for change. She looked under the seat and over the entire floorboard. She was not sure where she had driven and had to ask the gas attendant after giving him all the change.

She had trouble getting the truck started and tears began to trail down her cheeks. Tension became her new emotion and it filled her mind. She took off her torn flannel shirt and used it to wipe away the tears that wouldn't stop. She fingered where his boot had rested and didn't understand why she held it. Every inch of him seemed to pull at her insides. She could still smell his masculine scent in the material. What had happened to her?

The hurt in his dark eyes brought back repressed memories when her father had died. She had said things to him then but she couldn't remember clearly what it had been. Vague memories of the past repeatedly floated around in her mind as the miles sped by. She had blamed him for her father's death.

The look of anguish in his eyes by the horrible things she had said. How she found him repulsive. She wondered if his philandering started because of the things she had said to him then. Horrible things she remembered slightly about him being so unattractive and that no woman would want him. Remorse and regret filled her thoughts. What she had said then should never have carried that kind of weight! She had to be wrong about it!

He had left and came back years later after his own father had passed. He had come back a different man, who showered animosity over her like a rain cloud.

Exhausted by an emotional deadlock she wanted to continue to hate him and refused to acknowledge to herself any attraction she might have toward Moss Branon. Maybe she had been working too hard or maybe she needed a good night's sleep.

The next few days she worked and rarely saw her brother. The expenses continued to pile up and when the phone rang it was only creditors wanting their money. Eventually the phone was disconnected as well.

A miserable feeling followed her around everywhere. The ranch continued sinking financially but her thoughts always lingered on him. She needed to know what happened that night, maybe even what happened between Owen and Sid. But who could she ask? She imagined visiting Moss and a rough shiver went through her with the visualizing thought. Tension caused pain in her stomach. It seemed to occasionally hurt under her left ribs.

Half awake one night, growing more frustrated by the minute with the image of his handsome face and the hurt, when unexpectedly she remembered his aunt Hilda. She sat up in her bed looking at nothing in the darkness as she contemplated going to see her.

The next day without telling Jas what she planned on doing, she drove to town, to the retirement community. She sat in the truck after parking, feeling fearful to deliberately see a relative of Moss's. She didn't think a relative of a Branon would want to see a Tate so Liana had not called first.

She timidly knocked on her door and waited. She knocked again with more strength and waited longer. Doubt developed and she became apprehensive. What if Moss found out that she had been there, asking questions? Tension painfully tightened her abdomen. She could hear movement within and wondered if Hilda knew it was her.

A Tate.

She likely planned on not answering the door. When no one came, Liana felt surprised at the flood of disappointment. She slowly turned and walked away.

Chapter 2

The door suddenly opened behind Liana.

"Hello?" an elderly woman said as she held the door open and peered at Liana questionly. The old housedress she wore fluttered in the breeze as she stood holding on to her walker with one hand and the other on the door.

Liana tried to speak and found her throat had tightened with nervousness. She timidly walked toward the woman and waited to be told to leave.

"I'm sorry, honey. I wasn't certain I heard someone at the door but when I looked, I saw you. I don't get around so quickly anymore." she said patting the walker she leaned on. "What can I do for you, dear?"

"I'm Liana," she hesitated before adding her last name. "Tate."

"I thought it was you, but I wasn't sure." she motioned Liana in. "You've become a beautiful woman." she said, smiling widely.

Surprised by the elderly woman's friendly tone, Liana smiled nervously. She had done nothing to look nice, having hurried over before changing her mind.

"Come in, dear." Hilda said in a welcoming tone, moving back with her walker and making a soft clicking sound when hitting the floor. "Come in."

Liana followed but didn't understand why Hilda was so hospitable. Shouldn't all Branons and Tates abhor each other?

Hilda sat down carefully on a flowery sofa, out of breath. "I'm sorry, I'm not able to be a good hostess. If you would like something to drink, feel free to go in the kitchen and get something, dear."

Liana sat on the edge of a large easy chair.

"I'm fine." she said and silence filled the room. Anxious and indecisive over how to approach the topics she came to ask, she remained silent. Maybe she should get something to drink.

Hilda spoke about the weather and Liana agreed with her. Silence continued between them. Hilda smiled and looked at Liana with fondness. "I'm glad you came by to see me."

Liana stiffly smiled and fidgeted, uncomfortably.

"I'm sorry about what happened to your father, Liana," Hilda said tenderly.

Liana almost fell off the chair where she perched. She felt stunned Hilda had brought up the subject she wanted to hear about and so quickly. Her throat tightened with emotion thinking of her father. "Do you know what happened that night, Hilda?" Liana asked, in a shaky voice.

"I was there." Hilda said briefly. Memories seemed to pull her into her own thoughts and she didn't speak.

Liana waited patiently, she finally found someone who could tell her the truth about what happened.

"I was there that night." Hilda repeated. "Sid was such a terror to live with, a harsh man and not just when he was drinking.

Liana thought of her father and remembered that he had been a similar type of man. She shoved the disloyal thought away. Her brother had said many times how their father had been cruel and abusive. She tried to tell herself he had been a good man, nothing like Sid. He had been nothing like the Branons. Excluding Hilda, she thought kindly of the woman.

"I lived with my brother so I could be there for the boys, mainly for Moses."

Liana felt a strange stirring hearing Hilda using Moss's given name. She could hear the love in Hilda's tone toward him.

Hilda continued, "Moses has a soft heart and he feels strongly about things, the way his mother was."

Thinking of what Moss did to her two days ago, she wondered what his aunt would think of him, if she knew. All the other things he had done and him being soft hearted was outlandish. He seemed like a hard cruel man just like Sid. She didn't argue with Hilda as she continued talking about the past.

"Owen came over unexpectedly that night, right at sundown. Sid and him argued out past the porch for a while. Those two were always yelling at each other and there was never anything a normal person could do to stop them. I don't even know what the argument was about, I didn't listen. Something trivial, I'm sure..." Hilda looked about for something.

Liana remembered her father's rants about Owen. "Do you need something, Aunt Hilda?" She asked. After she had called her, 'aunt' she felt uncomfortable. She was Moss's aunt, not hers.

Hilda smiled hugely at her with a tender gaze.

"Tissues, honey. It's over on the shelf." She pointed and Liana's discomfort disappeared and she quickly brought her the box. After pulling out one, Hilda left the box next to her on the sofa.

"Liana, dear what I'm about to tell you I have not told others." Hilda paused for a moment to gather her thoughts.

Liana sat rigid on the edge of the soft cushion of the easy chair, waiting to hear the truth after so many years. Her heart raced in anticipation and dread as she waited for Hilda to continue. She knew the Branons were responsible for her father's death, now she might hear the truth.

"Sid came storming into the house, in a rage. After a little bit, the two boys came in and they went straight to Sid. He controlled them both like two stupid toy monkeys on strings. They didn't

so much as blink unless he gave them permission. I could hear them whispering something to Sid.... I don't know, maybe if I had paid closer attention. I had sensed something wrong but I didn't do anything." Regret sounded heavy in her tone,

Liana felt her own throat tightened with emotion.

Hilda continued, "I heard Sid say, 'leave him'. I think they were telling him about your father lying out in the yard. Sid hated your father in ways I never understood," Hilda paused, "I'm sorry, Liana." in a tone full of remorse and guilt.

Liana saw tears in the older woman's eyes and moved to the sofa next to her. For the first time, Liana felt forgiveness and felt lightened by the emotion. Feeling tears warm her own eyes from the alleviated feelings, she reached out to touch Hilda's hand. Hilda gripped her hand and surprised Liana by the strength of her hold.

"Moses came home, I heard his truck pull up. Suddenly, he yelled frantically for me, from the yard. With a bad feeling in the pit of my stomach, I came out running. He was by your father's side, performing CPR. I didn't know he knew how, but he was always a smart boy. Terrified, he told me to call for an ambulance.

Sid got in my way, and tried to stop me from calling for help. He slapped me and I tried to hit him back, it became a physical fight. Moses stepped suddenly between the two of us. Moses still a young man, slender and Sid outweighed him by seventy pounds. Moses swung a fist at Sid and I got away. The two started fighting.

I ran inside and made the call. Once I gave our address I dropped the phone and ran back out. Moses frantically tried to help your father and Sid kept hitting him with his fists. Moses turned around with a spin and his fist uppercut so swiftly that it struck Sid in the face causing him to fall. Both boys jumped Moses and he fought them both. It was partially dark and lumber had been laying around for repairs. I tried to help Moses and one of the boys shoved me hard making me fall again. I stumbled to my feet and looked up to see Sid with a two-by-four. He swung it and he hit Moses in the head, I couldn't even scream in enough time to warn him. I thought he had killed the poor boy when he fell to the ground. I rushed to his limp body and I could see blood pouring out of his ear. I thought he would die..." Hilda stopped and grabbed another tissue and used it.

Liana sat in shock, not moving and when Hilda handed her a tissue she flinched. Liana had not felt the tears on her cheeks, she wiped at them and breathed in a partial sob. Hilda patted her leg affectionally.

"I don't mean to upset you." Hilda said kindly.

"He seems fine." Liana stated with numb lips. Intense shock seemed to radiate through her.

"He's completely deaf in that ear."

"Why did Moses try to help my father?" Liana asked, her voice held a slight quiver. She was shocked over his suffering.

"Liana, don't you know how Moses feels toward you, dear?" Hilda gently chided. Liana looked at her in question and shook her head in a firm negative.

Hilda sighed. "He loves you so!"

Liana could not move for a full minute in shock. Her heart beat pounded in her ears as it raced fast. The man hated her, she told herself, trying to calm her thoughts. She could hardly grasp him feeling any love. His aunt was completely wrong!

She understood why he always talked so loud, never imagining he had trouble hearing. She had begun to see Moss differently. She could see their constant disagreements were partially her fault. An insane thought entered into her mind. Maybe, she could just give him her share of her ranch, for the heavy price he paid in helping her father. She dismissed the insane thought, she would never do that.

"I guessed you two must be working things out, the reason you are here, asking about what happened". Hilda said with a smile. "I'll be glad to see little ones before I go," she added. "I've prayed about it for a long time. I've wanted Moses to be happy and I know you are the only one who can do that."

Liana thought to herself that maybe Hilda was not of sound mind, but she seemed fine.

Hilda was perceptive and chuckled. "I'm not losing my mind, yet."

"Hilda, he truly hates me!" Liana stated firmly. "You've not seen how he acts around me. Surely, you mean someone else!"

"No! I'm positive that he could never hate you! You have always been his sun, even the last time I saw him, you are the one who he talks about. He is proud of you and how you keep your ranch running. His feelings will never change. When your father passed and you two had your quarrel, he came back different."

Liana swallowed the bitterness in the back of her throat, listening to Hilda talk about their fight. She didn't like the guilt painfully besieging her, thinking how she had caused him so much hurt by her words and actions. She would have to apologize to him even if it was seven years too late. Hurting him like she did, she could understand his hatred toward her. She did not believe Hilda's positive assessment.

Hilda was still speaking of their fight. ". . . like he had given up all hope for you to love him. I think he feels too strongly for you. He loves you too much! After your father's funeral I could hear him crying at night. He was so terribly sad and depressed! I knew he wouldn't want anyone to know, so I didn't say anything. I watched him closely, worried about what he might do. He suddenly left with no warning and didn't come back until Sid's funeral."

A tight invisible band threatened to cut the air from Liana's lungs. Tears filled her eyes again and she grabbed another tissue out of the box. Had his feelings for her caused a rift between him and his father? A rift that existed to Sid's grave. Was this the reason for his hatred of her? Did he blame her for the discord with his father that had not ended until it was too late. She felt certain the man detested the sight of her.

She vaguely remembered things she said to him, after her father's funeral. She tried to swallow away the bitterness that sat in the back of her throat. Hurting Moses years ago seemed to hurt her now, in a way she had never experienced. She didn't like the heavy weight of guilt that besieged her. She would have to make amends somehow. He likely hated the sight of her and with reason.

She got up to leave, her emotions had become overwhelming and she could hardly speak.

"Can I hug you before you leave?" Hilda asked tenderly. "Don't be too upset over his loss of hearing, he learned how to deal with the loss. He learned sign language at the deaf school, where he worked."

Liana moved forward and embraced her, affection growing towards the kind elderly woman.

She didn't imagine it so horrible that it had split the family apart. Thinking of the rift between Moss and his father caused her the most intense kind of painful sadness. She realized that Sid had been abusive.

She didn't understand why she had denied the memories. Jas had said the same about their father. Neither of the men had been good to their families. She wondered why the two of them had lived next to each other their whole life. It seemed ludicrous to Liana.

The feud had been the fault of both men.

Chapter 3

Liana pushed her wavy hair back and fiddled with the heart-shaped locket hanging from a gold chain around her neck. Her face itched a little, unused to the new makeup she had carefully applied. She tried to not spend too much money on makeup.

She knew the ranch would never be financially stable and had finally given up on succeeding. She knew they would be losing everything anyway so she stopped trying. She had grown weary of putting every penny into it. Tired of the constant struggle.

