

WOLF AT THE DOOR

WHEN HELL MEETS HEAVEN
BOOK SIX

ERIN O'REILLY



Wolf at the Door

When Hell Meets Heaven Series
Book Six

Erin O'Reilly



Affinity E-Book Press NZ Ltd.

When Hell Meets Heaven Series

When Hell Meets Heaven

Fatal Hesitation

Echoes of the Past

Paradox of Love

The End Game

Wolf at the Door

Reparations

Final Story (title TBA)

Back of the Book

Parker Davis is determined to get back in the good graces of the super secret covert group known as Department of Covert Operations (DOCO). She will do whatever is necessary-even if it means letting someone else be the team leader.

When the mission she is assigned to as a sniper goes wrong, Parker finds herself on the run with the mysterious team leader Remington Wolf. Parker's life is in the Wolf's hands-just as the Wolf's is in Parker's-as the two women find themselves fighting for their lives.

The End Game
© Erin O'Reilly 2010

Affinity E-Book Press NZ Ltd.
P.O. Box 71, Kingsland, TX 78643

All rights reserved.

No part of this e-Book may be reproduced in any form without the express permission of the author and publisher. Please note that piracy of copyrighted materials violate the author's rights and is Illegal.

This is a work of fiction. Names, character, places, and incidents are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously and any resemblance to actual persons living or dead, businesses, companies, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

Editor: Nancy Kaufmann

eBook Editor: WarrSpirit

Cover Design: Helen Hayes

<http://affinityebooks.com>

For one human being to love another; that is perhaps the most difficult of all our tasks, the ultimate, the last test and proof, the work for which all other work is but preparation.

Rainer Maria Rilke

Chapter One

With the driver's eyes continually looking in the rearview mirror, the red sixty-seven convertible Mustang's wiper blades were working overtime as heavy rain continued to beat against metal and the canvas top. Her hands, gripped tightly to the steering wheel, were beginning to cramp—she had been driving since six that morning and the heavy rain slowed her down considerably. She had followed Route 81 through New York, Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia before turning west toward Knoxville, Tennessee. Around seven o'clock she turned into a Days Inn located in Bristol, Tennessee, glad for the respite. For a half an hour, she sat watching to see if the DOCO operative that had been dogging her for days would show up.

The Department of Covert Operations, DOCO, was an ultra secret intelligence operation that dealt with those areas that government officials disavowed. Parker, known to be a first-class tactician and sharp shooter, joined the organization years earlier when they promised to tell her the location of her lover, Olivia Santos. The woman, arrested for killing the district attorney responsible for her brother's death, disappeared after her arrest—Parker never gave up searching for her. Once she obtained the knowledge of Olivia's whereabouts, she set on a course that ultimately led to her being shot and the designation of a rogue agent. It took her a year before she had a chance to get back to where she once stood.

Parker knew that the chip that DOCO had inserted behind her ear would allow the agent tracking her to find her easily. The headaches that plagued her since a bullet connected with her head a year earlier demanded that she stop. She opened the car door and let her long legs, clad in black jeans, slip out before she stood to her full five foot-nine inch height. Walking quickly, she entered the lobby going immediately to the tall gangly young man standing behind the counter. "Anita Brown. I have a reservation," she said in a low voice.

The man quickly clicked the mouse before he looked up and smiled at the ominous looking woman who slid cash across the counter. The man frowned. "Yes, Ms. Brown, I see you secured the room with your credit card but now you wish to pay with cash?" When he saw her nod, he busied himself with programming the key card before turning to her and grinning. "Lucky thing you called ahead and secured the room. I've turned away at least a dozen people." He handed the dark, brooding woman the room key. "Is it still raining hard out there?"

Dark eyes in an expressionless face, fixed on the man. "I'm leaving my car under the awning until I get my bags," she said before turning away and heading for the door.

"You're welcome," the man muttered, "another satisfied customer,"

*

Parker deposited a soft sided suitcase, a duffle bag, and her laptop on one of the beds in the room before going back outside to park the Mustang. Minutes later, she reentered the room, drenched from head to toe. She stripped and then held her hand to the left side of her head and bent over as pain shot through it. "Fuck," she moaned as she pounded her fist on the nearby bed. Collapsing on the bed, she held her hand over the scar where a bullet had entered her brain. She recalled the woman who shot her. "I'll see that you pay, Amelia."

She stretched out on the bed, held a cool pillow against her face, and willed the pain to go away. When she heard the room's telephone ring, she frowned. "Who the hell is that?" She attempted to ignore the shrill sound but it only made the pain intensify. Yanking the receiver off its cradle, she barked, "What."

"Nice greeting, Davis," a velvety voice said. "This is Dupree."

Parker closed her eyes. *Fuck*. She knew the answer but asked anyway—it never hurt to let the opposition think she wasn't at top of her game. "How the hell did you get this number?"

Ava Dupree let out a low chuckle. "Was your brain injury so severe that you've forgotten that we always know where you are?"

But they didn't know the name...did they? "What do you want?" Parker queried.

Again Ava laughed. "You know what I want and why I'm here. What's your room number?"

"Go to hell."

"Make this easy on yourself, Davis. You know it will take no time to find your room number and gaining entrance won't be a problem."

"Three-twenty-four," Parker calmly said before she disconnected. Sitting up, she opened her duffle bag and pulled out a prototype sniper rifle. The rifle's range of almost two miles would make her current job for DOOCO easier. Her fingers caressed the cold metal when she heard the knock on the door. She smiled, slid the rifle back into the duffle bag, got out of bed, and walked to the door.

Ava Dupree, a six foot dark beauty with indigo eyes, raked her eyes over Parker's body when she opened the door. "I see you dressed for the occasion," she quipped as she brushed past the naked woman. "I'm not impressed."

Parker felt her body react when Ava's arm skimmed her breast and that made her mouth curve slightly—it would be to her advantage not to cover her body—Dupree wanted her. "Just tell me what you want and then get out," she demanded.

After depositing the bag she was carrying on the floor, Ava fixed her eyes on Parker's engorged nipples. "You really aren't in any position to demand anything, Davis," Ava said. Although the naked body aroused her, she pushed those feelings down—it wasn't the time for pleasure. "Just taking off without me makes me think you didn't want me along."

"I don't need a nursemaid," Parker bit out angrily.

Ava had read the dossier on the woman and her proclivity for frequent sexual encounters. *Perhaps I can capitalize on that. She certainly has an enticing body.* She stepped closer to Parker and could feel raw and dangerous power radiating from her. Tracing a finger from the hollow in Parker's neck, through the valley between her breasts, and stopping at her navel, her breath caught. Looking into the dark eyes, she let out a long slow sigh. "You know we can make this mutually beneficial on so many levels."

Parker grabbed the woman's wrist and twisted hard. When she saw the grimace on Ava's face, she said, "That's never going to happen." Her upper lip curled. "What do you want?"

Ava sneered as she wrenched her wrist free. "It's my job to see that you get to the meeting on time. That means no side trips," she said in a low ominous voice. Her eyes fixed on the duffle bag. "Carrying that kind of,"—she shrugged—"luggage requires special care. Driving to Texas wouldn't be my first choice but it is the safest one." When Parker's eyes showed minimal interest, she nodded.

Snickering at Ava, Parker said, "I don't need or want your help. I can get to the meeting without you."

“Wolf isn’t going to let that happen and you know it, Davis. The only way DOCO will take you back is if you cooperate. You don’t have a choice in this. You can either cooperate or find yourself on the outside and probably marked for elimination.” Ava set her jaw and glared at Parker. “If that’s what you want, Wolf won’t have a problem arranging for a substitute shooter.” She grabbed the bag holding the rifle. “This won’t be yours either.” Pulling the rifle out, she held the cold metal. “As you’ve probably noticed there’s a part missing.” She laughed. “Did you really think they’d trust you with a complete weapon?” When she saw Parker react, she grinned. “Play nice and you’ll get the firing pin and another little goody that will blow your socks off.”

A low growl emanated from deep in Parker’s throat. She had no use for Ava and, if she could think of a way, she’d get rid of her permanently. But, the throbbing in her head was so intense that she was having a difficult time not letting her debilitating pain show. Finally, unable to hide or control the intense throbbing, she clamped her hands against her skull and bent over.

Detached, Ava watched as Parker writhed in pain before falling to the carpeted floor. *I can’t believe I got stuck with watching this loser. Maybe she was once a top agent but she clearly isn’t anymore.* Ava came prepared and pulled a small black pouch out of her bag, unzipped it, and took out a syringe along with a vial of liquid. Sucking the liquid out of the vial with the syringe, she stopped when it reached one hundred milligrams and then bent down and stabbed it in Parker’s backside. “That should ease the pain,” she said coldly. After a few minutes, the woman’s apparent agony began to recede. *How did they think she could handle this mission?* She bent down, pulled Parker to her feet, and led her to the bed. “Lie down and let the medicine work.” As she covered the naked body, she licked her lips. *Damn is she delectable.*

While Parker slept soundly, Ava searched the pockets of her wet clothes lying on the floor until she found the car keys. “If it was me I’d have a backup somewhere.” She picked up the clothes again and examined every seam. She found the key tucked inside of the waistband of the jeans. “No way am I letting her bolt on me,” she said. She fished handcuffs out of her bag and attached one to Parker’s wrist and the other one to the bed frame.

She went through the duffle and found a full size semiautomatic Beretta and a Smith and Wesson three-fifty-seven magnum along with enough ammunition to kill an army. In the suitcase, she found a stash of drugs tucked in a side pocket. “Man I’d hate to have her on my bad side. Her rep as being a wacko must be spot on.”

Ava punched in the number for the team leader and waited for an answer. When she heard Wolf’s voice she said, “Hey, it’s me. I’ve got her...In Bristol, Tennessee. I figure we’ll arrive in Austin by mid-afternoon the day after next... I gave her a shot of Demerol. Are you sure she’s going to be able to perform...I’ve got her handcuffed to the bed.” Ava heard Wolf sigh before the line went dead.

*

Two hours later, Parker opened her eyes and was relieved that the pain had subsided. She looked around the room and saw Ava Dupree’s eyes fixed on her. Briefly closing her own eyes, she said, “Thanks, that was a bad one,” before she tried to move her hand. Her eyes flew wide open. “Why the hell did you handcuff me?”

“I told Wolf that your headaches make you a liability,”—she lied—“what’s going to happen if we have everything set up and you have one?” She eyed Parker. “I’ll tell you...our people will die.”

Parker ran her tongue over her dry lips. "Then don't work with me," she said rattling her cuffed hand. "Let me out of this."

"Are you going to behave?"

Parker glared.

Ava unlocked the handcuff before she picked up the clothes that she laid out to dry and handed them to Parker. "Get dressed. We're going out to eat."

"Who made you the boss?"

"Wolf." Ava held up a file. "This says you are intelligent. Yet, for some reason, you don't seem to get it. Perhaps that bullet to your head did more damage than they thought." She looked pointedly at Parker. "You don't have a choice in this. Now, get dressed."

For a moment, Parker considered the comment. After the shooting, she spent months in a psychiatric hospital with what everyone thought was complete amnesia. After the surgery to remove the bullet and repair the damage, she was in a coma for a month and did have a brief episode of amnesia. When she realized that she did remember everything, she decided to continue to allow everyone to think she had no memories. It was to her advantage since she was able to glean valuable information. The DOCO psychiatrist spoke freely with the DOCO directors about her condition and prognosis. Silently she laughed as she remembered the woman responsible for her condition, Dr. Amelia West, who paid her a visit when she was on the psychiatric floor. *The look on her face when she recognized me was priceless. I will pay her back...that is a promise. All in good time my dear, Amelia, all in good time.* Now, she had to deal with her present situation. *I'll play Wolf's game for the time being.* "Fine, tell me what you want," she said hoping her voice sounded defeated enough.

With a skeptical look, Ava regarded the woman—she agreed too easily. "Ok. From here on in, we will always be together. We can take turns driving until we get to Austin. Once we are there, Wolf will brief you and the others."

Parker glared at the woman. "No one drives my car but me."

"Fine, have it your way but if that pain comes back you'll have to live with it—we have a deadline." Ava nodded toward the empty bed. "I'll take that one." She held up Parker's car keys. "I've got these so don't get any smart ideas of bolting."

Parker hooked her thumbs in the belt loops on her jeans and felt for the key she'd hidden there—it was gone. *Bitch.* Reluctantly, Parker said, "Ok," without much conviction. She chewed on her bottom lip before they made a grim line. "Guess I have no choice—I'm stuck with you."

"Good, let's go. I'm starving."

Parker followed Ava as a feral grin formed on her lips. *I'll let you think you're in control.*

*

The drive across Tennessee seemed endless and Parker felt the beginnings of another severe headache. For the last eight hours, her hands tightly gripped the steering wheel as her jaw locked. When they turned south and entered Arkansas, she pulled into the lot of a Courtyard Inn.

"No way are we stopping now," said Ava when the Mustang came to a halt in front of the lobby door. When Parker turned and looked at her, Ava had the answer. The pain etched deep into Parker's skin was evident. "We aren't stopping yet—get out and let me drive."

"You aren't going to drive my car," Parker said as the pain ratcheted up another notch.

Ava sneered at the woman. "Look, I told you that you'd have to work through the pain if you insisted on doing all the driving. Right now, you're not in any shape to drive and here's a

news flash—we aren't stopping yet." Taking advantage of Parker's condition making her reflexes slower, she grabbed the keys and pulled them out. "Now, get your butt out of this car and sit over here. I'm driving."

Parker closed her eyes as a bolt of searing pain went through her head. "You win. I need to get something out of my suitcase," she said wincing as she opened the car door.

"I'll give you another shot," Ava said when they met at the trunk.

Watching the key go in the trunk's keyhole, Parker felt like the world was going in slow motion. She tried to get the keys back and was strangely surprised when the other woman easily thwarted her attempt. Grabbing her head with both hands she cried out as the pain escalated beyond anything she'd ever felt. Her legs became rubber and she knew that at any moment she was going to pass out. "Help me," she whispered as she felt strong arms surround her waist.

A man from inside the hotel quickly pushed the door open. "Do you need help?" he asked with concern.

With a quick look at the well dressed tall man, Ava said, "No, she just needs her pain meds."

Unconvinced, the man scrutinized Parker. "She doesn't look so good maybe I should call nine-one-one."

"No," Ava blurted out. "I told you once she gets her meds she will be fine."

"Is that right, ma'am," the man pointedly asked Parker.

Through gritted teeth Parker said, "Yeah, I had brain surgery a while back and every so often the pain gets really bad."

The man nodded toward the door and said, "If you need help, I'm right inside," before he turned and left.

"Get in and I'll give you your shot," Ava said as she closed the trunk. "Good comeback, Parker. I'm impressed how you handled that guy."

*

When Parker opened her eyes, she closed them immediately trying to figure out where she was. *Ok, I can tell I'm in some sort of vehicle...it's my car.* Her forehead creased and her eyes flew open before she stared at Ava Dupree who was driving. She closed her eyes again as she recalled the woman giving her a shot.

The words, "How are you feeling?" filled the silence in the car. Ava took a quick look at her passenger. She looked unaffected by her latest pain episode.

"Where are we?"

"Just coming up on Mount Pleasant, Texas. I've booked us a suite at the La Quinta Inn. We should be there in about three minutes."

"Two rooms," Parker's drug voiced said. "I like my privacy."

Ava shook her head in disgust. "We are going to share a suite with two bedrooms." When Parker began to speak, she held up her hand. "Not up for discussion, Davis."

"Fine, all I want to do is sleep."

Ava nodded as she turned into the parking lot of the La Quinta Inn. "There's no way I'm letting you get away. I'll handcuff you to the bed again if I have to."

"That's a bit extreme don't you think. You've got my keys. Where do you think I'll go?"

With a small laugh that held no humor, Ava said, "DOCO one-o-one—never underestimate your opponent." She removed the keys from the ignition, pushed open the car door and disappeared inside the main lobby of the hotel.

Chapter Two

Parker, in no condition to drive, watched as the red mustang drove through the streets of the capital city of Austin, Texas. The car's air conditioner had been running full blast since they departed Mount Pleasant earlier that morning. When she spied a man standing on a corner of Sixth Street, dressed only in what looked like a thong with red high heels and a handbag she laughed. "It must really be hot out there," she quipped.

Ava looked at the man just as the red light turned to green. "Austin is an eclectic city and that's no big deal." She turned the car to the west and merged onto a four lane highway.

Parker was having trouble focusing on the rapidly passing vehicles and scenery but knew they were zooming down what appeared to be an interstate highway. No sooner had she finally got her bearings then the car turned west and suddenly they were traveling along a residential road that meandered through what appeared to be an affluent neighborhood. When the vehicle turned into a long macadam driveway, Parker asked, "Is this it?"

Ava merely nodded as she stopped at a gate and punched numbers on the number pad. Once through the gate she moved forward until she brought the vehicle to a stop in front of what looked like a mansion. "Get out," she ordered as she slid out from behind the wheel. Once they were both standing by the front door, Ava gave her traveling companion the once over. "God, you look awful. Try to brighten up some for your meeting with Wolf."

A tall, distinguished looking man with immaculately styled salt and pepper hair opened the door and looked at both women. "I see you've managed to arrive here in one piece," he said as he too gave Parker the once over. "Davis, you'll need to clean up before you meet with Wolf." He turned to Ava. "Get her things and show her to the bedroom that is the third one from the left." When he saw Parker crease her forehead, he frowned. "Do the best you can with her," he said before dismissing them with a wave.

Ensnared in the room, Parker looked around for any telltale signs of listening devices. She knew they were there, along with cleverly hidden cameras—she'd used them herself on numerous occasions. Feeling better, now that she was out of the car, she grinned. *I'll give them a show.* Not wearing underwear, she proceeded to pull off her shirt and jeans slowly, letting them drop to the floor. Standing naked in the middle of the room, she made a great show of bending over and picking up her clothes before draping them over a chair. "Ah," she cooed as her fingers fondled her nipples that were hard and full. She let out an exaggerated moan when her middle finger slid between her parted legs. Then she laughed and said, "That's all for now folks. I'm going to take a shower."

*

Later, Ava deposited Parker in a room where books filled three walls—a library. In one corner of the room, floor to ceiling windows looked out over a body of water that Parker guessed was a lake but couldn't be sure since she could clearly see homes on the other side. A highly polished mahogany desk sat to one side of the windows affording a spectacular view of a well maintained and lush garden area.

She had been waiting over fifteen minutes for the Wolf to join her and her agitation was escalating. Over the years, she had heard the name and had read the woman's profile—she was

high on the list of operatives—even higher than she was when at the top of her game. When the door opened, a woman whom she guessed was in her mid to late thirties entered the room. With interest, she sized the woman up—she was slightly taller than Parker was, had short blonde hair, green eyes, and a trim well developed body. The thing that held her attention was the woman's eyes—they were hard and cold, showing no sign of warmth or compassion—they were disconcerting yet, Parker felt drawn to them. The woman exuded so much power that Parker shivered with arousal—she hadn't felt anything that intense in a long time. She recognized the woman from the file picture. "You're the Wolf?" she challenged.

Remington Wolf did not speak for a long moment. She wondered how she would react when she was in Parker Davis's presence for the first time. *She's looks even more dangerous than her dossier indicates.* Inwardly she chuckled. *Fortunately, in her present condition, I can control her. She's certainly not in my league.* "Take a seat, Davis, and we will get this started."

The commanding tone of the woman's voice irritated Parker.

"Not until you answer my question," she growled.

"You're not in any position to demand answers, Davis." The green eyes challenged Parker until she finally took a seat.

"Fine, now what?"

"You may think that you are still the hotshot operative that legends are made of but you're not. I need a shooter for the operation I'm running and you're it. You should know that Olivia Santos was my first choice. Since you single handedly took her out of the Company's control, I had to settle for second best."

The sound of her ex-lover's name caused pulses of arousal to course through her body. She remembered the last days that they were together. Their lust for one another was so overwhelming that they stayed in bed for three days taking each other repeatedly—until the annoying Amelia West interrupted them. Even when Olivia, not caring that Amelia was there, greedily took Parker, Amelia still wouldn't believe the truth of their love. Anger mixed with excitement had Parker touching the scar, which was a result of the bullet Amelia shot at her. Dragging her thoughts back to the present, she looked coldly at the woman on the other side of the desk. "I'm not second best to anyone. If you'd like a demonstration I'm sure I can arrange something."

Remington looked at Parker wordlessly before she flipped open a file. "I've spent over a year setting this up. Our target runs one of the biggest drug cartels in the world—Carlos Castellan. He also trades in young girls and weapons. Guards are with him at all times and his public appearances are limited. I was able to infiltrate the organization a year ago..." She stopped when Parker laughed. "Does this amuse you? I assure you that it is no laughing matter."

Parker grinned. "Look at you—blonde hair, green eyes—you hardly fit the image of a drug dealer much less someone who is able to infiltrate such an organization."

"Looks can be deceiving, Davis...you should know that. I've heard stories about the bizarre disguises you used in operations."

With a slight flick of her head, Parker acknowledged the comment for what it was—the truth.

Remington steepled her fingers and tapped the index fingers together. "From all the reports I've read about you and your missions there is one idiosyncrasy you have that screams at me."

"And that is?"

“You are meticulously scrupulous in carrying out your mission.” Remington sucked in a deep breath and looked down at the report. “That is until the last one when you went rogue. Care to enlighten me as to what happened from your point of view?”

Parker shook her head. “No.”

With her elbows still resting on the table, Remington leaned forward. “Let’s get something straight. I’m in charge and you will do exactly what I ask of you or you will find yourself with another bullet in your head—it will kill you.” She leveled Parker with an intense gaze. “Do you understand that you have no say in this?”

Full of bravado, Parker smirked. “And just who is going to shoot me?”

Remington stood up so suddenly that Parker didn’t have time to react as the woman rounded the desk and jammed a gun against her temple. “Does that answer your question, Davis?”

Parker knew when to push and when to retreat. She wrapped her fingers around the barrel of the gun. “Yes.”

With green eyes focused on the fingers wrapped around the gun’s barrel, Remington pulled the trigger—click. “Don’t think for one moment that I won’t kill you.”

Parker didn’t flinch. For the first time since she learned that DOCO was giving her another chance, she completely understood what that meant. There was absolutely no doubt in her mind that with the right provocation, Remington would kill without a second thought.

A soft knock on the door had Remington saying, “Come.”

The door opened and the man who had greeted Parker at the front door entered. “There’s an urgent communiqué,” he announced.

Remington looked at Parker then at the man. “Give it to me, Peter.”

The man noiselessly crossed the distance on the plush wool carpet and handed his boss a paper. He watched as Remington read the communication and when she looked up, he spoke. “Reply?”

Remington’s slim fingers rubbed against her chin as she considered what she’d read. “No, I will deal with it personally.” Her gaze traveled to the woman sitting across from her then back to Peter. “Thank you.”

Understanding the dismissal, Peter nodded then turned and left the room. Once the door shut, Parker felt an uncomfortable silence fill the room as Remington’s gaze focused on her breasts. Parker tried not to look nonplussed but the woman’s stare was working on her libido—her nipples hardened and she visibly squirmed before crossing her legs.

Finally, Remington smiled before her gaze moved. *Her sexual proclivities are renowned and I get to see it firsthand...lucky me.* “We don’t have the luxury of time. Tonight you will accompany me to the Barraca Club where two significant members of the cartel will be meeting with buyers.”

“What kind of place is that?”

“It’s a dive where drug dealers hang out and make their deals for large shipments.”

Parker touched her chest. “Won’t they be suspicious? If I was doing...”

Remington held up her hand and cut Parker off. “That’s your last chance—I am in charge, not you. When I say jump you jump. I haven’t spent the last year setting this up to have someone on an ego trip fuck it up.” She stood up. “God, what was I thinking? I can see now that you’re not going to work out.”

“No,” Parker blurted sounding more desperate than she was. “You can count on me to do whatever you ask.” The last thing she wanted was to do was wash out of the assignment. The Wolf’s words struck a chord in her that she had buried long ago. “You’re right; I let my emotions

influence me when I was assigned to bring Santos back to the Company. I handled it badly. I won't let that happen again." She held her breath as she hoped that her groveling would pay off. There was no way she was going to let the woman dismiss her—she'd do whatever was necessary to finish the assignment. *Then I can go out on my own again.* For a moment, Amelia's face flashed before her. *Bitch.*

Remington studied the woman. Her early dossier spoke of her prowess as an operative in terms that let her know they held her in high regards. Then, she spiraled out of control. The phone rang and she picked up the receiver. "Yes." She listened. "No, Davis is going with me. I'll let you know later."

"You'll find your closet filled with clothes. I want you in tight black leather." She looked Parker up and down before her eyes rested once again on her breasts. "Wear the black leather vest with nothing underneath."

Parker asked, "What about underwear?"

"A thong or nothing...it's your choice." Remington let her lips curve slightly. "Earlier I saw that you don't normally wear any."

Unable to help herself, Parker winked at the woman. "Anything else?"

The momentary warmth that Remington allowed to show disappeared as she sat back at the desk. "There's a fully stocked kitchen. Let Armand, our chef, know what you want then he'll make it for you. You should eat then get some rest—we'll be leaving at ten sharp." She lifted her eyes. "Meet me here at nine-thirty and I'll brief you on what I expect will happen tonight."

"Wh..." Parker started to ask why not tell her now but thought the better of that line of questions. "Right, I'll see you then." When the Wolf kept her gaze on the papers in front of her, Parker knew the discussion was over. Turning, she began to open the door but stopped. "Thank you," she whispered before she opened the door and left.

Remington looked up once the door shut and for the first time relaxed. She rolled her shoulders and felt some of the tension leave her body—but not all—she doubted she'd ever relax until the mission was done. Parker Davis was the wild card in the operation and that made her nervous. She flicked on the monitor on her desk and navigated to the kitchen camera where she saw and heard Parker with the chef.

"I need her skills with the long rifle for this operation to be successful. Hopefully I can keep her in check until the mission is over."

Chapter Three

Once Remington had finished preparing for the night, she clicked on the icon for Parker's room and watched her dress. Ava's assessment that Parker was dangerous was evident the first time she met her. Watching her now, she wondered just how far she could push the woman before unleashing the feral animal that she knew lurked just below the surface. Added into the mix were the debilitating headaches that seemed to plague the woman when stressed. "Tonight will tell me if she's staying or going." When she saw Parker leave her room, Remington steeled her emotions, for even on the monitor, the aura of the woman drew her in and that wouldn't do.

Parker stood outside the door to the library. She was nervous and didn't quite comprehend why. If nothing else, she was confident that dressed in leather her body oozed sensuality and that was a plus. It was hard for men or women, for that matter, to deny the pull of the magnetism she exuded. She fisted her hand, raised it, and then knocked confidently on the door.

Schooling her features, Remington opened the door and glared at Parker. The leather vest was tight around the middle of the woman making her breasts heave above the v of the garment. "I said nine-thirty not nine-thirty-six."

With her mouth wide open, Parker looked at the Wolf. The transformation was breathtaking. No longer did she see a blonde with green eyes but a woman with black hair, dark brown eyes, and a definite darkening of her fair skin. Unable to stop the words, she said, "Wow, your transformation is remarkable. I'd never recognize you."

Remington wasn't expecting the gush of enthusiasm from Parker but managed to keep her self control. "What I look like has nothing to do with what will happen tonight." When she saw Parker take a step back as if she were intimidated, she was immediately suspicious. *No one scares her.* "Sit down and I will run the game plan by you."

As the two women walked out of the house, Parker said, "Are you sure about this?"

"Absolutely." Remington looked at Parker. "It needs to be convincing. Once they believe your role then you will be free to gather information." She opened the door of her Cayenne Turbo and slid behind the wheel. When Parker closed her door, Remington said, "Ready?"

Parker nodded before the black vehicle roared out of the driveway.

*

During the thirty minute drive to the club, Remington went over the plan once again. "Remember, I'm Stella Montevallo and you're Maria Vasquez. These people know me," she offered. "I've made significant buys from them and..." she paused, "I've executed a traitor for them so they trust me for what that's worth. I'm not under any illusion that I'm special or that they won't kill me just for the fun of it. We need to play everything precisely if we are to survive long enough to get Castellan."

"This isn't my first time around the block, Wolf. I know what I'm doing."

Remington stopped the car just as it entered a dark parking lot and narrowed her eyes. "If you fuck this up you won't have to worry about them killing you—it will be my pleasure."

Parker's voice was low with a cold edge. "There is no doubt in my mind that you would do exactly that. Know that I won't hesitate to return the favor if I deem it necessary."

Remington regarded the counter threat and inwardly smiled. *She's dangerous enough to make this night interesting.* She pressed the gas pedal and the car moved further into the parking lot. When the vehicle came to a stop outside a poorly lit building, Remington got out and Parker followed suit. "Just remember you're Maria in here," Remington said as they walked to the building.

Parker stopped moving forward. When the Wolf looked at her with a hint of irritation, she said, "I know the rules—this isn't my first dance."

Remington grabbed her arm, jerked her close, and growled, "Make sure you remember them." She kissed Parker hard before moving forward.

About a half dozen people were milling around the area of the main door to the Barraca Club. They made lewd comments along with cat calls and whistles as the two women approached them. When they stopped at the door, Maria materialized and put her hand through Stella's thick dark hair and kissed her hard.

*

Stella Montevallo slung her arm casually around Maria Vasquez's shoulders as they walked toward the entrance. A heavyset man in a black silk shirt to the right of the door said, "Hey Chiquita, you want to see what a real man can do for you?"

Stella let go of Maria. In one fluid motion, she gathered the front of the man's shirt in her hand, and snarled. "You haven't got the balls to satisfy anyone."

The man's breath, soured with tobacco and alcohol, assaulted Stella's nose as he said, "You never know till you try it," before he laughed and grabbed himself with a pumping motion.

Stella's face filled with fury as she tugged the man so his face was within inches of hers. "Wrong answer," she said before she sucker punched him. Releasing her hold on the man, he fell onto the gravel below. She kicked him in the gut before she grabbed Maria's hand and opened the door.

If it was at all possible, the interior of the club was dingier than the outside. Guiding Maria to a table, Stella kissed her before she said, "I'll get us a beer," before she walked quickly to the bar.

Maria watched her walk away and smiled—she was enjoying the assignment so far. *She's a first class kisser.* Stella's handling of the man outside made Maria understand just how dangerous she was—Maria shivered. She felt the menacing heat that exuded from Stella and that excited her. A smile wreathed her lips. *Can't wait to see what happens next.*

Placing two bottles of Dos Equis on the table, Stella sat to the right of Maria and draped her arm possessively across her shoulders. Her hand rested on Maria's left breast as her fingers idly rubbed the exposed skin. She leaned in and whispered, "You need to be more aggressive if we're going to pull this off."

Maria turned her head and kissed Stella's soft lips then ran her tongue along the bottom lip. Stella opened her mouth wide inviting Maria's tongue in. The kiss was so arousing that Maria moaned as she began sucking harder on her partner's tongue. Her hand crept under the red tank top and was pleased that the nipple was swollen and hard. When Stella pulled away, Maria groaned. "Not yet," she whispered.

Stella nuzzled Maria's ear and said, "Later. One of Castellan's men is coming our way."

Reluctantly letting go, Maria noticed a tall man with broad shoulders who looked like a body builder coming toward them. "Is that him?" she asked in a low voice. An imperceptible nod was her answer.

"Who is this ravishing woman, Stella?" Vince Alexander asked. "Is she a gift for the boss?" He sat down next to Parker and pulled her close. "Mmm, let me show you what it's like to be with a real man." The sound of a hand slamming against the table made him look up. His eyes widened when he saw Stella pointing the barrel of a Glock at him.

In a threatening voice, Stella said, "She's mine." When the man grinned, she placed the barrel between his eyes. "Back off. No one touches her but me."

Vince swallowed hard. "You won't shoot me. If you do, the boss will kill you." The gun's safety clicked.

"No he won't. Men like you are a dime a dozen. My specialties, on the other hand, are rare."

"Ok," he said holding up his hand and moving away from Maria.

"I need to make a buy," Stella said. "Tell Castellan that I want to meet with him."

"No need to involve him," Vince said as he wiped his brow. "I've got a couple kilos you can buy."

Stella leaned across Maria. "Who said anything about a couple of kilos? I'm interested in significantly more."

Vince scrapped his chair back and stood up. "I'll let you know."

Once the man disappeared into the crowd, Stella looked at Maria with hunger in her eyes. She roughly pulled Maria to her and greedily kissed her lips.

The contact she had earlier with Stella made Maria's body primed and ready to explode. She pulled away and in a thick voice said, "Let's get out of here. I want more."

Stella's answer was to rub Maria's thigh until her legs parted. When fingers moved so close to Maria's clit, the thighs clamped down on them as her hips began to gyrate.

"You're playing with fire, Wolf. The choice is yours—now or later. Either way I will have you."