She was surprised when she looked in the mirror as she walked past it in her bedroom. The woman didn't look like the image she had of herself. It had been years since she fixed her appearance and the difference surprised her.

She pushed her hair back as a breeze caught it walking to the truck. She wasn't used to it hanging loose. The last three times she had gone to town he had not shown up, it had become a record. He almost always showed up in the past. She wasn't sure what had changed. Now that she wanted him to appear he wasn't materializing.

She got in the truck and left.

She parked in front of the only bakery in the small town. Hilda had decided to have a surprise birthday party for a friend and had asked her to pick up the cake.

Mrs. Peabody continued to talk on the phone while Liana stood waiting.

In befriending his aunt she had thought the town would treat her better, but she guessed wrong. The woman kept her ear to the phone and rudely ignored Liana.

She didn't know how long she stood patiently waiting. Too long.

Maybe, no one knew she was friends with one of the sovereign Branons.

She took the money from Liana before getting the cake. Did she think she would run off with the cake without paying? Liana shook her head at the idiocy. She should be used to such conduct, but it still hurt. It hurt more thinking that Moss might encourage their behavior. She felt an incredible need to move away and forget ever living there.

A twinge of physical pain radiated from under her ribs. The stress was getting to her, she thought.

Depressed, she took the cake and exited the bakery. She needed to go home and wash off the makeup, but she still had to stop at Hilda's. He wasn't there where several elderly were gathered for their friend. They invited her to the birthday party but she kindly refused.

She drove to one of the few gas stations that the town had and put in half a tank of gas. She berated herself for wasting money on makeup. She walked around the truck after paying and his voice boomed behind her, giving her a tremendous start. She hadn't seen him, she had been so deep in thought.

What she had rehearsed in her mind earlier, disappeared. Tension caused her to freeze and she couldn't remember anything she wanted to say.

He dressed better than normal wearing a white silk shirt with native designs. It clung to his muscular body as he moved. Unbuttoned at the top of his shirt he wore a silver chain around his neck. His neatly trimmed black hair ruffled slightly with a breeze and he didn't wear a cowboy hat.

Liana's mouth went dry as desert sand. She didn't remember being that attracted to him. She couldn't even breathe. His dark pants had creases down the front of his legs and his boots had a noticeable shine. When had he become so attractive? Nothing in her brain worked and she couldn't remember anything she had planned to say.

He pulled his sunglasses off and her heart dropped painfully hard. His eyes were dark ice.

She suddenly felt the need to cry.

He stepped closer to her, his eyes roaming over her face. She caught his cologne, and with his body so close, she was afraid she might embarrass herself by groaning from pleasure. She couldn't control how fast she breathed. She felt helpless against how he made her feel and became frightened he would know how she was responding toward him. Something flickered in his cold eyes. For a fraction of a second she thought he intended to lean closer to kiss her.

"You could have anyone," she whispered. Stunned, she had spoken her thoughts out loud, she stared wide eyed at him, unable to move. Embarrassment burned through her veins.

His eyes darkened with rage. his chest rose and fell rapidly.

She took a step back, afraid he might hit her. His rage so sudden and so fierce. Had he misunderstood her? She wanted to say it louder so he would know what she had said. If he was deaf in one ear he likely hadn't heard her over the strong breeze and traffic. She couldn't repeat the words, they stuck in her throat. She glanced at her truck, looking to escape. She grew extremely afraid he would know how she felt and she would become just another one of his conquests.

"You're not going anywhere until I'm done talking!" His violently harsh tone caused her to tremble. Hearing the bitter hatred in his voice cut through her heart. Tears pooled in her eyes. She wanted to end the strife between them, but she couldn't gather her thoughts nor find her voice.

"Your brother has been seen on my property!" His speech was concise and sharp. "Things have come up damaged and missing! If I catch that juvenile aberrant in action, I'll send him to prison!" His tone grew harsher, lethal sounding to her ears as he continued, "If I find out you're helping him, I'll send you there too!"

Too hurt to even breathe, she stared up at him speechlessly. She wanted to assure him that she would never do anything to him or his property. She still couldn't speak, she was too stunned. She blinked the tears from her eyes and they streamed down her cheeks. She saw something flicker in his eyes.

"Who's the new man in your life, Liana?" His tone cut and seemed laced with contempt. He suddenly turned and walked off. The rage in his fiery eyes left an imprint on her mind that she couldn't eradicate.

She got into her truck before she fell. The strain of dealing with his hatred affected her emotionally and physically.

Chapter 4

He avoided her eyes as they sat down at the table to eat a very sparse meal. Knowing already by what Moss had said she knew he was guilty of something. "Jas, what have you done?"

"Nothing!" He exploded. "Why are you always harping and carrying on like a mother duck! You're not my mother!"

She stood up, suddenly extremely angry, "I already had one man yell at me today!" she screamed at him, startling him with her sudden anger. "I'll ask again! What have you done?" She continued to scream. Her anger took away any concrete peaceful thought.

"What is wrong with you? Maybe, I need to move away!" He yelled back.

She sat back down in defeat. She had fallen in love with a Branon and the hurt from dealing with him earlier had not dissipated. Tears ran down her cheeks, like they had been doing since she had seen him in town.

She no longer hated Moss, but she hated being in love with him! She was beginning to feel numb from the hurt. "What did you do, Jas?" she whispered. "And where are you going to go?"

He didn't respond for a moment. "Who did you talk to?"

"Moss." she answered brokenly through a sob.

"He's a filthy liar!" He stormed at her. "Who are you going to believe? Me or Him!" He added foul words that he wasn't supposed to use.

"He's a good man! Stop talking about him like that!" She ordered him.

He looked at her like she had suddenly grown a second head. "What did you just say? I think there's something wrong with my hearing!"

Moss's partial loss of hearing was because of the feelings he once had for her.

He sat staring at her. "You've become one of his women!" he finally said.

He was right, she had fallen completely in love with him. Nothing could change how she felt so she remained silent.

Disbelief along with other emotions flickered across his face. "How could you fall for him? How could you dare defend him?" his voice became high and tight with emotion. "They murdered our dad!" he yelled "How can you say that about those killers?" He stood up while backing away from her like she had become contaminated by something lethal.

"Sid was guilty of dad's death, Jas. Moss tried to help him!"

Jas shook his head vigorously, "Who told you that? They're all killers and liars!"

"Were you there when it happened? I talked to someone who was!" she yelled back. Seeing the shocked and hurt look on his face, she stopped speaking. Guilt flooded through her, knowing she was the one who, over the last few years, had fed the poison against the Branons.

She filled his young mind with hate and had continued where their father had left off! She had made a grievous mistake. Full of regrets, she wondered if she had made peace between the two families would she be having the same problems with him. What if he had already broken the law and had done something?

His eyes grew big and round as an idea occurred to him. "You've refused to tell me lately, who you've been meeting in town! Dressed up like on a hot date, it's s Branon!"

"He's not interested in me! He's too busy yelling at me over what you've done! Why don't you tell me who've you been talking to the past couple months! You're never around anymore to do any of the chores!"

"You're interested in him! Your face is beet red! How could you Liana!" he practically screeched. "Are you insane?" he stood facing her with his chest heaving from his vehement emotions.

"I think it would be a good idea to get along with our neighbors!" she said quietly.

"You're like all the other women, falling under that womanizer's spell!" he shouted while shaking his head and flaying his hands wildly about.

"What's her name, Jas?" she asked calmly.

"I never dreamed my own sister would become such a cretinous fool!" he snarled.

"You can't help who you fall in love with." Defeat and complete hopelessness over having such powerful emotions toward a man she should only hate she sat, fighting tears. "What's her name?" she persisted, knowing her brother and certain he was keeping secrets.

He calmed down and sat back at the table. "She wants me to come visit her. She's bought me a ticket for early tomorrow morning." he paused and swallowed. "We love each other." he whispered.

She sat in absolute shock, staring at him. He really planned on leaving! Had he been deflecking? When was he going to tell her?

"I love her!" he said emotionally.

"You've not met her, yet!" She could see he was about to get angry and argue. "I didn't want to fall in love with Moss!" she added, "It's like being in a nightmare you can't wake up in!"

He nodded, seemingly to understand. "You can't control who you fall in love with."

She got up to put their dishes in the sink. She glanced up and saw a car pull up and park. For a moment all the air left her lungs. "Jas, why is the sheriff here?" she managed to choke out.

He flew out of his chair and raced up the stairs. She could hear him overhead.

When they were little, Liana read a tale about a girl who had a secret door in her room. Owen had built a small one for her, after she had pleaded with him. She could hear him in her closet, pulling open the door and then closing it. Should she be protecting her brother? Would Moss send her to prison, like he said? She couldn't decide if she should tell them.

Fear threatened to choke her as she opened the door after their hard and loud knock.

"Does Jason Tate live here?" the sheriff loudly asked, after identifying himself.

She slowly nodded, horrified to hear her brother's name on his lips. He slapped papers into her hand.

"Move!" he barked and stepped into the house. He gave her a shove to the side so his burly size could pass. The big man frightened her and she wondered what would happen to Jas if he found him. He tramped through the house while his deputy stood next to her.

She made a move to step away. She needed to find a place to sit, because her trembling legs were weak from fear. She worried the muscles in her bladder wouldn't hold. The two men deeply frightened her.

"Remain right here, ma'am. Don't move." the unfriendly deputy ordered her.

"What is this about?" she asked, her voice breaking as it shook.

He didn't answer and the sheriff returned after spending some time looking into every niche and crevice of the old farm house.

"He's probably out on the range, hiding," he said to the deputy.

"Please, what is this about?" she begged them, fighting to keep her tears from falling. They frightened her and she couldn't imagine turning her brother in.

"Read what you have in your hand!" He barked impatiently at her. "Where is he?"

She glanced down at the papers in her trembling hand. She couldn't comprehend any of the words. She saw the name Branon and she suddenly needed to sit, choosing the chair closest to her. She didn't care if the deputy tried to stop her, because she was going to fall if she didn't sit.

"I can arrest you for hiding him, ma'am!" Sheriff Harmen said, towering over her, menacingly.

The papers fell from her numb fingers. Moss was going to make her suffer! Anguish flooded her mind and she was hardly aware of what the men were saying to her. She couldn't even cry, the hurt went so deep. She sat shaking, hurting all over.

"We're going to keep looking for him! You better not be hiding him!" he said curtly. The two of them went out the door.

She remained sitting and silent, trying to grasp how much Moss wanted her to suffer. Would her pain make him happy? Did he hate her that much?

She sat aggrieved and not moving after she heard them drive off. The sun lowered in the sky and shadows filled the room. She heard Jas move around above her. Rage pulsed through her, as she thought of the trouble he had just gotten them into. She grabbed the papers off the floor. Clenching them in her fist, she stormed up the stairs and into her room. She tried to speak past the rage that strangled her.

He sat halfway out of the hiding spot with his head bowed. There wasn't enough light for her to see his face. She could see his shoulders quiver and for a moment she thought he might be laughing. He breathed in a noticeable sob and her anger abated.

"They were talking about arresting me, Jas!" she whispered in the still darkened room.

"I heard." He whispered back. "I'm sorry, more than you know."

"What did you do?" She kept her voice quiet, afraid they might come back.

"You didn't even do anything wrong, sis!" he whispered harshly.

"It hurts so much that he wants to make me suffer!" She began sobbing and choking with crying so hard. She didn't know it could hurt so much physically and yet have nothing wrong with her body.

"You're crazy to fall for that womanizer!"

"I'm crazy! I'm not the one the sheriff is looking for! So who's the crazy one?"

"I'm sorry, I know you can't control who you fall in love with. They will be watching for me, and I was supposed to leave in the morning! He will call them if we drive by his place and they'll arrest me!" He began to cry harder.

"If you get arrested, how am I supposed to pay for a lawyer? Who's going to help me here on the ranch if you're locked up?" She knew she shouldn't be scolding him, but she couldn't stop.

"No! I never wanted to work this rundown dump! I planned on leaving!"

"We could've sold it and both left together!"

Silence filled the room. "I'm sorry! I've been a fool! I never dreamed of you wanting to leave! I thought you would fight about leaving!"

"You think I want to be here so Moss can get me locked up because of some payback over what happened in the past?"

"What happened?" he asked.

She remained silent, nothing mattered now.

"You're not going to say?"

"No! You have your secrets and I have mine! We could've left together!" She felt overwhelmed by defeat. Everything was so hopeless, she thought. "You have no idea how much this hurts, Jas!"

"I really am sorry, Liana! I . . . " He hesitated, "poisoned a watering hole."

"Why?" she asked with a sob.

"I thought you hated the Branons as much as me! I didn't know you had feelings for him!"

"I would never pick him as someone to fall in love with! You don't have a choice!"

"I know! I didn't pick Brenda, but she's so amazing and understanding and kind and beautiful! I planned on burning down one of his barns but I thought of her and didn't."

"You let your hate override your common sense! We could've both left!" she repeated. She didn't want to go to prison because Moss hated her!

"You'll leave this ranch?"

"Yes! But, one of us should stay and get rid of everything first. After, I sell everything we can use the money to pay off all the debt, including paying off Branon for the damage."

"I can't leave! The sheriff will be looking for me!"

She sat thinking. A painful burn started under her ribs, she didn't know why it hurt. The stress had become physical, she guessed. She couldn't let Moss destroy them! "There's another way to the highway. We have to use horses to get there."

His shadow straightened up. His defeat turned into hope. "I forgot about that old trail! You'll stay and sell everything? Then you'll come live with us?"

"I don't know. Does she live close?"

"Alaska." he stated.

"Alaska?" she exclaimed.

"Quiet!" he hissed.

"Our phone is out. I can't call to see if you arrived safely!"

"I have a phone. She sent me one."

"You can't just use people!"

"I know! I'm going to work it off and pay her back for everything. Her family owns this factory and she's getting me a job there. I'll pay her back and I'll work hard. She sent me some money too."

"Jason! How much?"

"Here, I'll give you some."

She could hear him moving around in the darkness. The room slightly lit up and she saw he had turned his new phone on. "Here's my number."

She took the phone from him. "I'm not going to write it down because that big bully of a sheriff might find it."

"Good idea, sis!"

After she memorized the number she handed the phone back to him.

"How long will it take to travel with the horses?"

"Let me see your ticket." she said.

He handed it to her and turned his phone on again so she could read it. "Do you think we can make it past that sheriff and Branon?"

"They are likely parked down the road toward town. We'll leave at five. Have everything packed." Her heart felt wretched and under her ribs it burned like a fire had been lit. Her brother

would leave her and Moss wanted her in prison! She got up and laid down on her bed. She didn't think she could sleep but she felt exhausted. She heard him move to his room. She worried about his safety going so far away from their home. What if the people were crazy and did something to him? Tears slid out from under her closed lids.

She thought of aunt Hilda praying for Moss and her. She decided to join her in saying some prayers for her brother and herself. She didn't want to go to jail.

It was a long time before she was able to sleep.

She had recurring nightmares of Moss standing over her grave and laughing.

Chapter 5

"We'll go out the back doors, house and the barn." Liana whispered to her brother after a nearly sleepless night. She felt an occasional sting of pain under her ribs.

His luggage was meager as he held a small bag of his things.

"We're late! Are we going to make it?" He whispered frantically.

"Do you have everything? If I sell everything, you need to take what you want before I do!"

"I don't need any of my old junk. Let's go!" he whispered.

She didn't see anyone as she led two saddled horses out the back door of the barn.

He came quickly out of the shadows and got up on his horse.

She mounted Cinny and led them north, toward a wooded area. The sun laid out its rays before rising above the horizon.

She tried to be brave and not cry about her brother leaving. She would have to sell everything without him! She didn't know what to think about him living in Alaska. It was so far from their ranch. Tears occasionally fell and once the sun slipped past the horizon her sore eyes burned from the brightness.

They exited out of the woods and past the scrub brush that grew on the edge of the ridge they traveled. She wiped at a tear and he happened to see it.

"Are you crying because I'm leaving?" he asked, concerned.

"Yeah, and other things. Do you want me to sell all your stuff?" she asked, she needed to plan what needed to be done before she moved away.

"Yes, sell everything! Did you count the money I gave you?"

"No, I just stuck it down in my purse."

"There should be enough to get your phone working again. I'll send more once I get settled."

They called a taxi and waited at the edge of the road. She feared the intimidating sheriff driving by and catching them.

She worried over his safety and meeting with strangers he'd met online. She couldn't stop him from going since he was an adult. She wouldn't let Moss win and send them both to prison.

They both got off their horses and she hugged him many times until the taxi showed up.

She slowly headed back towards the ranch, alone! The beautiful scenic view of the terrain offered her little solace.

Sadness lingered with depression as her days passed. Occasionally the pain under her ribs would stir. Over time the pain intensified and she had it all the time.

She wished she could forget about Moss but she couldn't. It hurt that he hated her.

She had taken pictures of everything on the ranch and posted it online after getting the internet working with Jason's money.

She considered an auction but didn't think all the old items would pay enough for her trouble.

She had gotten up late one morning and noticed how little was left in her kitchen to eat. She wanted to go to town and buy groceries but afraid of meeting up with the sheriff.

After doing her morning chores she waited outside for a customer to check out her cattle.

The sheriff's car pulled up and slowly came to a stop.

Her heart dropped and fear filled her veins. Her legs grew weak seeing them again. She opened the door on her truck and got in the seat. She heard him yell something as the deputy ran towards her truck.

She closed the door out of fear. She felt her throat tightened with terror. The two talked for a while before walking to each side of her truck.

The big man stepped to her truck's driver side window. "Where is he?" He thundered.

"He left the night you came with that warrant."

"I can't understand you!" He said. "Why don't you step out here so we can talk!"

She was positive he was lying. Her speech was concise and she knew he had heard her. His cold, hard eyes left her with no trust toward him. She sat still while trembling, waiting to see what they were going to do. Hoping they would leave. She wondered if she needed help but knew no one she could call. Jason had made it to Alaska and was happy with his new girlfriend. She deleted everything he sent her so if they got her phone out of her pocket they wouldn't find anything about him.

"Come out so we can talk, ma'am!"

"I already told you, he left!" She nearly screamed the words. There was no way he couldn't hear her.

"I'm ordering you to get out of the truck! You're about to be arrested for resisting!"

Fear rushed through her. They were going to put her in jail! Moss would be happy to see a Tate in jail. The agonizing thought caused tears to run and pain grow under her ribs.

He nodded to his deputy. The loud crash as he busted her passenger window caused her to scream. The sheriff broke the window on her driver's side and she screamed again as tiny cubes of glass hit her.

He reached his meaty hand in and unlocked the door. He roughly grabbed her arm while she screamed again. No one was going to hear her screams but she couldn't stop. She screamed louder as he forced her to the ground. She thought she might throw up because her fear was so profound. He grabbed at the front of his pants and for a moment she thought he was going to rape her.

He suddenly went still and stared straight ahead.

She frantically twisted around on the ground to see what caused him to stop. Moss stood thirty feet from her. She scrambled to her feet and raced to him. She dropped to the ground at his feet on all fours.

"Please!" she whimpered. Her legs felt so weak with fear that she couldn't stand. She realized he may not have heard her since he didn't look at her. She couldn't speak any louder, fear had locked up her voice. Did he come to see her arrested? Tears flooded from her eyes.

His gaze was locked on the sheriff. He was too still!

She blinked away her tears and straightened up so she could look up at him. His eyes, dark fiery flames aimed towards the sheriff. He clenched his fists and unclenched them. "The warrant is no longer valid!" He said in a harsh tone.

"I heard differently!" The sheriff yelled condescendingly back.

"Leave!" Moss ordered the sheriff.

She stared at Moss in confusion. Was he ordering the sheriff around?

"She's under arrest for resisting!"

"Lonan!"

A masculine voice spoke from a tree line that ran along her house. "I've got it all recorded!"

She saw a man in the shadows, on a horse, slipping a phone into his pocket. She looked around and saw another truck parked behind Moss's truck. A group of Moss's men stood near.

A third pulled up with a trailer behind it. It was likely the party who wanted to buy her livestock.

She got up on her feet and stopped feeling so frantic once she understood Moss wasn't there to see her get arrested.

He was wearing a white shirt with sleeves rolled up revealing tan muscular biceps and open at his tanned neck. His black hair was tousled and his boots looked worn. He had been working by the looks of him. The sight of his casual attire caused everything to clear from her mind. She found him more attractive than the last time she saw him. She wondered if she had fallen more in love with him over time. She didn't know a man could look so beautiful. She jerked her gaze off him and faced the law men.

The sheriff looked around in a cocky manner. He slowly moved towards his car and got in. Every eye watched them drive away.

Once the car was out of sight, Moss turned his gaze to her. A powerful feeling swept through her. She loved him so much. She wanted to say she was sorry for what her brother did but no words formed. Why couldn't she talk around him? She wanted to thank him for helping her.

He turned and walked towards his truck. The party that came to buy stock, stopped to talk to Moss. Apparently they knew each other. Moss looked back at her before getting in his truck and driving off. His workers got in their truck and followed. The man on the horse had disappeared.

The look in Moss's eyes as he looked at her was hard for her to interpret.

She wanted desperately to talk to him but intimidation took over. She didn't have the courage to approach him. Every time around him her mind would become blank and she wasn't able to speak.

He probably hated her for what Jas had done and she couldn't deal with knowing.

Chapter 6

The pain had gotten so bad under her ribs, it was hard to do anything. She frequently thought of Moss and noticed it made the pain worse. She didn't let her thoughts dwell on him.

She tried to get what little she had left in the house packed, but exhaustion filled her veins. Nearly everything had been sold on the property and she had money saved for when she moved to Alaska to live with Jas. Bills were still piled up, she decided after moving she would work on paying them back, over time.

She tried to drink a little water and intense nausea followed. She hadn't eaten in days, the pain in her stomach was so debilitating. Once she moved to Alaska she would see a doctor, she

promised herself. With so much pain it likely meant she should see a doctor. She didn't have time to do it now, not when she would become free!

Free of all the responsibility of running the ranch. Free of the towns' meanness. Free of loving Moss with a futile love.

Her head pounded painfully as she went outside to saddle Cinny.

The time had come!

She would have to seek him out for the first time. She would have to meet with him in person. Terrified of approaching him she had waited until the very last minute. The paper in her pocket made a crackling noise as she moved. The thought of seeing Moss face to face made her extremely apprehensive and fearful. Giving him the paper in her pocket was the last thing she needed to do before she scheduled her flight. A one-way ticket to join her brother!

Juxtapose emotions filled her. Her immense fear of his hostility and hatred mixed with love she felt towards him.

Hopefully what was on the paper would cover the damage her brother caused and make some amends for what had happened during her father's death. She felt guilty blaming Moss for what occurred seven years ago and she wanted freedom from the guilt!

Sharp pain in her stomach seemed to grow as she imagined seeing him. The whole time she sold the things on the ranch she had not seen him, again.

The sheriff never came back.

The broken windows mysteriously were fixed one morning when she went to use the truck. She wondered if Moss had done it but didn't know why he would.

She struggled to place the saddle with all the weakness and pain. Intense nausea came with the pain.

She almost fell out of the saddle once she managed to get seated. Cinny looked back to see what was wrong. She urged her horse forward.

"Go, Cinny!" She whispered.

She didn't get far when she noticed some of Moss's cows grazing in her pasture.

She led Cinny up the hillside where the fence likely went down. She examined the downed fence while remaining in the saddle. She gripped her stomach, the pain intensified seeing his buildings nestled in the valley. She clenched her teeth and urged Cinny back down towards the road. She had to go see him, she had no choice!

Maybe she should have used some of the money to see a doctor sooner. She kept putting it off while she worked, clearing up her ranch of all the farm equipment, livestock and everything in the house. Once she had started selling everything she had found it hard to stop and get herself checked.

As she neared his house she grew weaker. The water she had drunk earlier didn't want to stay down as she swallowed hard.

His house looked so much grander than she thought it would. A huge yard full of herbs and flowers growing in patches. A large barn built into a slight rolling slope, not far from the house.

She got down out of the saddle between the two buildings. A man came out of the barn and approached her.

He didn't say anything but reached for Cinny's reins.

She let him have her horse and tried to feel brave as she approached Moss's home.

She could feel herself tremble and shake on the inside. Her outer body did the same. She felt so afraid to see him, face to face. She had never deliberately sought him out before. Would she become speechless like all the other times? She tried to tell herself he was human and she didn't need to be so afraid.

She timidly knocked on his door, bracing for what he might say. The pain in her stomach sliced sharply through her. Again she wondered if she should've come on a different day, after seeing a doctor.

A much older man answered the door and sent relief through her. It wasn't Moss! He opened it and allowed her in. With weak legs she crossed the threshold.

He motioned toward the living room, which lead off the dining room she had just entered. He walked past another door to what looked like the kitchen.

Her ears rang and her head pounded hard as she walked slowly into the living room. His home gave her a warm feeling. She felt close to him by seeing the inside of his house. She still felt extremely terrified of what he would say when he saw her. She had grown so tired of seeing only his anger.

For once she would like to see him smile. She didn't know if her gift could make him smile. Maybe a confused smile.

She stared at the many expensive native artifacts that lined the large room. She wanted to know what he liked as she walked around. She didn't touch anything, fearing he wouldn't want her to. It started to darken with nightfall, she didn't turn on any of the beautiful lamps. She didn't feel worthy to touch anything of his. She sat on a cream colored couch and worried her grungy old clothes might dirty it. She considered sitting on the floor.

A grandfather clock chimed gently. She sighed and slowly relaxed on the very soft cushions. She had not been sleeping well at night because of her stomach pain and the discomfort of sleeping on the floor.

Warmth and comfort seemed to surround the room. She found her eyes closing and she began drifting off to sleep.

A loud noise at the door awoke her. She opened her eyes to a room covered in darkness until a light came on in the dining room. She froze upon hearing his voice. A powerful thrill went through her.