Out of the corner of her eye, Stella saw Vince returning. "Looks like you will get exactly what you want," she said as she pulled her fingers free.

"Let's go," the man said before he began walking back in the direction he came.

Stella grabbed Maria's hand. "It's show time," she said as they walked quickly after Vince.

When they arrived at a closed door guarded by two very big muscle-bound men, Vince put his hand out. "You stay here," he said to Maria.

"I told you, she's with me," Stella said angrily.

"If you want to talk with the boss she stays out here," Vince said moving his bulk in front of the door and crossing his arms.

Stella pulled Maria in close and kissed her. "You stay here baby, I won't be long." When Vince opened the door, she walked in.

Maria stood by the door and listened as Vince and the two guards conversed. She was fluent in seven different languages with an understanding of three more so understanding them wasn't a problem.

"The boss is going to like this one," Vince said.

"He always enjoys the girl on girl action," one of the guards said with a laugh.

"The way they were going at it at the table gave me a hard on. Which one do you think the boss will take?" the second guard said as he adjusted himself. He pointed to the bulge in his pants. "Look what just thinking about it does."

All three laughed.

Vince glanced at Maria, who stood plastered by the door with a look of horror on her face. “Look how scared she is. Wait till she finds out what’s going to happen.” He laughed. “I bet the boss takes her.”

They all laughed again before their conversation turned to football.

Earlier, back at the house, the Wolf told Parker what to expect if she succeeded in having a meeting with Castellan. The three men’s conversation confirmed what was ahead for her. *Group sex no big deal*. Stella and she would have sex while the man watched. What she hadn’t bargained for—sex with the man—that the other men seemed to think that would happen. The thought sickened her—if that happened, it would be rape and *that* wasn’t part of the deal. As the beginnings of another headache loomed the door opened and she saw a smiling Stella.

Showtime.

*

When she entered the room, all Maria could see was the outline of a man sitting in the shadows—she assumed it was Castellan. Stella immediately put what seemed like a protective arm around her and pulled her close.

“Ah, Stella, it’s been a long time since you’ve brought such a delightful flower to me.” He came out of the shadows and gazed appreciatively at the woman Stella had wrapped in her arms. A smarmy smile formed on his lips. “We have business to discuss but first pleasure.”

“Yes, Mr. Castellan, we’d like that too,” said Stella as she began pulling at Maria’s tight leather pants and vest. “God, how I want you,” she cooed as she removed the clothes. She smiled when she discovered no under garments before she ran her hands over Maria’s naked body.

The previous kisses aroused Maria—being naked in front of the woman made her eyes darken with desire. Stella guided her to a worn couch and said, “Lay down here for me love so I can take you.”

Maria relaxed into the caresses as she lowered her body onto the couch. *Good it’s just the Wolf and me*.

Completely ignoring the man, Stella knelt down next to the couch and ravaged Maria’s mouth with kisses as her hands began exploring other parts of the woman’s body. The intensity increased when her tongue licked a turgid nipple before sucking the pebbly surface it into her mouth.

For Maria’s part, she tried to pull Stella closer so she could remove her clothes but the woman kept moving away. “I need to feel your skin on mine,” she whispered.

“Not yet, babe.” Stella licked one of Maria’s ears then the other one. “He’s watching us.”

Maria pushed Stella back then greedily began sucking, through thin fabric, a swollen nipple. When she bit it so hard that Stella let out a yelp, she heard the man say *that’s more like it*. Maria began biting the woman’s neck and soon found the action reciprocated. The more physical they got the higher passions rose.

Stella rose up. “I want you to come for me,” her husky voice said.

What happened next was a blur for Maria. The man nudged Stella away before he lifted Maria’s head and placed a line of coke under her nose. “Snort this,” he said as he pushed her nose close to the white powder. Her eyes frantically sought out Stella’s only to find what looked like indifference.

“Snort, I said,” roared the man as he squeezed the back of her neck.

The action made the pain she often felt in her head increase—her nose sucked in the drug burning the inside of her nose. She felt the effects almost immediately and was helpless when the man mounted her and his hips began to rock.

Repeatedly the man took her. When he was done with her, he stood up, grabbed Stella, and laughed. “Just like old times isn’t it.” He laughed again. “She was an excellent fuck. Now, on to business.”

In her drugged haze, Maria saw Stella standing stock still. Her cold, dark eyes watched as the man pulled on his pants before he headed to the door.

Opening the door, the man ordered, “Vince, get your ass in here.” Nodding at Maria lying nude on the couch he said, “She’s one fine piece of ass,” Castellán said. “Go ahead; show her what you’ve got.”

Castellán looked at Stella. “You don’t mind sharing do you?” He laughed. “We can talk business while Vince gets off.” He looked at his right hand man with his pants around his ankles crawling on top of the woman. With a satisfied look, he turned to Stella. “How many kilos do you want?” he asked as he sat at his desk.

When Maria cried out, *NO*, Wolf’s face remained stoic although fingers that were out of Castellán’s sight were clenched into a fist. Sitting down in front of the man, Stella gave him a cool composed look. “I hear you have a new shipment arriving soon. I’ll take as much as you have. My sources are screaming for the high quality stuff and I know you can deliver.”

Castellán looked at her skeptically. “You can come up with that kind of money?”

With a slight nod, Stella looked at the man intently. In the background, she heard the man named Vince grunt as he continued taking Maria. His last and loudest grunt said he was done.

“Hey, boss, want me to invite the other two in for a poke at this fine pussy?”

The man looked at Stella who sat with a blank expression when Vince asked the question. Castellán continued to monitor Stella’s reaction as he said, “Why not? You don’t mind do you?” When he saw the woman shrug with no discernable reaction on her face he said, “No don’t. Leave us alone.”

Without missing a beat, Stella said, “I am more than prepared to take all the cocaine you have available. Like I said, my people are eager for primo coke.” She heard Maria moan. “How big is the shipment?”

Carlos Castellán pushed back from the desk. “I have many interested buyers who will be disappointed if I sell it all to one party.”

“How big is the lot?”

The man seemed to study Stella for several minutes. “Two hundred kilos.” The Wolf did not blink. “Can your organization handle that much?”

“Easily.” Stella picked up a pen and wrote down a figure on a piece of paper then passed it to Castellán.

Castellán nodded and said, “Come back in three days.” He leered at the naked woman on the couch. “Be sure and bring your friend.”

Maria didn’t know how long she’d been lying in the men’s semen and the effects of the cocaine made her not care. When she felt gentle hands touch her body, she opened her eyes and saw Stella.

“Come on, babe. Sit up and let’s get you dressed.”

Everything was in slow motion for Maria as the woman dressed her. “Thank you,” she whispered in a weak voice. A strong arm surround her waist helped her to stand. Had it not been for the drugs, she would have screamed out in pain.

Stella began to move Maria away from the couch and looked back to make sure she hadn't left anything. A bloody pool congealed where Maria's butt had been. "Let's get you out of here," she said as she guided them to the door. It was noisy in the bar area as they moved slowly toward the door.

"Hey baby, you want a good time?" a drunken man who reeked of stale smoke asked.

With her knuckles bent at the first section, Stella cold cocked the man along with another one who tried to stop her. Everyone around began to roar and call out to her. Pushing two more men out of her way she finally got to the door and kicked it open. The night air was hot and sticky and she found it hard hanging on to the slick leather. Somehow, Remington managed to get to her vehicle and deposit Parker Davis in the front seat. Sliding in behind the wheel, she looked at Parker who had opened her eyes.

"I liked kissing you," Parker said before she felt her world go black.

Chapter Four

Stretching before opening her eyes, Parker felt the effects from the night before once the cocaine wore off. When she moved her legs, she felt searing pain in her vaginal area. She grimaced as she recalled the two men repeatedly violating her the night before. She was no stranger to men in her bed—the success of her DOCO assignments often relied on men who demanded sex as part of the deal. This time it was different—it was rape. She knew going in that she would have to have sex with the head of the drug cartel and the conversations she heard from the guards verified what would happen. She recalled the look in Remington's eyes—cold and uncaring. Suddenly she grabbed her head and cried out as a bolt of pain slashed through her brain.

*

Remington turned her attention to a monitor that flashed on and saw Parker thrashing in her bed with her hands locked on either side of her head. Picking up the phone, she punched in a number. When the other end answered she said, "Come in here."

A few minutes later, Ava Dupree entered the room and her eyes focused on the monitor. "What's going on with her?"

With a feral grin, Remington said, "She's feeling the effects of last night. I still need her for the kill. Give her ten minutes then give her a shot of Demerol."

Ava gave her boss a quizzical look. "I thought the sex thing was over with Castellan a long time ago."

Remington laughed low in her throat. "This one was special." Her eyes turned to Parker who was still writhing in pain. "Let her suffer a little longer...she'll be more compliant then."

Ava left the room and headed for the medical suite located on the upper floor. Pulling open a metal drawer, she took out a syringe then grabbed a vial. Once she'd filled it, she monitored Parker for twenty minutes then proceeded to her room.

*

Parker looked up with blurry vision when she heard the door open. "What the hell do you want?" she screamed.

Ava walked directly to the bed and gazed at Parker. "I've got something for the pain." She put her palm on the woman's forehead and instantly Parker slapped it away.

"Get your fuckin' hands off of me."

"I'll give you a shot of Demerol...roll over." When Parker failed to comply, she frowned. "I said, roll over!"

"No," growled Parker. "I want to see the Wolf."

Ava shook her head. "You're not in any position to demand anything. Wolf will see you only when she wants to."

Parker grabbed Ava's wrist, twisted it hard and snarled, "One more twist and it'll break." Even when the woman no longer struggled, Parker didn't let up but slowly began to twist it more. In a low angry voice she said, "I want to see the Wolf and I want to see her now."

A voice echoed throughout the room. "Let go of her, Davis."

"So you're watching me, Wolf. If you don't want one less worker bee I'd suggest you..."

Taking advantage of the distraction, Ava pulled her arm away.

"Bitch," Parker screamed.

"What's wrong with you? I was trying to help you shithead!"

Parker rapidly got out of bed and started after Ava.

This time, a commanding voice coming from the door yelled, "Stop." Remington Wolf was standing in the doorway.

"Dupree, leave us," Remington ordered. Her eyes pierced Parker with such intensity that she had to avert her eyes. "Sit down, Davis."

"The hell I will," Parker countered. She tore off her t-shirt and pointed to her breasts. "Look what you stood by and let happen."

Remington walked over to the angry woman and pushed her hard. "I said, *sit down*." When she had Parker's attention, she leaned into her. "How does it feel to be violated, Davis?"

With her eyebrows raised, Parker glared at the woman. "How did it feel to watch it happen, Wolf? Did it get you off?" She laughed. "I bet you came all over yourself." Parker gave a nonchalant shrug before she grinned.

"You are a piece of work. God, what an ego you have."

"You should have told me that I'd be drugged and raped," Parker screamed.

Remington leveled Parker with a cold, piercing stare. "You got exactly what you deserved."

Parker sprung up to her feet only to have her face slapped before the Wolf pushed her back down. Remington could see that the anger that Parker felt grow into rage as she traded angry looks with the woman. Parker's jaw set as she ground her molars then she said, "You humiliated me and I'll make sure you pay for doing that."

Remington let out a humorless laugh. "No you won't."

"Don't underestimate what I am capable of, Wolf."

"How did it feel to have Castellan force you to snort the cocaine then forcibly take you before he handed you off to his lackey?" Her icy gaze captured Parker's eyes. "Drugs and sex are your specialty aren't they, Davis? You like to kidnap people then drug them so you can have sex with them, don't you." She rested her hands on the chair's arms and leaned in so she was a hair's breath away from Parker's face. "Isn't that what you did to Olivia Santos?"

Parker tried to pull back but had nowhere to go. "No, she was with me because she loves me and wants me. It's that West woman who caused that to happen."

"Unbelievable." Remington recalled the woman who saved her life on her first mission. Although Santos was in charge, she instilled a sense of safety in all her operatives. They all knew she had their backs and would sacrifice a mission to keep them safe. Olivia Santos had done exactly that and now, she and Olivia had a strong friendship. When she visited Olivia after her rescue, she told Remington about what Parker did to her. Remington looked at Parker and noticed her obviously excruciating pain—she felt no pity for the woman. "You kidnapped her, drugged her, and made her your love slave," Remington said as she fought to keep her emotions under control.

"You know nothing," Parker fired back. "You know nothing about the love O and I share." She grabbed her head then glared at the Wolf. "What would a cold hearted bitch like you know about love?"

Remington stood up. “There’s a briefing at fourteen hundred. Since you didn’t want Dupree’s help there won’t be any more drugs for your pain.” With one more sneer in Parker’s direction, Remington shook her head and turned away.

“You can’t do this to me,” Parker screamed. “You need me.”

With blazing speed, Remington turned and faced Parker once again. “That’s where you’re wrong, Davis. I don’t need you.” Remington left a seemingly startled Parker Davis behind as she exited the room.

*

Although the pain in her head was reaching higher, Parker remained seated as her eyes scanned the room again for any sign of cameras. Just as her search the day before she saw none. Inwardly she laughed. *I’ve used the things I know how hard they are to detect.* Keeping her face neutral, she stood up, went into the walk-in closet, and closed the door. With the light out she rooted in her suitcase for the pill bottle she had hidden in the lining. Once she opened the bottle, she shook three out into her hand before popping the white pills into her mouth. They wouldn’t work as quickly as a shot of Demerol but she knew that within thirty minutes she would begin to feel relief.

She dressed quickly in worn jeans and a black t-shirt, and then went to the bathroom and looked at her face in the mirror. Dull eyes reflected clear signs of darkening under her eyes and lips still swollen from what the two men did to her the night before. She turned, felt the sharp burning pain between her legs, and forced herself not to react. *I will not let them see my weakness.*

Leaving the room, she made her way to the main entrance and noticed the silence around her. *Am I here alone? Surely not.* She checked the kitchen but did not find Armand or any sign that anyone had recently been in the kitchen. Rapidly walked toward the room where she had met with the Wolf and grabbed the doorknob—locked. Emboldened by the feelings of euphoria the Vicodin gave her, she hurried to the door she knew would lead to the garage and her Mustang—locked. Standing in the foyer she shouted, “What the fuck is going on here? Where is everyone?” It was almost noon and she didn’t understand why no one appeared yet she knew someone was watching her. “I know all about DOCO and the ways they monitor people. Show yourself.”

When she still heard nothing she waved her hand and said, “Fine,” before she opened the front door and hurried out. Parker made her way across the lush green grass to a dock jutting out into the water. She found several benches and chairs lined along a wooden deck. To one side was a wet bar and on the other side a covered area where two canoes rested above the water. *At least here, they might not see or hear me.* She laughed. “Yeah right.” She sat in the chair that was closest to the water with her back to the house. She reached in her pocket, took out a small device that looked like a Blackberry, and pressed several keys effectively blocking any video or voice signals. *I’ll do this inside from now on.* She thought better of that idea—the Wolf and her team would be on her if she did.

The excruciating pain in her head was all but gone but the Wolf’s words were still relentlessly circling her mind. Parker blew out a cleansing breath as she willed the thoughts to leave—they did not. *That’s where you’re wrong, Davis. I don’t need you,* she heard. “Fuck how did this go so wrong? Has she already got a replacement for me?” It was then she remembered the Wolf saying, *you kidnapped her, drugged her, and made her your love slave.* “How the hell

does she know about Olivia? I know everything about O...don't I? I bet they had sex—a onetime thing.”

Parker felt her spine stiffen while her eyes widened. “Last night was punishment for what she thinks I did to O. She’s wrong...it’s what O wanted.” In the clarity that being pain free brought, Parker knew the truth—Olivia did not go willingly. During the ten months she spent in the psych ward feigning amnesia, she had a lot of alone time. She came to the recognition that what she did to Olivia was unconscionable. After what happened the night before she knew that what she did to Olivia was no better than the men that raped her. With that realization, tears began rolling down her cheeks in torrents dropping soundlessly onto her t-shirt. “It was my name she called out as she reached orgasm...that has to mean something.” *It was all an illusion*—the tears continued to flow.

In the ensuing minutes, Parker got up, stood at the end of the dock, and looked at the water’s murky depths. As her tears continued to fall, she knew she had hit bottom. “If I went into the water and floated away would anyone care?” The answer—a resounding NO. She thought once again about Olivia and the realization of the cruelty she inflicted on someone she professed to love. “I’ve become a monster that no one loves or wants to be around.” Her eyes focused on the water that seemed to beckon her. Just as she was contemplating falling into the water, she heard her name.