"Wayne, bring my supper." Moss yelled.

While Wayne brought his food the phone rang and Moss answered it. He talked about mundane things until he mentioned he had been gone for the last few days visiting his fiancée's family.

Liana's heart dropped like it was full of lead. Nausea came in powerful waves and she felt driven to quickly escape. Hearing about him getting married and the pain under her ribs became more than she could handle. She needed to escape! She couldn't face him! She should have just left the papers on his dining room table. Why didn't she think of that?

"The sheriff has been given another warrant for the Tates. Too much has been damaged and I can't keep ignoring it. He plans on putting them both in jail!"

She clenched the soft cushion under her fingers as she fought darkness that clouded her vision. Moss hated her! Her heart felt like it had been ripped from her chest cavity. She should've known better than to come!

Jas couldn't have done anything! He lived too far away and he was working to save money for the watering hole!

She could hear anger in his voice. Hilda had been very wrong about his feelings for her! What did he mean about damage? Fear filled her veins. Were they going to be blamed for something they hadn't done?

"Hey!" Whane popped his head out past the kitchen door. "Woman waiting for ya' in the living room."

Liana had nowhere to run. Terror froze her body solid and she started to shake.

Moss ended his phone call. He walked up to a lamp and turned it on. He had a friendly look on his face but when he turned around and saw her, it instantly vanished.

Her hand shook so hard she could barely pull the papers out of her pocket. Intimidation intensified through every cell in her body and her legs shook with weakness as she stood.

"Good place to hide from the sheriff, Liana!" He said. His words sounded like a knife striking her heart, what was left of it!

Like he hated her more than she could imagine. Hurt scorched through her veins. She didn't know if she would ever recover from so much pain.

She felt like she was going to explode with pain, emotional and physical!

That she might die! She managed to finally get the papers out. Weakness became overwhelming and wave after wave of nausea followed. She could barely walk and hand him the papers. He refused to take them and they fell to the floor from her violently trembling fingers.

"You're not getting a dollar of my money in any lawsuit." His harsh words were like ice that cut through her.

She couldn't speak and couldn't handle the agony any more! He didn't even look at the papers! She raced past him. The water she had drunk earlier was about to come up!

"Get back here!" He thundered behind her.

She stumbled out the door and fell painfully to her knees, on his wooden porch floor. What was in her stomach came up with force.

She weakly opened her eyes to see a large pool of red blood! A new kind of fear iced her veins. Horror flicked through her, she suddenly realized she really could die!

Something was wrong!

She doubled over, staying still, not having strength to move. There was too much pain. Panic filled her mind and she became numb with a new kind of fear.

She heard Moss move around and suddenly a loud bell pierced the night air. Each strike of the bell caused her to flinch hard. After three rings he stopped. Aware of swift footsteps around her, she looked up. One man on a phone talked to Moss.

She saw Moss's boots stand in front of her. She could die but she hadn't apologized yet! He needed to know how sorry she felt! She wanted to straighten up but it hurt too much. She had to touch him, she grabbed the smooth warm leather of his boot. He needed to know she loved him. She loved every part of him. She became afraid of dying. She wanted help from him.

Suddenly jerked up to a sitting position she gasped and cried out in pain.

Moss's eyes held a dark hard glitter that frightened her! "Those papers are the title to your land! Why? What did you take?" He snarled hoarsely, holding her upright with hard fingers. His breathing made rasping sounds.

She looked at him in confusement.

"What poison did you take, Liana? Was this to make me suffer for what happened to your father? What I've done to you!"

She shook her head, she whispered, "No, Moses and I didn't take anything!" Her eyes pleaded with him, she was telling the truth and it had become so hard to talk. She gasped again, from the pain. "I don't know . . . what is wrong!"

Her bleary vision cleared some and she could see how extremely pale his face was. Concerned for him, she reached out to touch his cheek. She saw a small smear of blood on her finger tip and quickly jerked her hand away. She didn't want to get her blood on him. He wouldn't like Tate's blood on him, she thought irrationally.

He grabbed her hand and stopped her from pulling away.

"Hydie, grab my mother's quilt off my bed! Her hand is like ice!" He ordered the woman behind him. His voice when he spoke was low and thick with emotion.

Liana had trouble focusing but she noticed a number of people standing around, having answered the ringing of the bell. She guessed it had something to do with emergencies.

He abruptly pulled her into his arms when the quilt appeared and wrapped it around her. He brought her up firmly against him and stood. She weakly wrapped her arms around him. She felt too sick to resist and hoped he wouldn't fall with her.

She pressed her face against his neck. Touching her face against his warm skin brought her comfort. She wrapped her arms around him and held him tightly.

He carried her some distance and sat down. She heard him swallow loudly and his breathing didn't lessen after a bit, even while sitting. She didn't want to stop the comfort hugging him offered but she wanted to know what was wrong. She lifted her head slightly to look and saw the intense worry in his eyes.

"I'm alright." She whispered. She didn't really know what had gone wrong with her and if she really was okay. She didn't want him suffering if he did care about her. She gave him a tighter hug, "I'm sorry Moss." She whispered weakly, her arms loosened. She felt sorry about fighting with him for too many years. Sorry for hurting him with things she had said in the past. Sorry she had made a mess on his porch. She wasn't able to say any of it.

She noticed they waited on the edge of a large alfalfa field. A part of the field was lit up with lights circling around a square concrete pad.

His eyes held a strange light that she couldn't decipher.

"Why didn't you see a doctor?" He asked emotionally. He swallowed noisily again, his eyes seemed pained. "If you needed money you could've asked me!"

"I have money from sales, way more than I thought I would get! The pain grew gradually worse over the last few months. I kept ignoring it. . . " a stab of pain hit her and she flinched hard. She nearly doubled over. She tried to get as comfortable again as she could against him. She couldn't speak. Occasionally, his fingers lightly caressed as he tried to offer her comfort.

She drifted off into her fog of pain.

The roaring of a chopper grew loud. She wanted to watch but her eyes drifted shut.

Chapter 7

The noise of a doctor being paged over the intercom woke her. She looked about the room thinking she couldn't afford to stay in a hospital! She looked at the IV hooked to her. She didn't remember exactly all that had happened after Moss put her on the medical helicopter.

She still had pain in her stomach.

She stiffened hearing Moss's voice in the hall. Then she relaxed, he wasn't the enemy anymore! Was he?

A loud knock and then the curtain moved. "Liana, can we come in?" Moss asked behind the curtain.

"Pay no attention to the man behind the.." a giggle slipped from her. She couldn't finish the phrase. She guessed her giddiness came from her pain medication.

Seeing she laid decently covered, he pushed the curtain open. Several men came and stood quietly behind him as he approached her bedside. Her heart dropped, something was definitely wrong. He looked stern and angry as he stood there. Freshly shaved and his hair combed back. He had his shirt open at the neck. Jeans and black cowboy boots. His black cowboy hat he held in his hand.

"I need to talk to you, if you're up to it." A trace of coldness laced his words. She hoped he didn't plan to go back to his old ways toward her. Disheartened, she guessed the two of them would never get along peacefully. She needed to hurry and get better so she could leave the state.

"Where's your brother?" His tone had a firm but hard edge. "We need to know right now, Liana! No more hiding!"

Defeat drained away any hope she had of them being at least friends. She felt like crying from the hurt she suddenly felt. She closed her eyes and tried to will away the tears. She felt more sensitive towards him because of being so deeply in love.

"The land you gave me is not going to appease me!" He suddenly said her land's value.

Her eyes opened and widened in surprise. The tears ran down her cheeks. She had no idea it was worth that much.

"This is my lawyer, Andrew Verge and he's looked the title over." He pointed to the man wearing a suit and tie. "The title is legal. If you thought I would take it as payment for what your brother has done, I will not agree to such terms! Tell me where he is!"

She had gone to a lawyer with titling the land to him. She already knew it had been titled correctly.

She couldn't understand why he felt angry with her. His cruelty hurt! She understood they never could get along! Physical and mental pain filled her. She intensely disliked how much she loved him! It left her vulnerable and raw. Tears burned her eyes, again. She willed them to hold up and not flow. She didn't want him to see her agony.

"Did you think it would pay for all that your brother has done the last few weeks? He's not getting away with it anymore!" He pointed to the other man with a military haircut. "This is detective, Frankson and he is going to arrest you for aiding your brother! You need to understand how serious this has become!" His voice had become hoarse.

It hurt too much. She kept her eyes closed so she didn't have to see his angry face. The massive hatred in his eyes. The emotional hurt seemed worse than her stomach pain which started firing up. All because of poisoning a stupid waterhole!

"Look at me!" He snarled, brokenly. "Where is your brother?"

She laid still for a moment, trying to think. Why would a detective arrest someone for a poisoned waterhole? Fear went down her spine. Did someone drink the water and die? Everyone in the area knew not to drink from watering holes!

No sense in asking him, she thought, since unworthy of decent treatment. A hated lowlife Tate by the great Branons, the superior ones. She didn't deserve to kiss his feet. She felt so unbelievably naive to think by giving him her birthright it would make peace between. More emotionally hurt than in her entire life, she could see she had made a huge mistake. She felt intimidated by the cold eyes of the men in the room. She laid helpless and alone in the room.

She slowly opened her eyes, meeting Moss's fiery dark eyes, his chest rising and falling rapidly. She could feel her tears trail down her cheeks. Completely defeated, she tried to speak, she wanted his phone. Words couldn't form with her numb lips. She would call her brother, it was over. No more hiding. He should've sent money already for the damages and he clearly hadn't.

"I can't hear you!" He said hoarsely. "I'm not able to read your lips!"

She used sign language, not certain she did it right. She had been studying it since she had talked to his aunt but hadn't practiced with anyone.

He pulled his phone out of his pocket and typed on it with shaking hands, clearly upset.

She took it and slowly dialed her brother's number.

The two of them were going to prison, her life was over!

The phone carried Moss's scent. She didn't want it near her so she put it on speaker and set the phone down on the bed. It rang many times and she wasn't sure her brother would answer. She closed her eyes as the tears occasionally ran down her cheeks.

"Hello!" Her brother's frustrated voice answered.

"It's me, Jas..."

"What's wrong? Why do you have his phone?"

"My phone broke while loading horses." She replied. After all the things Moss had said and threatened she avoided looking in his direction. She couldn't look at him because it made her hurt more, physically and emotionally.

The detective had leaned over and had scribbled the number down. He handed it to the other man who then left the room.

"I'm in the hospital."

"What? Are you alright?"

"I went to talk to Branon last night and threw up blood on his front porch." She had to distance herself from Moss to protect her mental health. He could crush her and he planned on hurting them both by locking them up!

"He actually took you to the hospital? I'm surprised that he didn't just leave you there to die, Liana! What were you thinking? Did you forget about dad!"

"I know! I didn't think I was that bad!"

"You sound alright. What was wrong with you?"

"I've a bleeding ulcer, a hole in my stomach."

"Ouch! Listen, I worked a double yesterday and last night so I really need sleep, sis. I really like working there, especially as a shift leader. I've got almost fifty people under me!"

"I'm proud of you, Jas!"

"It's not like working for pa. He was always smacking us around. He would beat me for not working hard enough on his rundown dump that he called, 'his ranch.'"

The man came back into the room. "Alaska." She heard him say as he whispered more to the detective.

"You always hated that place! Someone else owns the house now." She wasn't going to tell him that she had given it to Moss. "Jas, you remember when we were kids and we would toss a snowball down a steep slope. It would grow huge in size as it tumbled downhill in the snow."

"I remember." He sounded confused.

"You should have dealt with poisoning his waterhole a lot sooner. He's trying to blame us for other things that we haven't done."

"I haven't been there and I haven't done anything else! I've been here, working! I would have to charter a flight with someone if there's none scheduled and that could take at least a day or even a week!

I've got money now and I can fight him sis. My fiancée will help too. Her father owns the plant where I work. The only thing I did was poison his stupid waterhole! I can pay for the damages!" He paused. "Liana, I'm sorry but I have to work tonight. I'm also sorry for getting you into this mess. I should have sent him some money. I'm sorry, but I need sleep, can I talk to you later. I'm glad you called to let me know you're in the hospital!"

"Love you."

"Love you, bye."

She heard the phone hang up. She could taste bitter defeat on her tongue. Exhausted by emotional and physical pain she continued to keep her eyes closed. Tears had stopped flowing, the hurt had gone deep. She loved Moss too much. He hated her too much.

She heard them leaving the room and talking in the hall but couldn't discern what they said. She felt glad to hear her brother's voice. Glad to hear from someone who didn't hate her!

She could still smell Moss's scent! It irritated her. She loved even how he smelled, how he looked and everything about him! Why did it have to be him? Why did she have to fall so in love with him? Why did love have to be so powerful? She couldn't fight it or get around it. There was no way to avoid the feeling. It was gentle like a butterfly's wing and strong like a tsunami.

She didn't know what they planned on doing to her. If they were going to arrest her after she left the hospital. She was so afraid of the sheriff. She worried they might arrest Jas too and he was doing so well in Alaska! She had given them his number and it deeply saddened her. She felt like a traitor. She planned on joining him and now she didn't know what would happen!