“Davis, the briefing is starting.”

Parker turned around and frowned at the man, Peter McCrea. “It’s two already?” she asked.

Saying nothing more, the man turned around and headed for the front door.

With one last longing look at the water, Parker hurried after the man.

Chapter Five

Parker caught up to McCrea just as he entered what appeared to be a conference room. She saw a round highly polished table made out of cherry. Six of the eight cherry chairs with high backs and leather seats had people sitting in them. She recognized Ava Dupree and Peter, the man she followed—the rest, all who looked much too young to be DOCO operatives, she didn't know. Remington Wolf, sitting in the chair toward the back of the room glared at her as she took a seat.

"Now that we're all here," she said looking directly at Parker, "we can begin." She nodded in the direction of one of the young operatives and he stood and began handing out file folders to everyone.

Looking around the table at the folders the other operatives got, Parker looked surprised. Her folder had two pages while the others had thick folders. Her eyes went immediately to the Wolf and found the cold green eyes fixed on her. She gulped at the hatred she saw there.

All eyes turned to Wolf—her persona exuded confidence and undeniable power.

"I've received word that the buy will take place in three hours. This move by Castellan isn't unexpected since in the past the buys I made came shortly after my meeting with the man. It would have been to our advantage to conduct our business in the dark of night." She raised her eyebrows. "But, we don't have that luxury. I have revised the plan to accommodate this new twist. You will find the details in your folders." She paused for a moment while each person opened the folders. "We have run through this scenario enough that this minor inconvenience won't hinder the operation. Our informants were correct as to the meeting site so that too is in our favor. I fully expect the mission to go off just as we planned."

"What plan?" Parker asked.

"McCrea will be with me as we make the buy. Edwards, will be my driver. Javier, Adder, and Covington you know your position and what to do if something goes wrong. Davis, you're with Dupree who is in charge. She's also the back-up shooter. When you get to the site you will receive the missing components to your weapon."

As Parker rode with Dupree to where they would set up their weapons, she was having a hard time containing her emotions. She was now someone who took orders instead of giving them. Once the Wolf had stopped giving the briefing, she was about to open her mouth and object but the Wolf's words sounded in her head. *I don't need you*. The briefing gave her the proof she needed. Although everyone else at the briefing knew the details of an elaborate plan to assassinate Carlos Castellan, a major cog in drug trafficking, she was in the dark. All she knew is that she had a prototype long range rifle with a key component missing. It wouldn't be until she was in place that she would receive the part. Other than that, she had no clue about the operation. *I don't need you* began bellowing in her brain and she felt the onslaught of her constant pain escalate. *No one needs me*. All bravado slowly ebbed from her being. *I don't need you*.

*

Parker and Ava Dupree stood in a room of a five story building that had a direct view to the warehouse where the buy was to occur. "This is all wrong. How do you expect me to make a

shot that you say is about a mile away without knowing the wind speeds, elevation, and exact distance? The variables are so numerous I can't even begin to decipher them all in the short amount of time the Wolf's given me. On top of that, if the bullet is to penetrate the wall of the building then I'll need to account for that fact. It doesn't seem to me that anyone has thought this through to its conclusion. "

Ava shook her head and pulled out a small item that looked like some sort of circuit board and didn't look like anything Parker had seen for her long range rifle. "This attaches to the scope," she said pointing to the rifle Parker was setting up. "It will answer all your questions."

Once Parker affixed the missing part of her rifle and inserted the firing pin, she measured and made a hole in three different areas of the wooden floor before settling in the spiked feet that held the rifle in place. Lying on her stomach, programmed in the coordinates of the building then looked through the rifle's scope. To her amazement, she could see through the building's exterior wall. As she began to adjust the knobs for the trajectory, she furrowed her brow when the rifle automatically began making all the necessary adjustments for wind and elevation. The optics were so amazing that she could see the small print on a crate in the building—her trigger finger twitched.

They had earpieces and mics, which relieved some of Parker's annoyance at not knowing completely about the mission. She heard the chatter between the other members until everything went quiet when the Wolf spoke.

"It's a go," the cold impersonal voice said.

Dupree looked through a long range telescope. "They're in there now. Can you see them, Davis?"

Parker moved the rifle and watched through the scope until she had clear vision of the Wolf with McCrea standing opposite Castellán and Vince, the men who raped her. She let out an audible growl. "Yes, I see them all," she said in a low dangerous voice. She moved the rifle slightly and saw Castellán's head in the crosshairs as the rifle set automatically.

"Do you remember the command to take your shot?"

Glaring at the woman, Parker said, "I'm not an idiot." She concentrated her attention on the two men who raped her the night before. *It's going to be my pleasure to kill you both.* When she heard, give him the money, she squeezed the trigger and then moved the rifle fractionally and squeezed again. Through the scope, she watched as her first bullet penetrated Castellán's head before it exploded followed by the second finding its mark in Vince's crotch. Then she saw the Wolf slump and followed McCrea as he picked her up and ran for their vehicle. All hell seemed to break loose as the men that accompanied Castellán fell to the concrete floor.

"What the fuck just happened," Dupree screamed as she and Parker quickly disassembled their equipment.

"Looked like the Wolf got shot," Parker said as they ran to the service elevator.

Once the elevator started its downward motion, Ava said, "Your orders were to only kill Castellán...why two shots?"

Parker shrugged when she saw the woman glaring at her.

"I told Wolf it was a mistake to bring you on board. What the hell did you think you were doing? Fuck. Who else did you kill?"

"His number two...the man raped me," Parker whispered.

Ava smacked the back of Parker's head. "That doesn't mean you don't have to follow orders. You've done worse. Shit happens, Davis, especially in this job. Get over it."

Their headsets began to crackle. "The Wolf is down. We are under attack."

“Location?” Ava asked in a calm voice.

“The west side of the warehouse.”

“How many?”

“It’s just me and Edwards.”

“Team one do you read me?”

*

The elevator finally stopped and Parker pulled the rope that let the wooden doors part. Picking up their bags, they ran full out to their van.

“Team one,” Ava said again. “Shit!” She jammed the keys into the ignition and within seconds, they were roaring down the street toward their entrenched colleagues. Parker took the rifle out, reassembled it, and then slid a Glock into a side pocket of her pants. A few minutes later, the van skidded to a stop next to the dark Town Car that belonged to the Wolf.

Parker scanned the area and saw Edwards crouched behind the trunk of the vehicle firing volleys of bullets toward the other side of the building. In the middle were the bodies of Castellan and Vince along with the money and the cocaine. When she looked to the front of the Town Car, she saw the bodies of the three other operatives lying motionless on the concrete. She turned to Ava and said, “Check on the Wolf,” as she approached Edwards—the left arm of his shirt was full of blood.

“There are four of them,” Edwards said. “I saw one of them leave right after the bullets started flying. Until their backups come, there’s one to the left, one in the middle and two on the right.”

Setting up her rifle, Parker set the scope on the two that were in front of her. She rapidly fired two bullets and saw both individuals slumping forward.

Ava scrambled toward Parker. “I’ve done what I can for Wolf. She’s bleeding heavily and needs immediate medical attention.”

Parker nodded. “Make your way to the front of the car and see if you can take out the sniper up there on the scaffolding.” Once she saw Ava in position, she focused on the sniper in the middle and squeezed the trigger—the body fell. Suddenly, a rapid volley of bullets pummeled her position. Looking toward Ava, she saw the woman lying in a pool of blood. With a sneer, Parker found the last sniper and let loose with her own stream of bullets—silence—then a body plummeted to the concrete.

Edwards said, “I’ve called clean-up. Get Wolf out of here and to somewhere safe. I saw one of Castellan’s men leave right after he was shot so they are sure to be after her.” He handed Parker a small square device. “You can contact me with this.”

“Will you be ok?” Parker asked.

“Yeah, it looks like they’re all dead.”

Standing up and taking out her Glock, Parker said, “I’ll make sure.” She sprinted across the warehouse, stopped at Castellan and Vince’s bodies. Castellan was dead but the other man was staring up at her as he tried to speak—her Glock was her voice as she shot him in the head. After making sure the others were dead, Parker went back to the Town Car and opened the door. “I’ve got to get you out of here,” she said to the Wolf.

“Where are the others?” Wolf’s ragged voice asked.

“They’re all dead but Edwards. He’s contacted clean-up and told me to get you to a safe house.” She examined the gunshot wound on the upper left quadrant of the Wolf’s back. She

could see where someone, maybe Ava, had used Quick Clot on the wound—it wasn't bleeding heavily and she took that as a plus. Putting her hand under the Wolf's shoulders, she asked, "Can you walk?"

Swallowing hard, Wolf nodded and with Parker's help got out of the vehicle. Several minutes later, she was lying in the back of the van on a soft pallet before her eyes closed.

Confident that the Wolf was secure, Parker set a small square device on the dashboard of the van and pressed a button—a green light came on. For now, she'd jammed any signals the van might be sending out—DOCO had the penchant for bugging all their vehicles. Shifting the gear into drive, she pressed the gas pedal and quickly left the warehouse for her safe house.

Chapter Six

The van Parker was driving westward, turned off the highway, and stopped. She jumped out and unlocked the padlock on the gate then punched in several numbers on a number pad discretely hidden in the fencing. Once she drove the van to the other side, she returned and pressed the numbers again. The vehicle bumped over ruts and grooves as a cloud of dust followed closely behind it for a mile before the van came to a stop. An old adobe building looking disheveled and neglected stood among a thick stand of cactus, yucca, sage, and Johnson grass.

Parker turned the key and the engine noise no longer competed with the silence of its surroundings. Once she opened the door, oppressing heat assaulted her—she restarted the engine—the heat wouldn't be good for the Wolf. She then walked quickly to the oak front door of the home, unlocked it and pushed the heavy door open that let out a loud groan. The cool of the interior enveloped her as she entered closing the door behind her and stood silently as her eyes and ears searched for signs that anything was amiss—there wasn't. Wasting no time, she went to the bedroom at the back of the home. Weeks earlier, she had set up the room to use as a makeshift hospital room and, if needed, as a surgery suite. Satisfied that everything was in order, Parker made her way to the van and the injured Wolf.

*

Remington Wolf opened her eyes, scanned the interior of the van, and then frowned. Trying to get up she felt pain shoot through her upper left chest and back with such force that she immediately returned to the prone position. Her eyes tracked to the van's sliding side door when she heard it sliding open and furrowed her brow when she saw Parker Davis. Gulping back the pain, she cleared her throat and in the strongest voice she could muster, she said, "Where the hell am I?"

Parker leaned into the van. "At a safe house. We need to get you inside and take a look at your gunshot wound." Her eyes locked on the Wolf's eyes. "Do you think you can walk?"

Remington weighed her options—she needed help but Davis was a loose cannon. *Can I trust her or will I end up like Olivia?* She recalled her friend telling her about Parker Davis abducting her and drugging her. She moved slightly and winced at the pain she felt. "Yeah, I can walk." Struggling to sit up, she vowed not to let Davis see her pain. Ignoring the proffered hand, she scooted to the edge of the van, called on all her strength and willpower, and stood up.

Grabbing the injured woman by the waist, Parker led her into the house and the waiting bedroom. She gently led the Wolf to the bed and said, "Lay down on your side. I need to secure the van then I'll be back and take care of that wound."

Wolf nodded and lowered her body onto the bed. She knew that taking care of her injuries wasn't a priority. Making sure that no one would find them followed by contacting DOCO were the main concerns. She let her eyes travel around the room. In one corner sat a metal table that looked to her like something that she'd seen in the operating room back at the house in Austin. She also saw a monitor for an IV and a pile that looked like disposable scrubs. "Is a doctor coming," she slurred before her eyes closed.

*

Parker moved the next to a Hummer to a three sided adobe building and then pulled down a large piece of canvas over the opened end. After she'd seen to the Wolf's injury, she'd come back and see if anything in the van was usable.

Standing in the area between the building and the house, she surveyed her surroundings. She could see scrub and cactus for miles but no other house or human being. Parker wasn't foolish enough to think that just because it looked desolate meant she and the Wolf were alone. The words of one of the snipers in the warehouse had her squinting in all directions. *We know who you are Stella. You can't hide from us Wolf.* Edwards said one of Castellan's men got away which meant that the cartel was aware of what happened. "That means they might be at her house." Parker pursed her lips. "It also could mean there is a mole at DOCO." Satisfied that no one seemed to be in the area, she went toward the house. Inside she'd set up a defense shield after she checked on the Wolf.

Standing in the threshold, Parker saw that the Wolf seemed to be sleeping. She turned away, took several steps, and opened a door to a small closet. Inside, she looked at several blank monitors. Flipping several switches, the monitors came to life. One streamed video from a small camera at the gate by the road and another captured the images that slow moving camouflaged cameras on the roof that kept an eye on the area and the sky near the house. She pressed one more button and lights began to flicker reds and greens indicating the successful jamming of signals that might concentrate on the house and the surrounding area. Taking a deep breath, she blew it out slowly. "Now, on to the Wolf."

*

With great care, Parker peeled off the Wolf's clothes covering each part as it was exposed. She always took the opportunity to admire a woman's body but for some unknown reason she had no reaction. "When did I stop checking out naked women's bodies?" She considered that it was probably because the night they spent at Barraca Club and the humiliation she felt when the Wolf let the two men rape her. *She isn't worth my time.*

DOCO made sure that each of its operatives had extensive knowledge in what to do in the field when they were injured. Parker would need all that knowledge if she were going to save the Wolf. As she began examining the wound, she thought back to less than twenty-four hours ago and the cold uncaring look on the Wolf's face. "It would be so easy to let you die," she whispered as she moved to the opposite side of the bed where a tray with Ringer's and an IV setup. For a moment, she stood with the needle for the IV in her hand and looked down at the Wolf. "I won't get back in the Company's good graces if I do." She then gently pushed the needle into the back of the Wolf's hand then hooked up the line to the solution.

With her hand, she felt the woman's forehead and was relieved that she didn't seem excessively warm. Filling a syringe with an antibiotic, she inserted the needle in the line and then filled another syringe with Demerol and injected it into Wolf's backside. Satisfied, she moved to the bathroom where she scrubbed her hands and nails before going back to the Wolf. Cautiously, Parker pulled out the Quick Clot Gauze and was glad to see that there wasn't a gush of blood. After cleaning the wound area with Betadine, she injected Lidocaine around the site. Sucking in a deep breath she gradually move forceps deeper into the wound until she felt the bullet. Once she removed the bullet, she quickly stitched the wound and covered it with gauze.

*

Parker woke with a start and after her eyes adjusted to the lack of light, she saw the Wolf thrashing about in her bed. Walking quickly over to the woman, she pressed back of her hand to a sweat soaked forehead—hot. In no time, she was at the other side of the bed filling a syringe with more antibiotics. Just as she was about to inject the drug into the line a strong hand grasped her wrist.

“I won’t let you do to me what you did to Olivia,” Remington growled even though her body was shaking.

“Listen,” Parker replied, “You can either let go of my hand so I can help you or, you can see if your body can fight off the infection before you die—your choice.”

Wolf increased the pressure of her hand around Parker’s wrist. “Where’s my gun,” her gravelly voice asked.

Nodding in the direction of the bedside table, Parker said, “Over there.”

Remington’s long arm stretched then she secured her gun. Pulling back the slide, and engaged a bullet, she narrowed her eyes. “Don’t try anything funny,” she said pointing the gun at Parker before she dropped her grip on the woman’s wrist.

“Wouldn’t think of it.” Parker pushed the plunger down and the antibiotics mixed with the bag of hanging fluid. Her eyes took in the Wolf—I can overpower her with one hand tied behind my back. She saw the Wolf’s eyelids grow heavy as she struggled to stay awake. “Night night,” she whispered as she carefully took the gun and laid it back on the bedside table. No way was she going to let the Wolf die—she was her ticket back to DOCO.

*

Parker stood in the kitchen looking out the window at a helicopter that passed by the house for the third time. She recognized the search pattern for what it was and didn’t panic—she had engaged blocking devices that covered both the house and perimeter for a hundred yards. Still, she was concerned. Her monitoring of the helicopter told her that it was equipped with sophisticated instruments that tried, but failed, to penetrate her defenses. It had come down to a chess game of who had the better strategy.

Once the helicopter moved further away, Parker went to the command center located in a closet in the main hallway. The data from the probes that the helicopter’s equipment used to scan the house and surrounding area told her that all the information gathered was that the house was unoccupied—she and the Wolf were safe for the moment.

Chapter Seven

Remington's eyes slowly opened. She saw the IV stand and the bag of liquid attached to it and then turned her head toward the lone chair in the room where she saw Parker Davis every time she opened her eyes. Davis wasn't there and that somehow bothered Remington more that she wanted to admit. Closing her eyes, she tried to recall all the events that brought her to Davis of all people taking care of her.

She recalled the warehouse and seeing the top of Castellán's head explode and as she fell to the ground, a bullet exploded in his bodyguard's groin. It was at that moment that she knew Davis hadn't followed orders, but she didn't have time to dwell on that since bullets seemed to fly all around her. Both she and McCrea kept low as they scrambled for the cover their vehicle would provide. When McCrea screamed, she knew he took a bullet but didn't take the time to look at him as she hit the ground when she felt blazing hot pierce her skin. Doing a belly crawl, she made it to the other side of the Town Car where Edwards met her. She remembered being in the vehicle and Ava taking care of her. *Ava is dead...they all are.* From the deepest recesses of her mind, she recalled a cool wet cloth on her forehead and the gentle touch to her cheek. Parker Davis's hand had caressed her so softly that she had a hard time reconciling that with the woman who did unspeakable things to Olivia Santos. *How can that be?*

When she heard the distinctive sounds of a helicopter, Remington's attention turned to the present. What was uppermost in her mind—find out where she was then contact DOCO. Knowing what she did, there was no way she was going to spend any extended amount of time with Parker Davis.

The door opened.

Remington looked at Parker and scowled. "Where the hell am I? How long have I been here?" she demanded.

"I told you," Parker said in a low voice. "You're in a safe house. We've been here for two days."

"This isn't a DOCO safe house...I know them all."

"No, it isn't. This is my safe house. I have them all over the world."

With her eyebrows touching, Remington gave the woman a curious look. "You didn't know in time to get this ready for this operation. As far as I know you never have operated in this area."

"Actually, I did. I was part of a strike force against human traffickers out of Nuevo Laredo."

Remington hated being in a position of weakness especially if the stronger person was Davis. Mustering all her reserves, she said in a low gravelly voice, "Get me to a DOCO safe house now."

"Can't do that."

Her mind scrambled for ways to escape. "Why?" Remington asked as trepidation filled her mind. "Am I your prisoner?"

Parker shook her head and laughed. "No."

"Then why are you holding me captive?"

With her head shaking, Parker said, "I'm not. I heard one of the snipers say *we know who you are Stella. You can't hide from us Wolf.* There's a mole in DOCO...did you really want me to take you to a known DOCO safe house?"

After considering all the options, Remington looked at Parker Davis with new eyes. “The helicopters...They're looking for us?”

“My information says it is a cartel search. The signals the copter was sending out were not from DOCO. I have a bubble around the house and surrounding area and for now they can't see us but who's to say if they have more sophisticated monitors and will be back.”

Remington pushed back the sheet and attempted to get up—her head spun and she lay back down. “I need to check with DOCO, get me a phone,” she ordered.

“You are hardly in a position to give me orders, Wolf,” Parker said as she turned to leave.

“Stop,” Remington barked before softening her voice. “We need to work together if we are going to get out of this alive.”

Slowly turning around, Parker let her gaze fall on the Wolf. “Once you're stronger we can discuss the options. For now, you need to get your strength back...the infection has sucked all the strength out of you.” Her eyes focused on the IV bag. “I think you turned the corner last night when your fever spiked before it fell to normal. Let me get you something to eat and we can talk about what happened.”

Hating to ask for help, Remington nodded. “I need to use the bathroom.”

*

Parker watched as the Wolf drank chicken broth and ate a small container of jello. “Want more?” When she saw Remington shake her head *no*, she took the tray and placed it on the floor. Walking around the bed to the IV stand, Parker said, “You don't need this anymore,” before she gently removed the needle that was in the back of the Wolf's hand. “I have oral antibiotics for you and Norco if you need it for pain.”

“I won't need any pain meds.”

“Suit yourself.” Parker placed two plastic medicine bottles on the table by the bed. “There's no debate over the antibiotic—you must take it—one tablet every twelve hours.” She looked at her watch. “That means you need another one around ten tonight.”

“How soon before we can get out of here?”

“Don't know it depends on what you find out from DOCO.”

Remington looked surprised. “You're going to let me contact them?”

Parker snorted. “Of course I am.” Her eyes narrowed. “You're not my prisoner, Wolf. The way I see it we are in this together, but...when you contact DOCO you will need to be extremely careful. I wasn't kidding about the leak.”

With contemplative eyes, Remington focused on Parker. “Do we have the capability to contact them from here or do we need to go elsewhere?”

“A satellite sits almost directly overhead. I can turn the cloak we're under off and you can call them but time is critical—you will have two minutes max.”

For a long moment, Remington was silent with her lips bunched and her forehead creased. “Is there an internet connection?”

“Yes, but it is under the same time constraint. Once I've lowered the cloaking device this place will be discoverable.” Parker looked directly into the Wolf's eyes and held them. “Number one rule—never underestimate anyone or anything. Castellan's people are hunting you and I don't think they will give up easily...they lost the drugs and the money and that can't be sitting too well with those in the cartel.”

“Either way the potential is there for someone to discover where we are,” Remington offered. “I know that DOCO is constantly monitoring everything. We have to believe that the cartel is doing the same albeit not with the same sophistication.” Her mouth bunched again. “There’s a secure number I can call that will give me the information I need.”

With a quick nod, Parker said, “I’ll get the phone.”

*

Confused by Davis’s willingness to let her make the call, Remington watched the woman leave the bedroom. The woman wasn’t what she expected. *From all that Olivia told me, Parker Davis is a cold sadistic bitch who will do whatever is necessary to see that she got what she wanted. Who the hell is in this house with me?* She considered that Olivia, who was in drug rehab, was talking through the effects of drug withdrawal and her perceptions were cloudy. *But, I know better.* She had read all the psych analysis on Parker. *It is evident that she is more than capable of doing what Olivia alleged and, if pushed, she will do much more. The question is...how do I handle her with the least fallout.*

Remington’s main goal was to contact her safe source at DOCO and find out exactly what was going on.

Parker entered the room and handed the Wolf a cell phone. “Once you’ve punched in the number count to ten then press call. I will lower our defenses and will let you know how much time you have left.” Her dark eyes fixed on the Wolf. “You have two minutes and even that is too long.”

“I know.” Remington closed her eyes for a moment as she contemplated the code she would use before pressing the buttons and nodding at Parker. “Ready.” When the woman disappeared, she started counting. “One..two...three...”

After pushing the call button, she heard one ring before a voice said, “Go.”

“Seven eight Tango Charlie one nine X-ray seven.”

“The wolf is under attack.”

“A fox is in the hen house.”

“It takes one to know one.”

“What’s a girl to do?”

“Wait for her wedding day.”

“Will the dress be ready in time?”

“Patience is a virtue.”

“What if it rains?”

“Use the umbrella.”

In the background, she heard *ninety seconds*.

“Tomorrow is another day.”

“Make the best use of your day.”

Remington frowned. *That isn’t right.* “Who’s to say what will happen.”

“Eskimos and seals.”

When she heard the last response, Remington quickly closed the phone. “Hurry put the shields back up,” she yelled.

A few seconds later, Parker reentered the bedroom. “What’s up? You still had forty-five seconds.”

Green eyes penetrated dark ones. “I need to think about what just happened,” Remington said in a low ominous voice. “You’d better keep a close eye on all the security...something isn’t right.”

Parker tore her gaze away from the Wolf’s eyes. “Like what?”

Remington didn’t answer right away. When she did, it was in a whisper. “I need paper and a pen.”

With three strides, Parker was at the bedside table and pulling the drawer open. “Everything you need is in here.”

Absently Remington reached inside the drawer and took out a notepad and pen. She looked up at Parker and sighed. *She’s all I’ve got...I have no choice but to trust her until I’m one hundred percent physically.* “Once I decipher the code we’ll need to weight our options.”

“Ok, I’ll watch for any activity,” Parker said before she turned and left the room.

*

Remington had total recall of the conversation and quickly jotted it down on the paper. Next to each question and reply, she wrote a corresponding meaning. The coded conversation with her safe DOCO contact was exactly as it should be—almost. They knew of her injuries, that she was in hiding, and that there wasn’t a definitive amount of time schedule yet. What cause alarm was the response to *tomorrow is another day*. The person on the other end of the phone should have said, *no one is counting days*. The response, *make the best use of your day*, alerted her to what she should say next and to pay close attention to the next response. Years before when she first teamed up with her safe contact, Danny Reno, they set up an alert code that only they knew. Danny had changed the standard response to *tomorrow is another day* from *make no one is counting days* to *make the best use of your day*. His response of *Eskimos and seals* meant *we are being monitored contact me in twenty-four hours at their predefined number*.

“What’s going on?” she wondered as she looked at what she wrote. “I’m in big trouble and the one person I have to rely on is an out of controlled maverick.” She closed her eyes and yawned. Exhaustion had taken over her body but not her mind. There would be no rest for her until she solved the puzzle. Once again, she thought of Parker Davis and her conflicting emotions about the woman. *What to do about you*, she thought before turning her full attention to her current situation.

Chapter Eight

Parker knew she was running on fumes. Drugs had helped stave off the worst of the pain that threatened to bring her to her knees. She knew her relationship with the Wolf was tenuous at best—now she waited to find out if the woman trusted her enough to share what she learned from the DOCO contact. She'd busted her butt to make sure the Wolf didn't die and hoped that she would reward her with a small amount of trust. Otherwise, she would have to decide whether to cut the woman loose or not. *In her present condition, she won't last long out in this arid environment.*

A small blip on a monitor had her sitting up and taking notice—whatever it was, it was heading in the direction of the house. “Fuck.” One blip turned into three then six. She rotated the roof camera in the direction of the oncoming unknown threat and waited. Her face was close to the monitor as she squinted in an attempt to make out what it was—that only made her head to throb even more. With forced patience, she waited then exhaled when she saw the pack of coyotes. *Another reason she'll never survive out there.*

*

Two hours later, the Wolf appeared in the hallway, dressed with a look of determination on her face. “Anything?” she asked in a clipped cold voice.

“A pack of coyotes,” Parker answered before she added, “Kind of strange really...I usually only see one at a time and this was a pack of six.”

“That isn't my concern. Right now, I need to devise a plan of attack. Unless I render the cartel redundant I will always be in the hairs of some assassin's rifle.”

Parker fixed her jaw and glared at the Wolf. “I take it you are doing that on your own.”

“Look, I didn't ask you to rescue me or bring me here, but here I am so I am forced to work with you.”

“Not a problem,” Parker said in a tight voice. “The door is right around the corner. Stay or go it doesn't matter to me.”

Remington pressed her back gently against the wall and slid down it. Once she was sitting, she focused all her attention on Parker. “The message from DOCO confirmed that there is a infiltrator within the organization.” She watched Parker's eyebrows lift. “You were right to bring me here instead of one of their safe houses.”

“Anything else?”

“Just to keep up the defense and be patient.” She refused to look at Parker—she'd know that there was more. She whispered, “Someone was monitoring the call.”

Parker's mouth opened wide. “How do you know that?”

“I don't the person I was speaking with did.”

Except for the hum of the monitors, the house was quiet. Parker leaned back in her chair and folded her hand on her chest. “Just because we lobbed of the head the snake still slithers.”

“We need to cut off all the heads,” Remington said before she looked at Parker. What she saw was thoughtful repose. There was no arguing the fact that the woman was a master of strategy—she had a long line of successful operations. *I would be a fool not to use that.* “Any thoughts on how to accomplish that?”

Scratching her face, Parker sucked in a breath then blew it out slowly. “Before I left for Texas I researched the cartel. There are four distinct parts all with different commanders. Castellán headed the biggest part—drugs, Miguel Sanchez—prostitution, Hector Diego—arms, Armistead—human trafficking, and that leaves J. H. McMillan who seems to dabble in it all.”

She did her homework. “Yes, I know all about them. Castellán needed to be dealt with first—his division made the most money for the cartel.” Remington shrugged and eyed Parker. “If you hadn’t shot Castellán’s right hand man maybe none of this would have happened.”

Parker let out a deep laugh that held no humor. “Maybe if you hadn’t let those men rape me it wouldn’t have happened.”

“You knew going in there what the game was.”

With a sneer, Parker bent down so she was in the Wolf’s face. “You know as well as I do that it had nothing to do with Castellán and everything to do with Olivia Santos. What you let those men do to me was retribution for what you perceived as a wrong I did to Olivia.” Sucking in a deep breath, she continued. “What happened in that warehouse had nothing to do with my shooting that bastard and everything to do with the mole at DOCO. So get off my case.”

Remington watched as Parker straightened up and pressed her fingers against the scar under her hair. “Have you slept at all?” she asked

Parker’s eyes narrowed. “When we are out of this I’ll sleep right now I can’t risk it.”

“What about the pain, have you taken meds for it?”

For a long moment, Parker seemed to be staring at the monitors in front of her. Finally, she said, “That stuff makes me fuzzy. If my mind is muddled I can’t keep us safe.”

“I can take care of myself,” Remington countered.

Malevolent dark eyes fixed on Remington. “Really? Do you see whose sitting on the floor because she can’t stand?”

Remington rubbed a hand across her face before she let her eyes rest on the floor. “We need to work together if we are to get out of this alive.” She lifted her head, closed her eyes, and gathered her emotions. “I can sit there and watch the monitors while you get some rest. If *you* are going to keep us safe until I’ve recovered then you need sleep.” She watched as various expressions crossed Parker’s face. “Let me at least do that...”

Parker stood up and reached her hand out. “I need to show you how to maneuver the cameras.

Taking Parker’s hand, Remington stood up, moved a few steps, and then sat in the chair. Fifteen minutes later, she watched as Parker disappeared into a bedroom. Her eyes flashed back to the monitors and she sighed. *What to do about you Davis? You’re a conundrum that I thought I’d figured out— now I’m not so sure.* Her eyes tracked to the monitor on the right when she saw movement—a hawk was gliding in the sky above the house.

*

Days went slowly by as the two women developed a routine that seemed to suit them both. Remington was getting stronger by the day and the helicopter that circled the area the first day hadn’t returned.

“I need to see some daylight,” Remington said as she stood at a darkened window staring at the arid expanse in the back of the house.

Parker stopped mixing a salad and let out a heavy sigh. “We can’t risk it especially during the day.”

With eyes flashing, Remington turned abruptly. "You can't really think they know where we are? We need to get out of here and find out what is happening."

Dark eyes focused on Remington. "I don't think they know exactly where we are, Wolf. Number one rule—never underestimate your opponent."

"You don't have to tell me about the rules—I know them verse and chapter," Remington growled. "We need a plan of action." Her eyes narrowed. "Do you have one or are you so paranoid that you haven't what it takes to take any action?"

"I might remind you that we are here because you were wounded and needed a safe place to recover," Parker said in a low ominous voice. "I could have been long gone by now enjoying the company of a sensuous woman anywhere in the world I wanted. But, I'm here with you, Wolf—protecting you." She gave the Wolf a once over. "Do you think you're ready to do something more involved?"

Remington stretched her shoulders and rolled her neck. "Yeah, I'm feeling almost a hundred percent," she said in a less confrontational tone. "What intel do you have on the cartel?"

Parker placed two plates on the table and then looked at Remington. "I've made lunch—Caesar salad—we can share information while we eat."

Wordlessly, Remington moved to the table and sat down. "All my actual notes are back in Austin."

Parker let out a cynical chuckle. "Won't do you much good here will they?"

Gritting her teeth, Remington's lip curled. "I have a photographic memory so don't think I will approach this problem without resources."

"Then why am I here?" Parker quietly asked.

Remington bit her lip. *Pride doesn't have a place now*. "I need your help." The words stung her mouth but she knew they needed saying—*I need her*. "Can I count on you?"

Parker put her fork down and let a smile form on her lips. "That's what I've been doing—helping you—and I will see this through to the end." She reached out and touched the Wolf's hand. "We're in this together," she said and squeezed the hand slightly. "We have to hit the cartel from all sides."

With cold eyes, Remington looked at the hand over hers and slid her hand free. "I agree," she said forcibly. "I think we should start with Miguel Sanchez. He's the most accessible. He has a compound in Juarez where he lives with his family...a wife, two boys, and three girls."

"Sounds like the perfect family man," Parker said as she pushed her plate away and stood up. "Come with me. I think you will find what I have to show you interesting."

Remington followed Parker to the hallway and watched as she pushed a combination of numbers on pad. The door to the closet opened but this time a wider area opened to reveal a hidden room. "A safe room?" she asked.