Depression filled her. Her stomach sharply hurt again from all the stress. She opened her eyes to grab the call button and ask for more pain medicine.

She startled violently seeing Moss sitting slouched in a chair watching her, he looked defeated and hurt. Not his normal confident manner. His gaze very dark and brooding.

"Why are you still here?" She whispered. "Afraid I'll escape?"

"I'm not going to do anything to you! Nor your stupid brother!"

Her heart began to race with hope. She also realized he read her lips. "What happened? Why was the detective here?" She didn't think he would answer.

"One of my men almost died this morning."

Her eyes widened in shock. She straightened up in bed to look at him.

"A knife was used and he lost a lot of blood before anyone found him. They think the person thought Davey was me. We have similar body structures."

"They thought Jas did it?" Fear for Moss choked her. Someone out there wanted to kill him!

"They wanted to rule him out and I agreed to play along. I didn't expect you to be so hurt! I likely made your stomach problem worse too! I thought you hated me!"

"No! I gave you my land, Moss!" Her heart raced painfully. She didn't want anything to happen to him!

"It was likely why you developed an ulcer! You wanted to be free from the stress! Maybe you thought to pay for the damage Jas caused." He was saying.

She wasn't going to let him know her real reasons, that she loved him and wanted them to stop fighting.

"At the gas station, when I saw you looking so beautiful. I thought you said, 'I couldn't have everyone!' I thought you could tell I wanted to kiss you and you wanted nothing to do with me! You said the same thing after your father's funeral!"

"You looked amazing that day! I said you could have anyone! I'm deeply sorry for what I said at my father's funeral, I didn't mean it! I wish I could take it all back!" Her heart continued to race hard, she needed him to understand she wanted him happy and safe! She was too afraid to tell him that she loved him. "I care about you, Moss!"

"I care about you too, Liana?" He said emotionally. He got up and came to stand by the side of the bed. "You really think I could have anyone?"

"I really meant what I said, Moss!" She stared up at him with wide hazel eyes, breathing a little faster.

"I'm sorry about upsetting you! Can I hug you?" He asked.

"What about your fiance'?"

"I broke up with her this morning. I'm not in love with her, I'm in love with someone else!"

She stared up at him with her heart racing. He didn't say more and she felt afraid to ask who it was.

She nodded her head and signed 'yes' to his question. She felt shy being around him and how intense her feelings were for him.

He sat down on the bed and leaned over to embrace her, sliding his arms gently around her. Deep warmth traveled throughout her body under his touch. She loved him so much.

"I'm sorry!" He said thickly.

She wrapped her arms around him as well as she could with an IV attached to one. The feel of his firm muscular body under her finger tips gave her a feeling she had never experienced before.

He pressed his face against the side of her head and partially her neck. He kissed where his lips rested. The touch of his lips gave her a joyous thrill. Happiness surged through her. His firm shoulders felt good as she ran her hand over them.

A knock caused them to pull apart. His face was flushed as he pulled away. She was certain hers looked the same.

It was Hydrie. "Davey is out of surgery and has stabilized. I wanted to let you know." She said to Moss. She glanced at Liana. "I brought you some gifts."

Surprised by the woman's friendliness, she took the gift bags from her. "One of them is from Moss." She gave her a friendly smile then left.

Liana looked questioningly at Moss. "Did you go to see your fiance' this morning?" She knew she was trying to get him to say who he was in love with. She wanted to know if Hilda was right.

"I broke it off over the phone." He sighed. "Her and her family were just looking for a money train. I knew the things they would say by reading their lips.

"I'm really sorry it didn't work out, Moss. You deserve someone who cares about you and not your money."

"Another reason I broke up with her because of something she said out of earshot. I was watching her as she talked to her friend. She gave details of a boyfriend she had on the side."

"You didn't misread like you did with me?"

"No! I'm positive! You don't move your lips very much when you talk. She did and was always very expressive! I'm not okay with an open relationship. I can imagine a divorce in the future and her trying to take everything I have."

"She didn't deserve you." Liana said, feeling glad he wasn't marrying someone. She desperately wanted and needed for him to feel the same towards her and wanted to know.

She pulled an item out of the gift bag. It was a pair of colorful slippers. "I can use this here!" He reached over and helped take off the price tag.

She grabbed the second bag. She hadn't had someone give her a gift in years. She was surprised how excited she felt. She pulled out a small box. He put his warm hand on hers.

"I have to tell you something about this first. I bought it for my ex-fiancee'. Since we're not together anymore I thought maybe you could use it. If you don't want it you can pawn it or something."

She wondered what it was. The touch of his warm hand sent a pleasurable and happy feeling through her. "Okay." She whispered. The glitter of diamonds took her breath away. She pulled the bright gold necklace from the box. The design in the front of it had numerous diamonds. She had never seen something so beautiful. A bracelet and earrings lay in the box. "It is so beautiful! How much did you pay for it?" It looked expensive.

He shrugged. "Around twenty. Why do you women always ask?"

She gasped in shock. "Not a thousand?"

He gave a slight nod.

"I'm sorry I asked. But someone might steal it!"

"Go ahead and put it on, if you want to keep it. I'll be right here, I don't think anyone will take it."

A glad thrill went through her, hearing he didn't plan on leaving. Her hands shook slightly as she tried to clasp it behind her neck. Intense excitement filled her, hearing he would stay. He leaned in to help her, taking it from her fingers. His breath and his scent caused her to close her eyes. It felt so good that she grew afraid of moaning.

"Here." He said huskily. He helped put her bracelet on. "You don't hate me anymore, do you?"

"No, I don't hate you." She said quietly.

"When did you stop hating me, Liana?" He asked quietly.

"At the restaurant when I fell. You were the only person to remember my birthday."

"I was mean as a venomous snake toward you!"

"A funny snake. You had people laughing so hard they almost fell out of their chairs!"

"I'm sorry for being cruel, Liana."

"I'm sorry for hitting you." She said, grabbing his hand. "I didn't hurt you, did I?"

He gently folded his warm hands around hers. "I'm sorry for being so horrible. Could you promise me something?"

She nodded. She wanted him to be happy.

"Your house is almost empty. I take it, you have plans to move away?"

"The house is no longer mine, it's yours. I'm planning on living with Jas."

"Please, let me know before you go. Before you buy a plane ticket."

"Sure." She didn't know why it mattered to him. She didn't want to give her heart hope to think he might have plans with her. That he might still love her. She looked at the bracelet and the bright sparkle of the diamonds. Thinking of all the wornout clothes in her closet. "I don't have anything to wear with such beautiful jewelry." She felt uncomfortable sharing something so personal with him.

He released her hands and took his wallet out of his pocket. He pulled out a credit card and handed it to her.

"Moses, I couldn't! I have money from all the sales. People came from out of state to buy. I have way more money than I thought I would get for everything!"

"Take it, Liana."

She didn't move. She felt embarrassed he would think of her as a charity case. She'd been fiercely independent for years and felt uncomfortable changing.

He reached for her purse and placed it in a safe spot.

She thought he was being stubborn and she would give it back when she had a chance.

He got off her bed and she immediately missed being close to him. "Get some sleep, sweetheart. You'll be able to go home soon."

"I hardly have anything left at the house." She had sold everything. She slept on the floor for the past week. Likely why she hadn't been sleeping well along with her stomach pain. She got a good price for the old bedframe and they had taken the mattress with it. "It's your house now, Moss."

"Thank you for such a generous gift, Liana. I don't understand why you gave me title to your land and I would like to talk to you about it later."

She nodded her head in agreement.

"You're welcome to stay with me after you are sent home."

"Are you sure?" She thought of his beautiful house and tried to imagine living in such a wonderful place. "I won't be trouble for you?"

"Please, stay with me. I promise to take care of you." He said.

She half smiled. He seemed determined.

He signed for her to sleep.

She closed her eyes and tried to sleep. Her heart raced knowing he would be there when she woke. She loved him so much and was so glad they were finally getting along.

Chapter 8

He picked her up at the hospital doors and helped her into his truck. Impressed by all the items built into the dashboard of his fancy truck she mentally compared it to her old one which was lucky to even run, on a good day.

She didn't think she needed help, but in a way for her to be close to him and have his warm hands on her as he gently helped her out of his truck. She still felt uncomfortable with him bringing her into his home. She could feel the eyes of his workers watching as she walked towards the porch. She noticed new boards had been installed where she had been sick.

She walked timidly across his threshold. He led her to a hall with a number of bedrooms.

"Pick one, Liana." he said, warmly.

She looked up at him, she enjoyed seeing the warm tenderness in his gaze. He seemed overly diligent towards her and so generous. She walked toward the closest doorway. She stood waiting for him to turn on the light. She felt nervous and wished he would just tell her where to go.

"Do you want this room?" He asked.

She wasn't used to him being so nice. Was he nervous too? His eyes were so gentle and he seemed excited.

He turned on the light and went over to a couple windows and opened the blinds. Sunlight flooded in and she could see outside where there were fruit trees growing.

She immediately saw it was his room. Papers littered a large desk, with piles stacked on the floor. A computer system sat in the center of the desk. Clothes tossed about, on the bed and the chair. A couple pairs of boots sat on the floor at the foot of the bed.

"Moss, this is your room, you don't need to let me sleep here!"

"You can sleep here! Just let me pick up a few things."

Her heart raced with his generosity. She didn't know he could be so sweet and kind.

He quickly scooped up his items and indifferently tossed them into a large walk-in closet. He straightened up the bed covers and lined up the pillows. He motioned for her to sit down on the bed. Her heart raced as she slowly sat. She didn't want to offend him by refusing to use his room. "Do you need anything, Liana"

"No. Thank you so much for letting me stay here!"

He nodded and started to leave. He stopped, "you said that you don't have a phone?"

"The phone fell out of my pocket while I helped load some of my horses. It got stepped on."

He walked over to his desk and pushed some papers around. He grabbed a phone after unplugging it. He typed on it and then handed it to her. "You can have this one. Call me if you need anything, the number is under my name. I'll let you get some rest." He seemed almost nervous as he stepped away, waving a friendly wave.

She smiled and waved back as he left. She laid straight back on his bed and stared up at the ceiling. Her heart beat hard under her ribs, the room smelled like him. She closed her eyes to enjoy the pleasure of being in his home, in his room and in his bed. She would rather have him next to her but she didn't want to mess anything up between them. She would take whatever time he was willing to give her.

She didn't realize how tired she was and quickly fell asleep laying crossways on his bed.

She awoke some time later and sat up, slightly disoriented. A thrill went through her realizing where she was. She got up and walked around examining large framed pictures on the wall. Whoever had taken the pictures did amazing work. She walked in front of each one to examine it. She stood in front of his walk-in closet and turned on the light. A spread of lights lit up a huge closet. She picked up the items he had randomly tossed in. She lined his boots up next to his row of other boots and shoes.

As she bent down to arrange his shoes she noticed a large photo peeking out from behind his hanging clothes. She slid the hangers over and stood in shock staring at a large nude picture of herself taped to the wall. It had been the summer before her father had died. She didn't know how to feel about Moss invading her privacy. Should she be angry?

It had been a hot summer day and she had gone to an area of their property where water bubbled up out of the ground, a spring that ran year round. The water made a huge pool with water so deep in some areas it appeared blue. They had called it, the Blue Hole and they often swam there during the hot summer months.

She had been changing into her clothes after taking her swimsuit off. She thought she had been alone where she had hid behind bushes. He must have had a certain lens to take a picture up that close. There were smaller pictures tacked on the wall. One of her fully clothed, with Cinny and more with other horses. Her sitting on the ground at sunset. Some of her with other people. She saw one with her father and her up close. She dropped to her knees to examine it more closely. His face looked extremely pale next to her summer tanned skin. She had been smiling happily but he looked like he had been in a lot of pain, with a haggard and pinched look. She realized he had been ill for a while. Why hadn't he gone to a doctor? If he had been in so much pain? Why hadn't he told anyone? She thought of herself with her ulcer and knew she shouldn't judge him. She also couldn't blame the Branons for his death. Guessing when Moss had taken the picture and guessing her father had time to take care of himself. He could've possibly prevented his early death. If she felt anger it should've been towards her father!

She sighed and stood. There were a few more of her changing her clothes. She sighed again and pushed the hangers back. She wasn't ready to confront him about the pictures.

She was surprised at his skill with a camera. The large framed pictures in his bedroom were likely his work too, she began to realize he was a good photographer.

She sat down on the bed to think. The sun started to set and shadows filled the room. She heard movement and sensed him approaching. His boots made a soft sound on the carpet in the hall.

She smiled as he entered his room and saw her sitting on his bed. She noticed he didn't smile back and tried to remember if he had ever smiled as long as she had known him. She couldn't remember one time.

"Wayne has supper on the table at the mess hall, if you are hungry. Did you sleep?"

"Like a rock. Thank you for letting me stay here, Moss." He was such an attractive man, she thought. His presence caused tingles along her skin and fiery liquid to flow through her veins.

He nodded. He opened the door to the outside and let her go in front of him. He seemed stressed about something but she was too timid to ask.