Parker smiled and took Remington's hand and pulled her into the room. "When I was involved in the Nuevo Laredo assignment, I bought this place for reconnaissance." She pushed a series of buttons on another number pad and the door closed. "If someone manages to get into the house and gets in here they will see nothing but the table, chairs, and gun safe." Once the door is closed completely, the room came to life. Multiple monitors were streaming video and a portion of the wall rolled up revealing a map. Parker's dark eyes fixed on the Wolf. "In here is all the intel collected over the last eighteen months about the cartel."

"Is this DOOCO approved?"

The dark eyes moved away from the Wolf and focused on the map. "I had worked the cartel and my informants for nine months when DOCO told me they had another job for me," Parker quietly said.

"To bring Santos back into the fold?" Remington asked in a cold tone.

Ignoring the question, Parker said, "While I was gone my contacts kept up the surveillance which eventually arrived here." Parker shrugged. "When I made the trip here a while ago, I made sure that all the information is current."

"And is it?"

Parker grinned. "Yes, in fact, the last intel I received said that Sanchez, Diego, and Armistead are meeting with McMillan in six days to discuss replacing Castellán. It will be the perfect opportunity to get them all in one fell swoop."

Remington gave Parker a skeptical look. "Show me what you have?"

Chapter Nine

Two days later, Remington and Parker had designed a strategy for getting all the cartel members simultaneously. Considering they only had a small window of opportunity, they worked non-stop until they came to agreement on how to eliminate the cartel.

"It's a doable plan as long as what we need is where you say it is," Remington said as she pushed back from the table. "Are you certain that everything is still in place?"

"Of course they are. How are your sniper skills," Parker asked as she marked an X on a map.

"I'll have no problem," Remington said with her usual cool aplomb.

"We will need to make the incendiary devices here," Parker glanced at the Wolf, "it will take about a dozen of them. Do you agree?"

Remington looked at the map and the distance of the mouth of the canyon. "Yes, that should do it."

"I have them already made." Parker shrugged slightly as she studied the map. "We've covered every base—I don't foresee any problems."

With her green eyes fixed on Parker, Remington said, "As long as the timing is right."

Without a word, Parker went to the gun safe and took out two long rifles. "We only have one of the prototype rifles so it will be incumbent on the shooter to make every shot count." She looked at the Wolf. "I should be the shooter."

All Remington did was nod.

"We need to get our gear together and get it loaded in the Hummer then we should try and get some sleep. We will leave at six—that will put us in Alpine with enough time to make sure there is still a way to get into Mexico from Big Ben."

Together they loaded everything they'd need. "Will we be coming back here afterward?" Remington asked.

"No."

Remington held out her hand. "I need to get in touch with my contact at DOCO."

Parker handed the Wolf the cell phone. "I'll lower the security," she said as she took a small device out of her pocket. "Once I push the button you have two minutes before the call disconnects." She looked at the device, said, "go," and then watched the second hand on her watch.

*

Several hours later, the Hummer had everything the two women would need for their mission. Standing in yard as night closed in on them, Remington and Parker stepped back from the building housing the vehicles.

"What did your contact say?" Parker asked as they began to move toward the house.

"The cartel is still looking for me. I got the go ahead for our mission but they will deny they sanctioned it if it goes wrong." Remington's voice was cool and devoid of emotion as she spoke. "Essentially we are on our own."

Parker chuckled. "Now there's a surprise." She looked at the Wolf and saw a look of sadness cross her face before it disappeared as fast as it appeared. "We won't fail," she said as they entered the house.

“No we won’t.”

*

Parker rolled out of her bed at the first sound of the intrusion alarm. She grabbed her Sig Saur off the bedside table and moved silently to the door where she saw the Wolf standing in her bedroom doorway with gun in hand. Parker held one finger to her mouth as she moved to the control for the safe room and opened it before signaling the Wolf to join her. Once the door closed them inside, she activated all the monitors.

“There,” she said pointing to the monitor that showed an SUV bumping along the dirt road to the house.

“I doubt they’re lost,” Remington said. “We need to set a trap for them.”

Shaking her head, Parker opened the gun safe and took out a double barrel shotgun, before she looked at the Wolf who was standing by the door. “No, you stay in here until it’s safe.”

“I don’t think so,” growled Remington.

“Look,” Parker began as she watched the vehicle closing in on the house, “they want the Wolf not me. You are the valuable commodity here, which means you stay in here where it is safe.” She loaded two shells in the barrels before she pressed the code for the door to open. “Keep an eye on what happens, if it looks like trouble press the lights button that will distract them so I can get away.”

“I won’t hide in here,” Remington said in a cold tone as she moved toward Parker.

Parker’s eyes widened as she moved to within inches of the Wolf’s personal space. “Listen, I didn’t bring you here and fix you up to die so stay put.” Her legs began to eat up the distance between her and the door.

Remington grabbed Parker’s arm. “I’m going with you,” she said in a tone that brooked no argument.

With a slight acknowledgement of the Wolf’s words, Parker handed her the shot gun and an earpiece. She saw the vehicle closing on the house. “You go out the back. I’ll be the first to confront them.” Taking another shot gun out of the gun safe, Parker nodded at the Wolf. “Let’s go.”

*

With the lights out, Parker opened the front door and went out where she stood in the shadows waiting for the approaching SUV. She heard the Wolf say, *in place*, before she narrowed her eyes—she saw the headlights. “Stay put,” she said as the vehicle came to a stop near the house. Parker heard the sounds of what she suspected were high school boys who were drunk. Once they were all standing together, Parker made herself known with the click of the shotgun barrel moving into place.

“You boys are trespassing,” Parker said as she moved out of the shadows.

A tall boy with red hair laughed. “You won’t use that,” his laugh increased in volume as the others joined him, “it probably isn’t even loaded.”

Another snap of a shotgun barrel broke into the laughter. “Maybe so, but mine is,” Remington said from her position at the side of the house.

“What are you doing here?” Parker asked in a threatening voice.

“We turned down the road...we didn’t know it went here,” the red head said.

“Really?” Parker asked. “The gate is always locked.”

“No, no it wasn’t,” the boy said in a shaky voice. “It was wide open.”

Just then, the Wolf appeared from the shadows. “Liar.”

“No,” another boy who was short and stocky said, “it’s like he said, the gate was open.”

Remington walked across the dirt ignoring the rocks that cut into her feet. When she reached the four boys, she pulled back both triggers. “Stop fucking with me,” she snarled, “why are you here?” She pressed the barrel of the shotgun into the redhead’s cheek. “You’ll be the first then she’ll take care of the others.”

Trembling, the redhead said, “No, no, don’t...it’s the truth...the gate *was* open.”

Parker moved quickly to where the others were standing. “She will kill you.”

Sweat was visible on the boys face. “I’m telling you the truth,” he cried. “The gate was open.”

Leaning into the Wolf, Parker whispered, “This is easy enough to resolve—I’ll check the video.”

Remington sucked in a breath. “Don’t be too long, my trigger finger is itching to kill this jerk.”

The tone of the Wolf’s voice told Parker it wasn’t an idle threat. She moved quickly to the SUV’s driver’s side, opened the door, and took out the keys “All of you get back in your vehicle,” she ordered before turning for the house.

Remington stood by the driver’s window and held the gun to the boy’s cheek. In a low threatening voice she said, “You don’t know how bad I want to kill you.”

The boy wet himself.

Moments later, Parker came out of the door and approached the Wolf and the vehicle. She handed the driver the keys. “I don’t want to see any of you anywhere near my property again. If the sheriff comes around I won’t hesitate telling him the truth that you were trespassing.” She narrowed her eyes. “You get me?”

The boy nodded and took the keys that the woman was dangling in front of him. In one fluid movement, he inserted the key, started the vehicle, put the gear in reverse, and pressed the gas pedal. Once turned around he sped away leaving bits of dirt and rock in the SUV’s wake.

“The gate was open for how long?” Remington coolly asked as she walked back to the house.

“It was locked when I checked the monitor forty-five minutes ago,” Parker said as she hurried to catch the Wolf.

Remington turned in anger. “I thought you said this place was impenetrable.”

“It is.”

“Then what the fuck happened?”

Parker walked past the Wolf and went into the safe room where she punched several buttons. She watched intently the video of the gate and saw it open automatically. She then scanned the logs and saw that somehow the code was entered at the exact time the gate opened. “What?” She rewound the video again and watched as the gate again opened and thirty minutes later, the SUV turned onto the dirt road. With her hand on her chin, she rubbed fingers over her lips. “Somehow the gate was activated from in here.” She turned to the Wolf and searched her face. “You didn’t have anything to do with that did you?”

“How could I,” Remington countered. “I don’t know the code.”

Parker lifted her eyebrows. “Huh.” She chewed on the inside of her cheek then nodded before she said, “We need to leave now.”

Chapter Ten

The Hummer H3 turned from the dirt road to the paved road only to immediately pull onto the shoulder.

“What are you doing?” Wolf demanded.

Parker opened the door. “Watch.” She opened the back door, took out a length of heavy chain, and walked toward the gate. . When she returned to the vehicle she said, “If something goes awry with the electronics on the gate again it won’t open.” She slipped the gear into drive and pulled back on the road.

Remington said nothing as she gave Parker a brief look then stared into the black abyss that held their fate.

*

Around noon, four days from the planned attack, the black Hummer pulled into the parking lot of a Hampton Inn in Alpine, Texas. Parker turned to the Wolf. “I’ll get us a room.”

“Two rooms,” Remington said.

Parker shook her head and grinned. “No way,” she said as she turned and walked quickly into the lobby.

Remington growled before she opened the door and followed Parker. Once inside, she grabbed Parker’s arm and spun her around. “Do I need to remind you who’s in charge?” she asked in a low ominous tone. “Two rooms.”

Taking the Wolf’s arm, Parker turned them around and whispered, “They only have one room and I’m not sleeping in the car so get over yourself.”

Immediately, Remington’s back stiffened.

As Parker was about to reply a young man behind the counter said, “Here you go, Ms. Huntington, you’re in room 156. The easiest access is to park in the back. Once you’re in the room you can access it through the sliding glass door.”

“You only have the one room?” Remington inquired.

“Yes, ma’am.”

Remington gave the man a cold stare before she said, “We need two keys.” The slim, young man slid a keycard tucked in a paper case across the counter and Remington snatched it up. She turned to Parker. “I’ll meet you in the room,” she said before squaring her shoulders, turning, and walking quickly away.

The look in the man behind the counter made caused Parker to quip, “She’s not a very good traveler,” before she too left the registration desk.

*

Remington was standing in the room looking out the sliding door window when she heard the click of the lock before it opened. She knew who it was. “When this is over I never want to see you again,” she said with cool detachment.

“Trust me, I feel the same,” Parker said as she threw a small go bag on one of the beds. “I’ll be back,” she bit out before going out the door and slamming it hard.

Cold green eyes saw Parker slide into the Hummer. The scowl on the woman's face told Remington all she needed to know—she was pissed. But, she saw more—pain. *She's in pain.* “Must be going to look for a score.” As she watched the black vehicle disappear from her sight, she let her shoulders drop—Parker was gone.

Exhausted, she stretched out on one of the beds and closed her eyes. Sleep eluded her as a kaleidoscope of the events, which occurred since Parker Davis came into her life, would not cease. “What am I going to do?” she whispered. She thought of her conversation with her DOCO contact the day before. *We cannot condone what you do or recognize that you and Davis are DOCO operatives, but we won't stop you.* The message was simple—she and Parker were on their own.

The plan was simple yet complex. *La Casa del Canon* sat in the middle of a box canyon with one way in and one way out. At the top of either side of the entrance were lookouts that intelligence said reported their status every thirty minutes. The plan was simple—kill the guards, set fire to the dry grasses then take out all the occupants of the house. The trick was to get into position without the lookouts spotting them. Fortunately, Parker had a stockpile of DOCO equipment to make that possible. What worried her the most; the headaches that often debilitate the woman.

“I hope you score enough drugs to see this mission through.” She closed her eyes as a vision of Parker floated to the forefront. “What to do about you?” she whispered before sleep finally took over.

*

Parker pulled into a parking space that had a view of the mountains of Big Ben National Wildlife Refuge. When she'd last been there, she gained the cooperation of one of the park rangers who showed her the way to cross the Rio Grande into Mexico undetected. Recent aerial photos told her that the border was still open. If it weren't—the mission would fail. She considered why she was putting her life on the line to help the Wolf. The woman was a cold hearted bitch but she knew she needed her if she was going to get back her full status with DOCO.

Pulling out her cell, she dialed a number and when the familiar voice said *hello* she began to tremble. “Mom.”

“Parker, is that you,” Ruth Davis said with tears in her voice. “Are you ok? I've been so worried about you since you left a month ago.”

“Yeah,” Parker said softly. “I'm good. I just wanted to hear your voice.”

“Baby, tell me what's going on? Are the headaches getting worse?”

“I'm just tired that's all. The headache is a dull ache most of the time.” She lied.

“You need to come home, Parker.”

Home. Parker rolled the word around in her head. Home is what she needed. Home is where she found love. Despite all she put her family through they still loved her. She knew it wasn't easy for them to all act as if she were dead, but they did. Not because they understood or agreed—it was born out of a deeply held loyalty and love.

“I will soon, Mom. I need to finish with what I'm doing first and then I will come to the farm.”

“Are you sure you're ok?” Ruth asked again.

“Mom, I'm good. I was just missing you and had a chance to call so...”

“I miss you too.”

“Mom, I’ve got to go.”

“Ok, dear. I love you.”

“I love you too, Mom. Bye.”

Ending the call, Parker held the phone close to her heart as a single tear rolled down her cheek.

Parker swiped at her face and bit down hard on her lip. “Stop it! I need to pull myself together.” She looked at the surroundings. “I need drugs.” A smile crossed her face as she remembered exactly where to find what she really needed—a mind blowing orgasm. Pain shot through her head. She rummaged in the glove compartment, pulled out a prescription bottle, opened it, and shook out three pills. Spying what she needed, she got out of the Hummer and sprinted across the grass to a concrete pad holding several tall vending machines. She chose a bottle of water and a package of Lorna Doones—she found eating something with the pills made them work faster. Once she had a modicum of relief, she’d go in search of a willing senorita and a few hours of pleasure.

Chapter Eleven

Remington heard the door open and looked at the time. “Where’ve you been?” she demanded. Looking harder at Parker, she noticed the glazed look in her eyes. “Are you ok?” She moved closer. “You’re high aren’t you?”

Parker threw the keys on the table then placed the heel of her left hand against the scar on her head—she grimaced. “If I was do you think I’d be in this much fuckin’ pain?”

Keeping her expression neutral, Remington asked, “You didn’t buy drugs when you were out?”

“NO, why would I?”

“For the pain,” Remington said dryly.

“I have a prescription for that.”

“Legal?”

Parker pushed past the Wolf. “Yes, it’s legal. I had a bullet in my head, it hurts like hell...so they gave me drugs to cope,” she said angrily. “If you must know, I went to get laid.” She flopped down on the bed and rubbed her head. “The damn bitch tried to steal my money without doing me.”

Remington gave Parker’s body spread out on the bed and stark appraisal. “I see,” she said as an eyebrow rose.

With a half grin, Parker said, “I’d fuck you but I’m not that desperate.”

“In your dreams, Davis. In your dreams.”

Parker shrugged. “I seem to remember that you are one hell of a kisser and you didn’t mind my hands on you.”

“Get over yourself. That was just for show.”

Scratching her neck, Parker gave the Wolf a serious growl. “That might be what you tell yourself, Wolf, but your body didn’t lie. You wanted me...that I know.”

Grabbing the keys, Remington headed for the door. “I’m going to get something to eat.”

“You don’t have to go out to do that you know.” She spread her legs. “I’ve got something very tasty right here.”

Remington opened the door and said over her shoulder, “Not in this lifetime.”

*

Remington stepped into the hummer inserted the key and closed the door in one fluid motion. As the vehicle roared to life, she looked through the windshield she saw Parker leaning negligently against the sliding glass door. Their eyes locked each refusing to break the contact. Gathering all her resolve, Remington put the Hummer in reverse and backed away ignoring the raw sensuality she saw in Parker's eyes.

“I can't let that happen...especially with her.”

She needed this—the time away from Parker and the feelings of want and need that she resolutely denied. Over the last week and a half, she had no time to herself. Food wasn’t what she craved—she needed to feel free but more than that, she wanted to take back control. She had been little more than a prisoner. If she were honest with herself—she rarely was in this type of situation—she’d admit her growing attraction to the woman who rescued her. As a vision of the

want in the dark eyes floated in to her consciousness, she stubbornly refused to acknowledge her feelings.