"You're really beautiful." she heard him whisper as they walked to the building.

"You're really handsome!" She smiled up at him. He didn't smile back but lightly touched her shoulder.

She tried hard to remember the names of everyone as Moss introduced her to his crew as they sat around a large table eating.

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She was almost asleep when she noticed a glow out the window. She sat up and heard Moss race down the hall. Sleep quickly disappeared as she pulled on her jeans and raced after him.

The fire lit the sky as it brightly burned. Moss yelled something to his men before diving through the open doors.

Terror tore through Liana seeing him run into the flames. She screamed at him to stop, why would he do something so deadly? She raced after him, she needed to stop him, he could die! She didn't get far as one of his men grabbed her and kept her from following him into the burning barn!

Screams from the horses' inside caused her to flinch. Several raced out of the doors and past the men who were hoseing the flames with water. The tail of one horse burned with a visible flame.

Terrified, she watched the front doors, waiting for Moss to show up. Her breaths came in gasps. She tried to pull away from the man holding her back.

She could barely hear the sheriff's sirens over the roar of the flames as his car sped down Moss's driveway.

He looked around and zeroed in on her. He pointed to her and said something to his deputy.

He put her hands behind her and the icy metal of the cuffs sent fear bolting through her. She started to shake as she sat in his car. As they drove away she tried to see the burning barn which she quickly could no longer see.

Chapter 9

Lonan waited patiently near the back door of the barn. The man's foot path led straight into the building and he hadn't exited, yet.

He could hear a loud commotion, of men yelling at the front of the building. He remained silent, still, and waiting. The man may have gone out the front but until someone told him to move, he would remain at his watch.

He thought of his wife and his little ones. They were living in an apartment that was uninhabitable. His wife had called that morning to tell him that the sewer pipe was leaking through the ceiling and she was having a hard time with getting the landlord to fix it. She struggled to keep the children safe in the small apartment in the city.

He forced himself to think only of his job. He couldn't let himself be distracted. He had a good paying job with Branon. He would use his pay to get them into a better home and a safer place to live.

Black smoke was the only thing exiting the doors as he continued to wait.

Eventually flame reached her fingers out the door and waved them in a breeze. The flame grew larger in size as she started climbing the outside wall of the barn. Eating at the wood as it went.

Heat grew as well and Lonan had to move back more into the shadows. Movement caught his sharp eyes.

A flame lit human form stumbled out the doors. He hit the ground with a loud grunt sound. He rolled swift and furious as he attempted to put out the fire on his garments.

His rolling around on the ground brought him up near Lonan's feet.

The half burned human quickly noticed Lonan. The gleam of steel reflected the orange of what had spread across the outer surface of the building.

"Are you pulling a knife on Indian?" Lonan chuckled. He occasionally talked of himself in third person. His wife didn't like it, didn't see the humor. She was always so serious.

He couldn't see anywhere he could grab the man where he wasn't burned and flesh wasn't hanging loose. He couldn't imagine the amount of pain the man was in.

He tried to move swiftly as he tore off the shirt he wore.

The man's eyes were wide and wild. Lonan knew the second he was going to charge with the knife blade tucked along his wrist. It aimed right for his heart.

Lonan countered the move, whipping his shirt around the bloody wrist. He yanked the man forward and sharply drove his elbow into his neck with a swift move.

The man dropped the knife and tried to catch his breath. He made snarling and choking noises, barely audible over the roar of the flames that continue eating through the building, taking it to ground level.

The man tried to crawl towards Lonan and grab his knife. Lonan kicked it out of reach. Movement caught his eyes. Frank stopped and stared at the bloody mess of human on the ground.

"Ring the bell!" Lonan said loudly over the burning foundation, sparks and flaming debris flying off into the wind.

"Is he the phantom? The one who tried to kill Davey?"

Several more men approached.

"Someone needs to ring the bell!" He ordered them. He could see how the man struggled to breathe. He would ring it but he wasn't taking his eyes off the man. "Where's the boss?"

"He got himself arrested! I'll get the bell!" One of the men said as he turned and raced off.

Three loud clangs could be heard over the dying fire and across the evening air.

Chapter 10

She wiped away the tears that fell. She felt so heart wrenched when she thought of Moss believing she would have anything to do with burning down his barn! She sat in a cell with others as the hours slipped by. Emotional pain smothered her. She had gone numb from hurt. Her stomach pain had her double over on the bench.

They took her out of the holding cell and told her to leave. They didn't tell her anything upon releasing her. They seemed busy and she didn't know who to ask.

She walked home with a nearly full moon to guide her. Jas had done it everyday but she did it in the evening hours. It wasn't as safe for a woman walking alone at night.

Whenever she heard a vehicle approaching she dived for cover. Since Jas had spoken of his daily trips to town, she knew where the aggressive dog owners lived.

She grew thirsty and the pain under her ribs made it difficult to walk straight. Normally fit and a walk from town seemed easy. Her head throbbed painfully and eventually she couldn't swallow. Her mouth became so dry. She became weak and kept stumbling.

As she neared Moss's property she hesitated. Maybe she should talk to someone. Moss had entered a burning barn, she didn't know if he was ok. She thought she had seen him when the deputy's car had driven away with her. She needed to be certain of his safety.

In the distance she didn't see activity around his buildings. She slowly walked down his driveway, she felt intimidated asking about him. What if Moss had her arrested again?

She had to know! Her stomach caused such excruciating pain. She desperately needed water! She needed the medicine the hospital had sent home with her, but she had to find out first if he made it out of the burning barn!

She walked towards his house. Close to passing out from the pain she saw one of his men nearby. The man who had taken her horse the night when Moss had taken her to the hospital.

He noticed her as she approached.

"Is Moss alright?" She asked hoarsely, out of breath.

He nodded.

"Did he get hurt?"

He shook his head. He motioned he had to get back to work and walked off.

Feeling like she wasn't welcome she turned around and continued walking to her house.

She stumbled past the doorway and almost fell flat on her face.

The electric was on but the air-conditioning definitely wasn't working.

She sat at the table and took her medicine with a glass of water.

She wanted to take a look at the air-conditioning, but was too exhausted to do anything.

She didn't need to worry about it, she thought.

She wondered if she would get in trouble for trespassing. She had enough money, she could stay at a hotel.

Jas owned the property where their large barn had been built. She grabbed her things and made a couple trips to the barn, storing her things. She needed to eat but was too exhausted. She would be traveling to Alaska soon. She wasn't taking much on the flight.

She spent the night in the loft with the front and back doors open. The night breeze was pleasant and she slept well.

When Moss didn't show up the next day she assumed he no longer wanted to deal with her. Heartbroken and depressed she sat under a large tree, near the barn. Occasionally wiping at her tears. She diligently watched for him. Desperate to see him before she left.

As the day passed she agonizingly knew the time to leave had come.

It had been three days, a very pain filled weekend. He hadn't shown up and she finally purchased a one-way ticket to Alaska. He probably never wanted to see her again!

They needed a credit card for the ticket. She had never owned one. She suddenly remembered Moss's card. She didn't think it would work but when it did she guessed he had forgotten about it. She would pay him back, she mentally promised.

Then she remembered the promise she had made in the hospital. She was supposed to tell him before she left. She began crying non stop again! She couldn't remain there after everything that had happened. It was over! If he wanted her to stay he would have to tell her. She didn't have the courage to talk to him again. She grew so riddled

It was Monday afternoon and she had a few hours before her flight. She thought to check the house one more time for anything she may have missed.

Memories swarmed her as she walked slowly through each empty room of the old farmhouse. She sat down in the middle of the living room and started crying in deep anguish. Memories of her family in the empty house and her heartache of never seeing Moss again had become overwhelming.

Soon she would be on a flight to Alaska and she would never see him again. Her heart twisted in agony.

She heard a sound outside and quickly lifted her head with sudden hope. A shadow fell across the doorway and she quickly wiped away her tears. A deep sigh came from him as he approached.

She immediately noticed something amiss with his appearance. Like no life in his eyes and his mouth seemed tight. He wasn't wearing his cowboy hat and his hair looked tousled. It looked like he hadn't shaved in a few days. His clothes had stains on them. He didn't look at all like his normal self.

She stood and worriedly reached out to him.

He reached for her arm and led her outside. She felt so happy to see him that she didn't protest.

Two horses and a pack mule stood waiting.

One of the horses was Cinny.

"Cinny!" She exclaimed. She tried to pull away so she could pet her loving horse, she had worried over losing her in the fire!

He didn't release her arm. She looked up at him in confusion. "Moss?" She noticed flushed spots on his cheekbones.

"Get up on your horse. We're leaving."

His tone sounded rough and she knew for certain something was wrong. He looked and sounded like a bandit and not the Moss she knew.

"Moss, talk to me, please." A breeze tousled his hair. She reached up with her free hand and rubbed her fingertips over the unruly strands. He closed his eyes and swayed slightly. She moved up against him, his hard warm body sent a thrill through her. "Talk." She whispered while continuing to slowly play with his hair.

"I was going to tie you up and force you to go with me . . ." He said hoarsely.

"Where are we going?" She asked in a pleasant tone. She leaned into him more.

He was hers!

"You're making this hard . . . To a cabin far northeast on my property . . ."

"You just had to ask, Moss. I'll go with you."

"You don't want to be with me! You were taking off! Leaving! A one-way ticket with my credit card! You broke your promise to me, Liana!" He breathed faster as he spoke. "I know you hate me!"

"Why do you think I hate you? I'll gladly stay with you!"

"I promised to take care of you. I broke my promise too!" Tears formed in his eyes.

"Moses, what are you talking about?" He wasn't making any sense. His tears caused her emotional pain. She had to stop his hurt!

"You don't think much of me now, do you!" He pulled away, his chest heaving. "I'm not much of a man, crying!"

She tried to reach for him and he jerked away.

"I tried to stop him from taking you!" He ground out.

"Who?" She asked, bewildered. She didn't understand him at all.

"That so called sheriff . . . taking you! I told him, to bring you back!"

A cold chill went down her spine. "What did you do, Moses?" She demanded.

"I beat him into the ground!" He harshly exclaimed.

"No!" She said in shock, grabbing his forearm.

"Can and did!" He said angrily and then hissed. "I would've killed him if my men hadn't pulled me off!"

"Moses, no!" She started crying, "No!" He was going to prison! He had become completely irrational and she didn't know how to help him.

She loved him even if his mental state seemed questionable.

She quickly got a grip in her thoughts. He had likely been locked up over the weekend, waiting to post bail. She had to make him understand! He couldn't beat up people! She didn't want to visit him in prison, she wanted him with her!

She felt overjoyed to stay with him! He made her happy. She had to find a way to convince him.

Tears fell from his eyes again. "I couldn't save you and now you're leaving because you hate me again!"

"I love you all the way to my core being, Moses Branon!"

"You hate me! You said it at his funeral!"

"I didn't really hate you, even back then! I wasn't in love with you then either."

He seemed to have trouble with his thoughts.

"Did you not sleep in jail?" She asked with concern.

"No! I was too upset, Liana! I couldn't stop thinking of you! He took you from me!"

"Three days not sleeping?"

"No! What difference does it make?" He said irritably. "You're just in love with my money! That's why you're being so agreeable!"

"Moses, you're not rich enough for me to put up with what you dish out. I love you! If you want me to go somewhere with you, I will!"

He frowned at her as he tried to assimilate what she said. "You didn't even ask one of my crew if I was okay! I could've burned up in that fire! You don't care about me!"

"You should never have entered a burning building! I screamed at you to not do it! And when I walked home after being released, I did ask one of your men!"

"They released you and didn't give you a ride home! Why didn't you call a taxi? You had my card!"

"I didn't think to use it."

"You thought of it when you bought your ticket!"

"I'm sorry if I've offended you. We're together right now, Moss. Let's be happy!"

"You're not having a choice over being together. You're going with me because I'm forcing you! I'm making you stay with me!"

"I'm willing to go anywhere with you and I do love you!"

He looked at her in disbelief. "Let's go!" He took her arm and led her to her horse. She got up in the saddle, his warm and firm hands guiding her.

He swiftly mounted and led their horses east. They rode in silence for a while.

The packmule followed from a distance, stopping occasionally to nip at grass.

"How did you train your mule to follow?" He didn't answer her question. She didn't think he heard.

He turned and saw how far the mule was and whistled.

"Mary-Jane!" He snapped at the mule.

Liana laughed. "He has a girl's name?"

"He deserves it!" Moss said shortly.

"Or is he named after a drug?" She asked giggling. He didn't answer.

They traveled a while in silence.

"You talked to my aunt! You know how I feel towards you, so don't lie to me about not knowing!" His posture rigid as he spoke.

"You were marrying someone else, so no, I didn't really know. You could've fallen out of love with me." She said loudly so he could hear.

"Never!" He firmly stated.

She didn't talk more but decided to enjoy the ride. She felt happy with him.

As they traveled his posture began to relax. "You could've made an effort to find me and talk, but you didn't!"

He was still angry. She didn't know what to say to appease him. He seemed emotionally wrought.

After a short time his head began to nod.

She brought Cinny close to his horse. She reached her hand out and tried to grab his hand. He flinched awake at her touch. She wasn't concerned about him falling off, most cowboys could easily ride a horse in their sleep. She had come up with an idea on how to get him asleep and stay sleeping.

"You know I've been thinking."

He narrowed his eyes as he looked at her.

Her mouth went dry. He had to be the most attractive man on the planet. She tried to ignore how he made her feel. She guessed love caused her to see him near perfect.

"It's hot and the air-conditioning isn't working at the house. I was thinking about taking a dip at the Bluehole." She let him think about it as she looked up at the puffy white clouds passing by.

"Use your card to fix it."

"What? Doesn't it have a limit?"

"Nope."

She laughed a little. He wasn't serious, she thought. "So, I can buy a new truck with it?"

"What kind are you thinking of buying?" He asked as he turned the horses towards Bluehole.

He was willing to buy her a new vehicle?

"You'll buy one for me?"

"Yeah."

She sat in silence. "You want to know something? I always felt inferior around you. Like I just didn't measure up. When I was in your house that first night I walked around looking at all your beautiful stuff and thought I shouldn't touch any of it. That I wasn't worthy. I thought about sitting on the floor because I didn't want my shabby clothes to get your couch dirty."

He straightened up in the saddle. "What the hell, Liana!" He stared at her like she was crazy. "You know I love you! Why would you think that way!"

A powerful thrill went through her, hearing him say the words. Her happiness spread swiftly through her veins.

He stopped the horses once they came close to the old swimming hole. He walked around and stood, waiting for her to get out of the saddle.

"I don't think you know what love is, Liana. I worship everything about you! How could you not think that we're equals? I find it hard to believe you love me."

She felt a most intense feeling go through her as she looked into his serious brown eyes. "I love you, Moss." She said quietly.

"Looking into your beautiful hazel eyes I almost believe you." He whispered as he gently helped her down. "You have anxieties and are downright sensitive! I should have protected you because you're so fragile! I'm so angry at myself for what happened and what I failed to do!"

"Moss, stop blaming yourself! Would a fragile person run a ranch? I'm not fragile and I kinda take offense!"

"You have an ulcer because of how fragile you are!"

"Because, I loved you and it didn't seem like we could work out together!"

"Get your swimming done so we can head up to the cabin." He finally said.

Her plan was to get him to fall asleep. She had yet to say anything about her pictures on his wall. She hoped he would fall for her trick.

"I didn't grab a swimsuit. What should I do?" She asked innocently, maybe he liked her fragile and she could get him to do more.

"Swim with your clothes." He said with indifference.

"They'll get wet!" She said.

"Then take them off." He was trying to be patient but he wasn't with his irritable tone.

It was harder to do what she had planned. She felt shy taking off her clothes in front of him.

"Maybe I can dance a little while I take everything off." She felt her face burn with embarrassment.

He crossed his arms and looked down at her. "Are you talking about stripdancing for me?"

She nodded her head. She had never done it before.

"Go ahead. Why are you stalling?"

"I'm nervous! You're not going to laugh at me, are you?"

He gave her an angry look.

"Sit down." She said pointing to the ground.

He sat and looked up at her waiting.

"I don't want to feel like a stripper." She whispered. He watched her lips while she spoke.

"Best get used to undressing around me." He said firmly.

"Could you lay down." She saw the negative argument coming from him before he spoke.

"Here. I'll take this off and you can lay on it." She quickly unzipped her jeans and pulled them down. She feigned innocence as she looked at him. It felt foreign and strange to act fragile. Nerves had made her tense and she was moving too quickly. She needed to move slowly so he fell asleep. She felt surprised when he laid down. She tucked her folded jeans under his head and nervously patted his head.

"Take everything off, Liana." He said huskily.

"I am." She gave him a nervous smile. She stepped into the water and leaned down to splash a little. She turned to face him and slowly unbuttoned the top button of her blouse. She kicked the water a little, careful not to send any in his direction. She wanted him asleep, not wet.

He closed his eyes for a few seconds then opened them. His body slowly relaxed.

She unbuttoned another button and swayed a little.

He closed his eyes for longer then jerked awake. He started to sit up.

"I don't want to feel like a stripper, Moss." She stopped swaying and let her arms fall to her sides.

He sighed and laid back down. He muttered something under his breath.

She kicked lightly and unbuttoned another button. He closed his eyes and she froze, waiting. He jerked awake and she continued swaying and letting her blouse slide off her shoulder. He closed his eyes again and she remained still.

He had fallen asleep.

She didn't step out of the water until she heard his light snore. He had fallen deeply asleep.

How was she going to get her pants back? The love she felt for him was so intense as she stared down at him. It seemed crazy for him to believe she was fragile. It almost made her laugh.

She buttoned up her blouse and approached the horses. She petted Cinny awhile, she was so happy she hadn't burned up in the fire.

When she tried to reach for the mule's halter, he jerked out of her reach. She tried a number of times, using different tricks she knew but continued to fail.

She needed something to put under Moss's head! She needed her pants!

She could ride Cinny back to the house but being near wild animal's water supply, it wasn't safe to leave Moss asleep, alone. At least not without telling him first.

She sighed and walked past his horse and noticed a small leather pouch hanging from the saddle horn. She examined what was in the bag and found apples, along with a pocket knife.

With her heart racing in happiness, she grabbed an apple and cut it up in pieces. She fed Cinny pieces of the fruit, enjoying feeding her horse snacks. Moss's horse came up to her and she fed him some of the apple.

Mary-Jane ignored her and wandered further away. She left the bag of apples on Moss's saddle horn.

She needed to dig through the bundles on the mule's back.

She looked over Moss's pockets and saw the edge of a cell phone. She slowly and carefully pulled it out. She walked away and looked at the screen. What was his password?

She typed her name and suddenly the screen opened up. She didn't know any of the numbers but when she saw Hydrie, she pushed the dial.

"Hello," a frantic voice said on the other end.

"Hydrie?" Liana asked.

"Is Moss there? Are you alright?"

"Hydrie, everything is okay." Liana lowered her voice. "I got him to fall asleep. I need help with a couple of things."

"Yes?"

"Moss and I are going to spend the night here at the Bluehole. Do you know where that is?"

"I think Lonan does."

"Moss didn't grab any water bottles and I need it to take with my medicine. My purse has my pills and it's not in the house, but in the barn. Are you confused?"

"After dealing with Moss I'd say you're talking fine. He was completely irrational and wasn't making any sense! We couldn't reason with him! We've never seen him like that!"

"I'm thinking of putting the tent up and trying to put him in it, but I'll need help. I want him to stay asleep, if we can do this."

"I'll send Lonan and Bill. Is there anything else, Liana?"

"I think he just needs a good night's rest. So, ask them to be quiet when they get here." Liana said before she hung up.

Then she remembered she needed her pants!

Chapter 11

She dug into the few things he had on his horse and found a shirt. She stopped herself from racing to his side and quietly approached. She folded his shirt and tried to gently lift his head. She wanted to lean down and kiss him but didn't want him to wake up. She slid his shirt under and removed her pants.

She breathed a huge sigh of relief. He was still asleep. She quickly dressed and waited for his men.

They rode in silently, slowly walking their horses.

She timidly approached. She smiled and they smiled back.

In unison they both got out of their saddles.

"I'm Bill and this is Lonan." The older one said.

She smiled and nodded. She recognized Lonan from the time with the sheriff.

"Where do you want the tent?"

"It's still on the mule. I couldn't catch him."

"He doesn't like women." Said Bill.

"Seriously?" Liana said.

Bill nodded.

"Indian will get him." Lonan said under his breath.

Liana noticed he wore feathers on his hat and in his long braided black hair.

Lonan walked up to the mule and removed the packs on his back. He then removed the bit to clean it.

She heard Bill muttering 'dumb' mule' under his breath as he grabbed the tent and began assembling it.

She had them set the tent up near Moss. They used a saddle blanket to quietly pound the tent spikes in the ground.

Moss didn't even move, his breathing still even.

Her heart began to race, it was time to move him without waking him. When Bill grabbed under his arms and Lonan grabbed his feet to carry him she thought for sure he would wake. When they got to the opening of the tent they switched places and Lonan crawled into the tent. He picked up Moss under his arms and pulled him in. When Lonan stepped out of the tent she quickly stepped in to check Moss. He was moving around and she quickly laid her hand lightly on his chest. He went still and she knew he was going to stay asleep.

Sighing in relief she stepped out of the tent and approached the men.

"Did you know Lonan caught the man doing all the damage?" Bill said.

"He's in jail?" She grew happy to know Moss wasn't in grave danger anymore.

"He's in the hospital, he got burned in that barn fire." Said Bill.

"He's not doing well." Lonan said quietly. "I will check on you during the night. If you make a fire, I'll occasionally put wood on it."

"Thank you, Lonan. You too, Bill." She said.

They left and Liana checked the bags they had laid by the tent. She pulled out a water bottle and her purse. She took her medicine and drank the water. After she had a small fire going she crawled into the tent and laid down next to Moss. It wasn't long before she fell deeply asleep.

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She opened her eyes to him watching her. "Moss?" She whispered hoping he wasn't going to continue his crazy talk and behavior from before. Though darkness outside, she could see him because of the full moon and the fire she had going.

He sat up and swallowed noisily. "Are you angry at me? Do you hate me again?" He asked tensely.

"Would I be here, in your tent?"

He sighed. "I'm sorry, Liana." He signed the words as he spoke. "I love you!" He dropped his hands in his lap in a humble and hopeless way.

She signed and spoke, "I love you too."

He closed his eyes and opened them. He leaned down and his kisses were quick to become passionate.

She discovered how quickly she could lose control as a powerful force swept through her. She stiffened, trying to resist how the foreign emotions made her feel.

He immediately stopped and pulled back. His gaze confused. "You don't love me!" He said harshly, "my kisses are repulsive!"

"No, Moss!" She said, while worrying he would get angry like before. "I'm nervous . . . afraid . . ."

His eyes narrowed. He sighed and laid light tender kisses across her face. She slowly relaxed and wrapped her arms around him.

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They awoke at sunrise. They sat together holding hands and not saying much at first.

"I've already asked you to marry me when your father died. I'll ask you again. Will you, Liana?" He said quietly.

"I would be very happy to marry you, Moss." She whispered.

"I have money, I can take care of you. I want you by my side for the remainder of my life."

"I will gladly marry you and I want to be with you for the remainder of my life too, Moss."

He sat thinking and then pulled something out of his pocket. "I'm surprised you didn't find it, digging in my pockets yesterday after you got me to fall asleep by your sweet trickery. It's a specially made engagement ring of my grandmother's."

She saw small dark amber crystals next to a large diamond. She reached her hand out towards the ring, her fingers trembling slightly. "The amber crystals are beautiful, like the brown of your eyes, Moss."

His hands shook as he slid the ring down her finger. "Then you'll marry me, Liana?" His voice slightly quivered.

"Yes!" She answered with a happy smile.

"Soon?" He asked. He took her hand and guided her back into the tent.

His kisses were passionate and they laid back down.

In a distance, she heard his phone ring. It continued to ring. She fought the fog he was taking her into. "Moss, it's not stopping." She said between gasps.

"I'll turn it off!" He said hoarsely.

"No, answer it." She said.

He closed his eyes momentarily and sat up. "Yes!" He snapped impatiently into the phone.

Liana heard Hydrie talk on the other end. "There's a lawyer here wanting to talk to you, . . ."

Liana exited the tent and walked towards the horses. She grabbed Cinny's saddle and tossed it over her back. After tightening the cinch she went to grab his horse's saddle. His hands came from behind her and took it from her. She wanted to turn and kiss him but he didn't seem very happy about the call. She hoped he wasn't going to jail. She couldn't think of anything worse that could happen. She wanted desperately to be with him.

He didn't speak as he saddled his own horse. His lips tight, she guessed he was angry. She was thankful it wasn't towards her. They rode back across the field and down the gravel road towards his house where cars were parked in his driveway.

She got off her horse and stood next to him. She stood close and wrapped her arm around him. His arm came around her and he pulled her up snugly against him.

His lawyer approached and spoke. "She's with the district attorney's office. I got them to drop most of the charges. But, you have to agree to hours of community service."

"No!" Moss said.

Liana pulled away to look up at him in surprise.

"Moss, don't make this go to trial!" Andrew firmly said.

Hydrie was standing near, along with a number of his other workers. "Moss, please!"

"No! He had no right to take her!" He exclaimed, clearly he was still emotional about it.

One of his men said something.

"No! I told all of you before! I'll go to trial then!" He loudly exclaimed.

Liana sighed and then signed. She would have to intervene. Like the day before, she had to take charge. "You need to do as he says."

A stubborn look was in his eyes. "No!" He signed back. "He took you from me! You were going to leave!"

"I'm here for the rest of our lives, Moses. As long as you want me." She continued to sign except when she didn't know the words she spelled them.

He signed 'no' again.

She signed 'yes'. He looked away. She touched him, then signed more. "You can't beat up people when they're not nice to me."