When Remington came to the southern end of town, she pulled onto the shoulder and stopped. Her eyes took in the horizon and the rugged expanse of land that lay before her. Somewhere out there was La Casa del Canon, where the remaining members of the Castellan cartel would gather to choose a new member and elect a new head of the organization. The next several days would test all her resolve and she didn't need any distractions and that meant Parker Davis. She wasn't foolish enough to think she could take on the cartel alone—she needed Parker. That thought alone was unsettling. “I have no choice really. She has the knowledge of the area and the expertise to pull this mission off.”

She checked the time and, with a deep intake of breath, she started the Hummer. With the cover of dark, she and Parker would covertly cross into Mexico and make their way to where they would wipe out the cartel's leaders. For a long moment, she allowed Parker to roll into her mind and over her body. Closing her eyes at the intensity, she willed the arousal she felt to subside before she opened her eyes and put the vehicle into gear.

*

Parker woke with a start and saw the Wolf standing over her—the desire unmistakable. She slowly rose and wrapped her arms around the Wolf pulling her close. Their bodies fit perfectly as they ground against each other. Lips locked in deep searing kisses—their hunger palpable as they each tried desperately to consume the other.

“I want you,” growled the Wolf in a husky voice.

It had been a long time since Parker felt such overwhelming need and want. *Not since...Olivia*. She pressed harder, pushed the Wolf down on the bed, and began to rip at her clothes. Her body was trembling for the release she knew that only the Wolf would give her.

Their naked bodies entwined as each struggled for dominance and control. Neither would yield as the anticipation of what was to come made them wet, hard, and in need of release. Remington finally got on top of Parker and straddled her before pinning her arms above her head.

“Don't move,” she purred as she leaned into Parker's ear. “I am going to take you and you will stay still.”

Parker nodded.

“Good,” Remington whispered. Her assault on Parker's mouth made both their lips swell but she wasn't done. She would take Parker so she would forget Olivia forever.

*

So lost in her dreams, Parker didn't hear the door open until someone said her name—her eyes flew open.

The Wolf was standing by the door saying, “We need to go soon.”

“What,” Parker said as she shook her head causing instantaneous pain. She grabbed her head and cradled it—the pain seemed to recede. “What time is it?” she asked.

“It's nearly dark,” Remington said. “If we're going to do this we need to leave soon.”

Shaking off the pain and the arousal, Parker got up and eyed the Wolf. “We need to secure this room.”

"I agree," Remington said as she eyed Parker. "Are you ok?"

Looking away, Parker said, "Yeah, I was having a weird dream...the drugs sometimes do that." She refocused on the Wolf. "Did you gas up when you were out?"

"Yes, and I filled all the cans."

"Good, we don't have to go far but if we are going to come at them from the south it means the distance is doubled...especially if we don't want them to spot us."

*

The headlights and interior lights of the Hummer went out as the vehicle crossed the border into Mexico. No one saw or heard the vehicle as it traversed the terrain. The vehicle was equipped with night vision courtesy of a modified DOCO version of GPS. Much like an aircraft pilot, Parker drove the Hummer relying on special instrumentation that allowed her to navigate the road ahead by watching a screen embedded on the dashboard.

Three hours before dawn, Parker guided the Hummer into an old seemingly abandoned adobe building. She turned to the Wolf and held one finger to her lips. For an hour, they sat with the only noise their breathing.

Finally, Parker whispered, "Come with me," then handed the Wolf a pair of night vision glasses.

They ran the fifty feet to another building that looked like it was a house at one time. Parker held out her arm to stop the Wolf from going inside. She signaled for the Wolf to go around to the back of the building and enter from that point while Parker went in from where they were.

Meeting in the middle of the ramshackle building, Parker said, "Help me," as she bent down. "Get the one next to this one," she said nodding to the loose board next to the one, she was lifting from the floor.

Remington stared into the area below the boards. "What's all this?" she asked as she helped pull the items out of the hole.

"It's what we need to pull this off." Parker opened one of the bags and pulled out a camouflage outfit complete with dangling leaves and branches. She looked at her watch. "We need to store what we need in these backpacks," she said pointing to two camouflaged bags. "We must leave here in twenty minutes if we want to be on the side of that hill before light."

Both Remington and Parker worked quickly packing the backpacks with rations, various surveillance devices, and other survival equipment they needed for the next three days. Once they procured binoculars, rifles, and guns from the Hummer they set out to their rendezvous with the cartel and its destruction.

Chapter Twelve

The journey up the side of the hill, which was like a small mountain, was arduous. Several times either Parker or Remington lost their footing on loose rocks, which made them fall and slide partially down the incline. Finally, when they reached the top they belly crawled as they made their way to a clearing where they would set up their camp.

Wordlessly, Remington and Parker arranged their belongings in the area where they would spend the next several days. The campsite was simple—their weapons were readily available, Mylar thermal blankets sat together with their rations neatly laid on top. Lying on their bellies, the two assassins looked through binoculars at the house below and the two guard stations at the mouth of the canyon.

Over the next two days the two women watched the comings and goings to the house surmising that, they were setting up for the upcoming meeting. Under the cover of night, they planted incendiary devices and coordinated the timers on them. They knew that the guards positioned at the mouth of the canyon checked in with the main house every thirty minutes and after patient watching, they were able to get a fix on when that occurred.

With her rifle in place, Parker laid on the ground next to the Wolf. “Is everything in place for when we leave?”

“Yes, if anyone finds this place they will find the evidence we want them to,” Remington said in a hushed tone.

“As soon as we are certain the targets are eliminated we need to leave.”

“Parker, I think we need to reconsider that plan...we will be too visible.”

Parker looked at her fellow assassin. *It's the first time she's called me by my name.* “By the time anyone gets here we will be long gone. Besides, we are going further into the interior.”

“To where?”

“Some place safe.”

“Another house of yours?” Remington asked before she reached over and pushed Parker's head down. “Helicopter,” she whispered.

They lay motionless long past the sound of the helicopter disappeared before Remington removed her hand and began to pick up her binoculars.

Parker looked at the Wolf and their eyes locked for a moment. In that split second, Parker was sure she saw caring before the Wolf's face returned to cold indifference. She still felt the warmth of the hand on her head and that was a puzzle—she felt bereft with its removal. She pulled a device out of her backpack and pressed a green button. “Good thing we set up the perimeter monitor,” she said before picking up her own binoculars and scanning the area surrounding them.

“The helicopter was directly over us,” Remington said as she stopped her surveillance. “If they saw us they would have been on us by now.”

“Agreed.” Parker looked at her watch. “Shouldn't be long now. Are we clear on the plan?” When the Wolf nodded, Parker added, “Then you will be home free, Wolf, and you can return to DOCO a hero. Of course, I expect you to put in a good word for me.”

“Good word for you?” Remington echoed

“Yeah, I saved your life and am helping you destroy the rest of the cartel...you owe me, Wolf.”

Cold green eyes focused on Parker. “I always pay my debts,” she growled. “You should know that better than anyone.”

Not wanting to see the hate in the Wolf’s eyes, Parker turned away. “What did Olivia do for you that needed repayment?” She rubbed the scar on her head as the pain began to escalate. “I know all of her friends...acquaintances and you were never one of them.”

“No you didn’t.”

Parker jerked her head around and stared at the Wolf. “Out with it—you were lovers weren’t you?”

Remington snickered. “You’re such a fool...everything doesn’t always come down to sex, Parker.”

There it was again—the Wolf said her first name. “In my experience it always does. There is either sex or the want of sex. Maybe you two weren’t lovers but I bet you wanted to be.” The slight flinch in the Wolf’s expression, before it grew colder, was her answer. “So you brought me into your mission so you could prove your love to Olivia?”

Holding up her hand, Remington lifted her binoculars again and trained them on the canyon below. “There’s a vehicle approaching.”

Both assassins followed the vehicle’s journey until it stopped at the house. When they saw J. H. McMillan step out they knew the time had come to complete the mission.

The only clear picture they had of who they suspected would be the next head of the cartel was not clear. Looking at the woman, Parker could clearly see the jet black hair cut short and the body gone soft with time. When J.H. looked seemingly at her, Parker could see a face that held nothing but danger. “Her pictures don’t do her justice,” Parker said as she followed the woman’s movements.

Remington monitored the woman until she swung her head around and watched as a low flying helicopter was coming down the canyon toward the house. She checked the time. “They’re arriving early.”

Parker watched the helicopter land then saw Hector Diego, exiting the craft and moving quickly under the slowing blades. “Apparently they are all arriving separately.” No sooner had she spoken than another helicopter approached. Once it landed she saw the other two, Sanchez and Armistead get out. “Looks like they are all here.”

Remington’s head swiveled to the right. “Another vehicle is approaching.”

“Fuck, who can that be?”

Five minutes later, they watched as the well known local politician, said to have mob connections, Javier Lumbardo, exited the Jeep.

Remington’s eyes narrowed and Parker grinned.

“This just gets better and better,” Parker said as she watched the man enter the house.

*

Once they were certain everyone was there, Parker let the prototype sniper rifle calculate the wind speed and elevation just as she had on her many practice rounds. This time it was for real as she set the site on the guard closest to her. “We’re clear on what to do?” she said as her finger curved around the trigger.

“Yes,” Remington answered. She caught the look in Parker’s eyes—feral—before she squeezed the trigger. Silently the bullet whizzed through the air before it ripped into the guard’s head. Remington focused her binoculars on the guard on the left when she heard the second shot

and saw the top of the man's head before his body disappeared. That was her cue to press a series of buttons that would set off the incendiary devices at the mouth and back of the canyon as well as near the house and surrounding areas. She also blocked or disabled all the communication devices.

Suddenly, fire began crawling rapidly spreading up the canyon. A blast from Remington's rifle hit the devices at each of the helicopters while Parker shot out the tires of the vehicles. The first to leave the house was Miguel Sanchez. The short little man with gray hair was running until he saw his helicopter on fire. He turned and lifted his hands as if he were motioning the others—he crumbled to the earth as a bullet ripped through his head.

Gun fire launched from the house toward the assassins fell short. Thanks to the sniper rifle that allowed Parker to see through walls, she was able to squeeze off four shots that all hit their target's head.

Together, the two assassins watched the fast moving fire engulf the house. "You did kill them all...right?" Remington asked.

"Yes, I had a positive ID on all of them."

"No safe room?"

"No, and even if there is one it wouldn't matter. When I make a kill the target dies." Parker began disassembling the rifle. "Let's get out of here before this place is crawling with the Federali."

Noiselessly, they quickly gathered what they would take and left the evidence that the Russian mafia was there. It was a win win for Remington, Parker, and ultimately DOOCO. Moving as fast as the rocky terrain would let them, they moved down the side of the small mountain. About thirty feet from the bottom, Parker lost her footing and tumbled across the jagged rocks to the bottom.

*

Remington stood over Parker and saw the bloodied gashes over her body as her eyes fluttered open. "You ok?"

Parker groaned. "Yeah, I think so. That last step was a killer."

"Lay there for a moment while I get the equipment." She heard the sound of explosions and knew the fire fully engulfed house. Remington quickly gathered the equipment Parker was carrying that was scattered in the dirt. "We need to get out of here," she said as she held her hand out to Parker.

"Yep, let's go," said Parker as she steadied herself. She could feel blood running down her left leg and she had no feeling in her right arm. What caused her the most concern was the pounding in her head—she was certain that was the cause of her blurry vision. She couldn't let the Wolf know. "Right with you," she said with little conviction.

The trip back to the abandoned buildings took longer than expected. They did get there just as helicopters began to fill the sky. Fortunately, they still had on their camouflage gear and that gave them protection so they could get a good look at them.

"News and one is the Federalis," Remington said to Parker who was slumped in the car seat. "You ok?" she asked.

Blank eyes looked at the Wolf. "I need to go home," slurred Parker. "I need to go home."

Chapter Thirteen

With helicopters flying above and the dark skies of night rapidly engulfing everything, Remington wrapped Parker in a blanket and had her lay across the middle seats. She eased the Hummer out of the shelter and parked so she could see any threat that might come her way. Then, she settled down behind the wheel holding two hand guns while her eyes searched the darkness through night vision glasses.

When the night grew still, she engaged the engine and moved as silently as she could across the rugged terrain in the direction that Parker Davis had laid out for her. With luck, she would arrive at Parker's Mexican safe house before sunrise. Remington hoped that by the time they arrived, Parker would be able to participate in getting them out of the country.

"God, I can't believe I let myself get into this situation," Remington grumbled. "Somehow I let her be in control and get under my skin."

Remington gripped the steering wheel tighter as the vehicle bumped over a berm before the wheels encountered a paved road. By her best estimates, it had taken her four hours to go forty miles putting her that much further away from *La Casa del Canon* and the carnage she and Parker inflicted there. Two hours later, she pulled up to a house with thick adobe walls much like the one they had stayed in days earlier. She slipped the Hummer into a covered structure and pulled a canvas cover over the opening.

*

"Davis wake up, we're here." When Remington heard no reply she said, "Wake up," louder.

Parker stirred when she heard a voice that seemed to be calling to her from a long way off. "Are we there?"

"Yes, I need the code to get into the house."

Trying to get a grip on whose voice she heard, Parker shook her head slightly and felt immediate pain. "Wolf, is that you?"

"Yes, we need to get inside before the sun is up."

Parker sat up. "Right. The code is six-five-four-eight-four-two-seven-two-six-eight-six-seven."

Remington looked at the woman in the back seat—she didn't look well. "I'll go open up and then come back for you."

When the door closed, Parker tried to regain control of her body and mind. She knew that she and the Wolf had been on a mission together. *The cartel, we wiped out the cartel. Yeah, now I remember.* But there was something else—something she knew was important—vital. "My head hurts too much to think about it now." She slid across the leather seat, opened the door, and got out of the vehicle. When her feet hit the ground, she had to hold on to the door to steady her when pain in her leg sent a jolt through her. Straightening up and sucking in a breath, Parker started toward the house.

*

Remington held her Glock at her side with her finger on the trigger as she cautiously pushed open the front door. Her eyes scanned the room as she listened for any sound that might not belong—she only heard the sound of the wind outside. Carefully she walked quietly to what was the kitchen—nothing. When she turned back, she saw something out of the corner of her eye and raised the Glock locking in on the target.

“Jesus, Parker, what the fuck do you think you are doing sneaking up on me like that. I could have killed you.”

It was all Parker could do to stay upright but she managed. “Is the house clear?”

“I haven’t checked that side,” she whispered pointing her gun in the direction of the bedrooms and bathroom.” Remington signaled for Parker to stay put then crossed the floor and entered a small, narrow hallway. Minutes later, she came back to where Parker stood. “It’s all clear.”

Parker did her best not to limp as she moved further into the house. “I didn’t have time to stock the cupboards or refrigerator but there’s plenty of stuff in the freezer and we still have the MREs.” She eyed the Wolf. “Personally, I’ve had enough of that shit to last a lifetime. I never did understand how soldiers can survive on that crap.”

With a cold clear detached voice, Remington said, “We do what we have to so we can survive.” She nodded toward the hallway. “I see you have the same type of keypad here as the last place.”

With a grunt, Parker moved so she was in front of the keypad. After she pressed several keys, the wall slid back revealing another safe room. “This one isn’t as up-to-date as the other one but it has everything we’ll need.” She motioned for the Wolf to come inside the room. “We can check to see what they are saying about what happened yesterday.” She flicked on a small monitor that came to life on a twenty-four hour news channel. Parker changed the channel to Spanish speaking news.

“We will learn more here,” Parker said turning up the volume.

“Do you speak Spanish?” Remington moved closer as the images of the destruction she and Parker caused filled the screen.

“I am fluent in seven languages.”

Remington closed her eyes. *Why didn’t I know that?* She listened intently then let the briefest of smiles cross her face. “They bought it.”

Parker’s arm went around the Wolf’s shoulders and she pulled her close and kissed her softly on the lips. When the Wolf responded, Parker became lost in the feelings as their kisses deepened. When she felt the tongue against her lips, she opened them and allowed the Wolf entrance into her mouth. Then, everything went black.

*

Remington realized she wanted to kiss Parker two nights earlier while they were lying together trying to keep warm. There was something about the way Parker looked in the moonlight that aroused her. *How hokey is that in the moonlight crap*, she thought as her lips greedily kissed Parker. Maybe it was the near death experience or the fact that Parker risked her life for her—she didn’t know the why all she knew is that she wanted Parker in her bed.