"Can and will! You just came from the hospital and I was responsible for your care! I promised!"

"He was just doing his job."

"You were leaving because you hated me for what happened!"

"I never blamed you! I was leaving because Jas was expecting me. I didn't know you wanted me to stay." She could feel that he was weakening. "Promise you won't hit anyone again. I'll always be here with you, if you want me!" She added, "when you work your community hours, I'll run your ranch for you! I'll do a better job than you!" She smiled.

His lips twitched. She had yet to see him smile, he was always so solemn! She continued to smile and saluted in a lighthearted way. Suddenly he smiled while showing his teeth and a dimple on one side.

She heard a mummer in the small group. Clearly they had never seen him smile either.

"You are so gorgeous when you smile!" She exclaimed out loud. She reached for the back of his head and pulled his face down so she could kiss over where his dimple was.

He held her close and slowly nodded his head towards his lawyer. Liana breathed a sigh of relief. She happened to glance over at Hydie and the older woman signed 'thank you', several times.

Liana signed back, 'you're welcome'. She stood close to Moss as he talked to the lawyers. He kept her up against his side.

"Hurner is in the burn unit at the hospital." Andrew said, "he's not doing well. His organs are shutting down."

"He's the one who tried to kill Davey and started the fire in my barn?"

"Yes. He had been in prison serving a life sentence, just recently released."

"I lost a race horse worth a quarter mil in that fire! He had to have known. He had the fire set like a boobytrapped around it. Liana's horse was there and I went to rescue her first."

"Her horse being there probably saved your life?"

"Technically, yes."

"You shouldn't have gone into a burning building!" Liana exclaimed. She realized how close he could have lost his life. She wrapped her arms around him and tightly held him. He briefly hugged her and continued to hold her.

"The man is 79 years old!"

"He was like a phantom! He kept slipping past my men. What is his problem with me?"

"He was seeking revenge on the people who killed his only daughter."

"The only person I have ever tried to kill is the sheriff!"

"I didn't hear you say that! Her name was Janey Hurner."

"I don't even know who this Janey is!" Moss said.

"My father talked about her." Liana said.

Moss looked at her for answers.

"Sid and her were in a car accident, years ago." She said, "my father and Sid blamed each other for what happened. Owen brought the alcohol to the party and Sid drove drunk afterwards with Janey in the car."

Moss shook his head in disbelief, "I didn't know anything about all this."

Andrew said, "I have court later. I need to head out."

"Liana, can I talk to him?"

She understood he wanted to talk to his lawyer alone. She walked some distance and watched the men work on setting up the mold for the concrete floor of the new barn. She worried he might be changing his mind about marriage. A slight chill went through her and she wrapped her arms around herself. She didn't know how she would deal with him, not in her life after coming so close. She loved him too much.

"Draw up a will." Moss said, glancing at the slender figure who had his heart and every reason for being alive. "Everything goes to her if something ever happens to me. After what has happened with this Hurner fellow I need to know she is secure."

He could see his long trusted lawyer and friend wanted to argue.

"We're getting married soon, she's agreed."

"No prenuptials?"

"Nope." Moss said firmly.

"I have to admit one thing, I didn't know you knew how to smile."

"She makes me happy."

"Good luck," Andrew said and then drove off.

Moss approached and Liana looked at him for answers. He smiled his assurance.

"Now I have to kiss your gorgeous face, again." She reached for him and went to kiss his smile grooves. He changed her movement and pulled her against him. Passionate kisses took away her breath.

A service truck parked near the house. The delivery person got out and stacked boxes on the porch.

"I bought you a few things, Liana." He stopped kissing her to speak. Both of them breathing fast.

She glanced at the building pile of boxes and then at him, questioningly.

"I also had someone go to your house, while you were in the hospital and find the name of all your creditors. They've all been paid in full."

"It's too much, Moss." She whispered.

"For my soon to be wife?"

She grabbed him in a hug. Tears fell and she worried she would get his shirt wet.

"Why are you crying?" He asked roughly.

"Because I'm so happy!" She said through a sob. A giggle escaped.

"Liana, why did you give me the title to your land?"

"Because I love you." She whispered, his eyes grew tender as she spoke. "I wanted us to stop fighting and I felt guilty for blaming you for my father's death."

"When you marry me, you'll get your land back along with mine. You're not going to get another ulcer from owning it again, are you?"

"Not if I'm with you, Moses." She said softly.

A vehicle drove down Moss's driveway. The cab was full of faces and the bed of the truck had some boxes. Lonan got out of the truck. "Boss, I'm sorry but I'll not able to work today. A sewer pipe broke this morning and leaked through the ceiling. An inch or more of dirty water covers the floor in our apartment. I had to get my family out and I need to find them another apartment."

"Liana, your house is empty?" Moss asked her.

"Just a few things I was going to donate." She replied.

"Will you stay with me until we're married?" Moss asked her, taking her hand.

"Gladly!" She said with a happy smile gazing up in his warm brown eyes.

"Lonan, take a day off and get settled in your new house. I'll add, the air-conditioning isn't working, but I'll get it fixed."

Lonan's eyes grew wide. "I have a house?"

One of Moss's men motioned him to come over where the concrete forms were being set up. "Here." He pulled his keys out of his pocket and handed them to Liana. "Drive over there and show them the house."

Liana stared at the keys and then up at him. Unsettled by the idea of driving his truck and denting it. He would become angry if she messed up his truck!

"Liana?" Moss said, with worry in his tone. He stepped closer to her. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to boss you around like one of my men!"

"No, Moss," she said, quietly. "I don't want to damage your truck."

"Liana!" He sternly. "I love you and I don't care about anything I own more than I care about you! I can have Andrew title everything I own to you, just like you did!"

"It's okay. I'm sorry." She whispered and signed with her hand over her chest.

He pulled her into a hug and kissed her forehead. He released her and gently handed her the keys. He signed I love you and walked briskly towards his men.

She got into his truck and sat in front of the wheel. The thought of owning everything he owned had begun to sink in. Tension filled her and tears burned her eyes. She ran her fingers along the smooth dashboard, trying to ground herself. A shift in her thinking seemed to hurt a little. She tried to imagine sharing ownership with everything of Moss's. After spending the night with him, she loved him even more. Like a connection between them had grown so strong, she didn't believe it could be broken.

She wiped the wetness off her cheeks and put the key in the ignition. She would do what he asked and began thinking of the two sharing. She slowly and carefully drove to her old house and parked. She drew in a deep sigh as she got out of the shiny new truck. She lightly ran her hand across the exterior of the door. She smiled as she turned to face the man who had found the criminal. He weakly smiled back as his wife and children got out of the truck. Timidly they approached, stress lines on all their faces.

She smiled at them. "You're going to love this house! just like I did, growing up in it!"

Their eyes grew wide as they entered the house.

"Lonan, the keys to this house are in my purse, at the Blue Hole."

"It's alright," he said, quietly. "Is all this to be our home?" He looked into the kitchen as he and his family stood in the living room.

"That's what Moss said. Come I'll show you a secret door in the wall upstairs!" Liana said, waving them to follow her. They followed, their eyes roaming over the rooms in the old farm house.

She walked up to her empty closet and leaned in to open the secret door.

The children remained still and staring with wide eyes.

"Check it out, it's safe. Even with the door closed." Liana motioned them forward.

Lonan nodded and they scrambled to get inside.

"How much does this place cost to rent?" The lovely young woman asked then added. "I'm Mona." She reached a hand out towards Liana.

"I don't know how Moss runs his ranch and what his rules are. I'm Liana." She shook her hand.

"You are engaged to him?"

"Yes," Liana said.

Lonan cleared his throat, "boss doesn't charge for his houses, wife."

Liana smiled at the children as they came back to them. They talked so excitedly Liana could barely understand them. They started asking her questions at the same time.

They went silent when Mona held up a finger.

"We need to be sure, husband. This is a large house and is probably too expensive if we had to rent it. He may want us to share it with someone or something."

Liana didn't say anything because she didn't know what Moss planned on doing. They continued their silence as they walked through the house.

He looked like he was afraid of assuming the house might be theirs. Like he would wake from a good dream, much like herself. Mona held herself back from believing their luck had changed.

Liana led them to the air-conditioning unit that didn't work.

Screams of excitement filled the air as they came flying towards them, with toys in both hands.

Liana smiled again. They had found the boxes of old stuff she had intended to donate. The little girl wore one of her old shirts.

"Wait children, these things are not yours!" Mona said, sternly.

They approached her with downcast heads.

"Mona, I planned on donating the boxes of Jas and my old stuff." Liana said.

"This is your house? We don't take charity." Mona said, almost angry.

"It comes with the house and Lonan works here. More like a gift, if old stuff can be gifted." Liana said light-heartedly.

Tears ran from the woman's eyes. She turned away and leaned her face into her husband's chest.

Lonan wrapped an arm around her. "The filthy liquid covered our children's toys in the apartment. She's upset. Please don't be mad at her."

"Everything is going to be alright now. Let's get what you do have and take it into the house."

Moss riding up on a horse caught Liana's eye. He looked so beautiful to her. She smiled happily as he reached down to hand her his phone. His lips twitched as he got down off his horse. "It's your brother." He said with her hesitation.

"Mona wants to know how much the rent will be for the house." Liana said.

"Just pay your own utilities." He said to them. "Is that why your truck is still loaded?"

Mona said something into her husband's chest.

"Thank you, boss." Lonan said, huskily and looking like he might cry too. The children had come back with more toys and stood silent. One by one they set down the toys and hugged their parents.

"Come, we'll walk back, Liana." Moss said softly.

"Jas," she said, happily into the phone.

"Liana, Liana, what are you doing marrying a Brandon? A womanizer?" She stopped walking, a little hurt by what her brother said.

Moss stood close and she knew he heard. He took the phone from her. "She's the end of the line, brother!" He sternly said.

Jas said something as she firmly took the phone from Moss. "Jason, you knew I loved him before you left."

"I didn't expect you to marry him!"

"I didn't know he wanted to marry me until this morning."

"I don't know if I can get there in time! I want to be there! I don't know if I can get a flight out of here before you tie the knot."

"Boss?" Lonan said softly behind them.

"Jas, I'm helping the new owners move into the house."

"Oh, well call me back later, sis!"

"I will." Liana said with a promise as she followed Moss.

"She's having trouble believing the house is ours." He said, pointing to his wife. He added with worry, "I'm sorry for troubling you."

Moss glanced at Liana with a confused look.

"Her name is Mona and she thinks she has to pay rent to live here." Liana said.

"Mona?" Moss said to the young woman, who wiped away tears on her cheeks. "You can live here the entire time your husband works for me, at no cost."

She teared up again. "It's so big!" She whispered. "And wonderful!"

"It sounds like you've been having a rough time at the apartment you lived in. Those problems are over! I hope you enjoy living here!"

She nodded and smiled brokenly. "Can the children keep the stuff?"

Moss glanced at Liana with a questioning look.

"It's Jas and my old stuff. I planned on donating it and just didn't get a chance."

"It's all yours, now!" Moss said, firmly. He grabbed Liana's hand to lead them back.

She stopped him. "I need my medicine at the camp and the key to the house."

He smiled and helped her up on the horse before getting up behind her. "Did you forget to give me the key?" He mumbled near her ear. Warmth filled her with him up against her.

Epilogue

Liana held her breath in check as she gazed into the mirror. The wedding dress fit perfectly and she never dreamed of having such a beautiful dress. She had seen the decorations of flowers everywhere earlier and could smell the food from what the caterers had brought. A knock on the door startled her. She opened it slightly to peer past the door. Jas stood with a smile and her heart skipped a beat. She hadn't known her brother had made it! Her day became more perfect with his arrival. She knew her soon to be husband had made sure of Jason's arrival.

"Someone I'd like for you to meet, sis." He said, touching the young woman standing next to him. "This is Brenda!"

Liana opened her arms and hugged her. She hugged her brother longer and worried her makeup might run from her tears.

"You are so beautiful!" Brenda whispered.

"You really are beautiful, sis," Jas agreed. "Come on, I'll walk you." He added while taking her arm with one arm and the other took Brenda's.

The music started as soon as she entered the front yard that seemed overflowing with people. All the chairs were full and people stood all along the yard, nearly out into the field.

She slowly walked towards the flower filled gazebo where Moss stood. Her heart beat hard under her ribs seeing how gorgeous he looked in his black tux. Happiness overflowed through her as she thought of all he had done to make their day perfect. A huge smile swept across her face.

Moss returned her smile and she could only stare at his beauty as she slowly walked to his side. She started to tremble as she came up to stand by his side. Jas stepped back and stepped next to Moss's side.

Moss's warm hand caught hers and a look of eternal love shined down at her. His look seemed full of promises and she felt overflowing with joy. She could feel her eyes tearing up again.

He moved briefly with one hand asking, 'what?'

She used one hand to sign, 'happy.' He gently wrapped both his hands around hers and held them.

The words being read over them echoed across the early evening air. The huge crowd of people stood silent as they listened for the words, 'I do.'

A Brandon and a Yate were marrying. No one wanted to miss a single word.