When Parker collapsed in her arms, she thought it was a joke until she felt the limp weight. “Parker? What’s wrong?”

“My head. I need to go home.”

“Come on let me get you into a bed and take a look at those cuts you got when you fell.”

Parker could do nothing but comply and do as the Wolf said. In her mind, she could almost make out the long lost memory that had haunted her the last several weeks. Just as she thought she could reach out and touch it, the image would fade. She turned her attention to the strong hands that were removing her clothes before they turned gentle as they touched her skin. Just before sleep overtook her, the yellow eyes of the Wolf seared her brain.

*

The dream—terrified and running with no way out as her heart pounded hard in her chest. Just as she came to a cliff overlooking the ocean with waves slamming against the jagged rocks below, her eyes flew open. Her skin was drenched and shivering as a cool breeze silently ran across her body. Her eyes scanned the room for any sign that a threat existed—she saw none. She moved her leg and felt instantaneous pain that seemed to shoot from her leg to her head.

“No, I won’t let the pain win.” She cradled her head in her hands. “I need to go home.”

“You’re awake.”

Parker quickly removed her hands and looked at the door. “Yeah.”

“How are you feeling?” Remington asked as she moved closer to the bed.

Refusing to look at the Wolf, Parker willed herself to slide out the opposite side of the bed. “I need to get busy and get us paper so we can get out of here,” she said through gritted teeth. “We shouldn’t stay here more than a day.”

“Let me help,” Remington said as she kept a watchful eye on Parker’s demeanor and movements. “Who do we contact?”

“No one, we’ll do it here.”

“You have that capability?”

“Look, while you’ve been sitting behind the desk ordering people around, I was in the trenches and had to take care of myself. There wasn’t someone watching out for me. If I wanted to survive, I had to be self sufficient.” The pain escalated and she braced herself on the bedpost before she made eye contact with the Wolf. “I have everything we need here for passports and I’ve got money too. We need to be on our way by nightfall.”

Remington looked at Parker skeptically. “You can do all that? Pardon me, but you look like shit.”

Parker glared at the Wolf. “I’ll still be standing long after you’ve collapsed.”

Remington snarled. “Like I collapsed up there on the mountain? As I found my way here, so you would be safe. Don’t discount my abilities, Parker.”

“I’m discounting nothing, Wolf. They aren’t after me, they’re after the Wolf, and that is you. So you tell me who kept who safe.”

“Fuck you,” Remington growled. “I’ll get myself back to DOCO and you can forget getting back in the organization because if I have anything to say about it, there’s no way you’ll ever work for us again.” Shaking from anger, Remington turned away and was almost out of the room when she heard Parker cry out. The sound reminded her of a wounded animal struggling to stay alive. Anger gone, she turned and saw Parker doubling over—she quickly moved to where the woman was. “What’s the matter?” she asked in earnest.

Parker lifted her head and tried to focus on and what the Wolf was saying. “I’m good, just moved to fast. I’ll be good in a minute once I’ve taken my meds.”

Remington looked at Parker suspiciously then shrugged. "Ok, I was just about to see what I can rustle up for breakfast. You interested?"

Managing to smile, Parker said, "Rustle up...an interesting choice of words...are you trying to be Annie Oakley?"

Remington looked at Parker and shook her head as a glimmer of a smile formed on her lips. "Smart ass." Not helping herself, she chuckled all the way to the kitchen.

Chapter Fourteen

Once Remington and Parker ate a breakfast of powdered eggs and crackers they went about the task of making passports and driver's licenses. Remington was somewhat surprised when Parker produced blanks of passports and Texas driver's licenses. From the intel on Parker Davis, Remington understood that in her prime she was one of DOCO's most resourceful and prolific agents. She recalled reading—*we can always rely on Davis to complete her assignments*—and wondered why her path took her down the road of a rouge agent. When headquarters told her they were sending Parker for the kill, she questioned the wisdom of that decision...

*

It had taken some doing but Remington was finally able to convince Olivia's partner, Amelia West, that she only wanted to visit her old friend. As they walked together, Amelia, cautioned her not to upset Olivia. "She's very fragile right now. If you upset her, I will ask you to leave."

"I have no intention of doing anything to upset or harm Olivia," Remington countered.

As they neared the door, Amelia whispered, "She doesn't know Parker is still alive—in her present condition having that knowledge might do more harm than good to her fragile ego. I must warn you, she isn't woman you once knew."

"I understand. I'll respect your wishes on all counts," Remington said as she opened the door. When she saw Olivia, she had to school her features to stop from gasping. The beautiful woman she once knew had sallow skin with sunken eyes. "Hey, Olivia, how are you doing?" she asked in an upbeat voice.

Olivia let out a low chuckle. "What's with your eyesight, Wolf? I look like hell. You, on the other hand, are as ravishing as ever. What brings you here?" Olivia looked at Amelia in the doorway and winked. "More importantly, how did you get by my ferocious guard dog?"

Remington swung around and gave a half smile as Amelia closed the door on them. "I heard on the grapevine something bad went down, what happened and how can I help?" Remington moved closer to her friend.

"Parker," Olivia replied flatly, "do you know her?"

"Not personally. I only know her by reputation—she's one of our top agents."

Olivia nodded. "That she was...we were partners at one time," Olivia said in a whimsical voice. "She was my first love. Some first love huh...she almost killed me."

Feigning ignorance, Remington said, "I didn't know that."

"She's dead...Amelia killed her." Olivia closed her eyes and sucked in a breath. "She didn't want to, of course, but she had no choice. I brought down the one true good person in my life to my level and all because of someone who I thought loved me." Lifting her eyes, she curled her lips sardonically and shrugged. "I don't think Parker ever got over me and that's why she..."

"She what," Remington urged.

"Kidnapped me, drugged me, and..." she sighed before she spoke again, "I really don't remember much of what happened but if the look of my body was anything to go by, she raped me. I have flashbacks of Parker being there with me and...how much I wanted her." She shrugged. "Amelia said it was because I thought I was back in the early days of our

relationship...it was always very physical.” Her eyes became distant, as she seemed to struggle with whether to continue. “Amelia told me that when she found us I fucked Parker in front of her.”

Remington watched various emotions flit across Olivia’s face. “Unbelievable. Is that when Parker was shot?”

Olivia shrugged again. “I don’t know...I have no recollection of what happened during that time. I can rely on what Amelia and the DOCO people told me...I believe what Amelia said. As for DOCO, I don’t have much confidence in what they tell me. Amelia’s love is too precious to squander on someone like me. I guess that’s what my drugged body thought.”

Remington could see the deep pain and hurt. The more she listened to what her old friend endured the more rage she felt toward the woman responsible—Parker Davis.

“I’m glad Parker’s dead,” Olivia said softly. “At least now she can’t hurt Amelia again. I wouldn’t want that.” Olivia’s tears began to fall. “I’d gladly murder her in cold blood and spend the rest of my life in prison if it meant I could spare Amelia the pain she feels for what she did.”

Remington moved closer and put an arm around Olivia—she felt so small and vulnerable. She held Olivia as she cried. “Let it and her go, Olivia. She’s dead and can’t harm you or Amelia ever again,” she whispered knowing it was a lie.

“I told you I would not allow you to upset her,” Amelia said opening the door and hurrying to Olivia’s side.

“She didn’t,” sobbed Olivia as Amelia placed a hand on her shoulder.

Amelia glared at Remington. “It’s time you left.”

Remington shrugged and patted Olivia’s shoulder. “I promise you that I won’t ever let someone like Parker in your life again...I’ll see to it my friend,” she said before she crossed the floor to the door.

*

With her eyes fixed on Parker, Remington’s brow furrowed as she tried to make a connection between the woman she saw and the one that abducted her friend. If she was honest, she saw none—she had come to her conclusion about Parker through innuendo and speculation. *She deserves better. Except I made a promise and if Parker ever tries to see Olivia, I will make good on it.*

“What’s got you so deep in concentration,” Parker asked as she handed the Wolf her passport.

Remington’s eyes opened wide. “When did you take this picture?”

Parker turned away. “When we were up on that hill.”

“I don’t recall you having a camera.”

“In the binoculars...got them from DOCO.” Parker sniffed. “I was coming back to the camp after repositioning one of the monitors and scanned the area for any sign of intruders. It was then that I saw you...it was a good shot and I knew we’d need one for your new passport.”

Green eyes looked at the picture again as Remington recalled that moment—she was contemplating if the plan they set in motion would cause either of their deaths. She remembered thinking if Parker died it would be a good thing followed by the hollow feeling of great loss. *I wish I could make sense of my conflicting emotions.* She allowed her shield of indifference to color her voice. “Good thinking.” There was no way she was going to let her emerging feelings for the woman to show.

*

By the middle of the afternoon, all the documents they would need to cross the border were completed. They had passports, driver's licenses, vehicle title, vehicle registration, insurance verification, along with a sticker that they would have gotten had they entered Mexico from the border. Remington had emptied the Hummer of all the equipment they used for the mission and stored it the safe room. The weapons they used, including the prototype sniper rifle were secure in the gun safe.

"Why don't we go back the way we came," Remington asked as she closed the gun safe. "That way we could take the prototype with us. I don't imagine DOCO will be thrilled we left it behind."

Parker gave the Wolf a weary smile. "The border will be crawling with Federalis—we can't risk it. The safest way is out in the open at the border crossing." She heaved a sigh that seemed to come from deep inside. "Right now my main objective is to get back to Texas and then go home. DOCO may not like their prototype in Mexico but, at this point, we have no other choice. If they want it they can come get it."

"They won't be happy and it will taint your chances with them," Remington pointed out.

She looked squarely into the Wolf's eyes. "I believe your exact words were, *there is no way you'll ever work for us again* so it would seem that I have no future with DOCO."

"Listen," Remington began, "you saved my life...I will make sure they know that..." Remington stopped in midsentence when she saw Parker's hand flatten on a table before she doubled over. "Are you ok?" she asked before the woman collapsed onto the floor.

Chapter Fifteen

Remington drummed her fingers on the steering wheel as she waited in a long line at the Juarez border crossing. The foot traffic was light as she watched the people on both the walkway and those who were moving between the vehicles hoping for a hand out. She glanced at Parker who was semiconscious in the seat next to her.

“Parker, you need to open your eyes and look alert when we get to the border.”

“I know,” slurred Parker as she tried to lift her head and open her eyes—she couldn’t.

Looking at Parker Remington shook her head. *She looks like hell.* She focused fifty yards ahead of the car and noted that several vehicles were off to the side as inspectors, with dogs, checked them out. Sitting up and squaring her shoulders she readied herself for the possible encounter with the border patrol. Over the years, she honed her abilities to remain cool and aloof regardless of the situation. Both she and Parker took great care in getting the Hummer ready for a possible inspection. They sprayed the entire vehicle with a chemical that neutralized any scent or sign of the firearms and bombs that once were there. The required documents were nearby and when she thought of them, she smiled. Parker attended to every detail with the documents down to making sure they looked and felt used. *The devil is in the detail*, Parker said as she muddled the Hummer. It was then that she knew why Parker was at one time the top DOCO agent.

Again, she looked at Parker. “Once we get across the border, what am I going to do with you?” she whispered. The woman had saved her life then risked her own to neutralize the cartel’s ability to carry out their planned hit.

As if she were reading Remington’s mind, Parker mumbled, “I need to go home.”

“Once we’re in El Paso tell me where your home is and I’ll take you there,” Remington said—it was the least she could do. *I’ll drop her off and then get back to my life.*

When the Hummer finally reached the booth, a tall, dark man wearing a border patrol uniform looked into the vehicle. “What’s wrong with her?”

Remington laughed. “Too much tequila.”

The uniformed man was not amused. “Are you American citizens?”

“Yes,” Remington said as she held their passports out.

Once the man looked at the documentation he gazed at Parker again and then his eyes scanned the inside of the Hummer. Someone said, *we found something in that old Toyota* and he turned his attention from Remington for a moment. He turned back to Remington and gave her the passports. “Move on.”

*

“You hungry,” Remington asked when she spotted a Short Stop. When Parker didn’t reply she pulled into the parking lot then drove to the order window. A short time later, with a bag of burgers and fries along with two diet cokes, Remington eased the vehicle into a parking spot. “Come on, Parker, you need to eat something.”

Parker opened her eyes and yawned. “I don’t know what’s wrong with me,” she whispered. She looked at the offered burger and smiled. “Thanks this is one of my favorite burger joints.”

“Eat up and let’s talk about getting you home while we do.” Remington took a sip of her soda and eyed Parker—she was eating and that was a good sign.

A full two minutes passed before Parker spoke. "I don't need your help I can make it on my own." She took a bite of her burger and chewed slowly before she said, "I'll take you back to Austin, get my car, and be on my way." Her dark eyes glared at the Wolf. "You'll be done with me—that should make you very happy."

Remington put on her face of cool indifference before her green eyes pierced Parker. "You're in no shape to drive anywhere. We'll get a flight out of El Paso International to your home. I will have your vehicle shipped to you there—that's easy enough to do with a train or a semi."

Parker gritted her teeth and was about to reply when pain slashed through her head. "Fuck," she screamed as she put the heel of her hand against her head. Her eyes narrowed as the pain intensified. "I don't need your help," she said in spite of the pain.

There was something about how Parker reacted with determination while in pain that made Remington's face soften. "Please, let me help you," she said before reaching across the console and touching Parker's arm. "You saved my life...let me help you now."

Closing her eyes, Parker wiped her hand across her face. "I'm too tired and in too much pain to argue with you." She opened her eyes and looked at the Wolf. With her voice laced with exhaustion and pain, Parker whispered, "What do I have to show for my life, Wolf?" She touched the scar on her head. "I need to go home."

"I will take you there," Remington said softly. "Finish eating then we can find hotel near the airport. You need to get some rest before we leave. I'll take care of all the details and get you home tomorrow...I promise."

Parker nodded then put her burger down. "I'm not very hungry. I think you are right about needing some sleep."

*

Remington quietly closed the door to the bedroom of the suite where they were staying. Parker fell asleep almost as soon as she crawled onto the bed. She had lingered at the door and watched while Parker tossed and turned. It was clear that the woman was failing and that thought made her sad.

Picking up the phone, she called DOCO. "This is Wolf, I am back in country."

"Excellent outcome to your last endeavor. Any casualties?" her handler said.

"No, both Davis and I are alive and well."

"Details."

Remington opened her mouth and was about to start rattling off all the pertinent information regarding the demise of the cartel's bosses but stopped in midsentence—something didn't feel right. When she began to speak again her voice took on a cold impersonal tone. "All the top people in the cartel along with a civilian, Javier Lumbardo—he most likely was there to take on Castellan's position. Each person taken down was positively identified before the kill."

"Where are you now?"

Again, Remington hesitated before speaking. "We are on the road heading west."

"Is Davis with you?"

"Yes," Remington answered as eyebrows creased and she rubbed behind her ear. "Davis did an exemplary job not only at the first target but in working with me to design a plan for the elimination of problem we encountered as a result of the first target." Her eyes traveled to the closed door. "I strongly recommend her reinstatement."

“We will take that under advisement.” The man cleared his throat. “Is that all you have to report?”

“Yes, I will give you all the details when I return.”

Ending the call, Remington couldn’t shake the feeling that something wasn’t as it should be. She looked at the closed bedroom door and wondered if what she was feeling for Parker Davis was the reason for the unsettling feeling she had. In the past, she never had time to delve into what she felt for a lover—she took what she wanted with little regard for what the other person felt. Her only goal was sexual relief. But somewhere along the way, Parker had gotten to her and made her care and that mystified her. Her cool uncaring façade was crumbling even as she was fighting to keep it intact. Yet, she somehow knew that wasn’t the reason for her disconcerting feelings.

She walked across the room and looked out the window at the planes taking off and landing as thoughts of Parker clouded her thinking. “There’s no way I will let her get to me. I know what she did to Olivia and I will not let that happen to me.” Yet, she could not reconcile the Parker she knew and the one that terrorized Olivia. Her mind flashed back to her old friend and the promise she made. “If she tries to see or get near Olivia I will have to kill Davis.” She felt butterflies in her stomach. “I will have no other choice.” Then as she rubbed behind her ear, it struck her—DOCO knew exactly where they were.

*

Parker slowly opened her eyes conscious of the fact that she was pain free. Cautiously she lifted her head then sat up. She looked around the room, which had all the amenities that a suite costing five hundred dollars a night would have. She recalled the house in Austin and shook her head. “The Wolf certainly knows how to live well.” She swung her legs off the bed, stood up, and listened—not a sound. “Wonder where she is?” Parker snorted a laugh. “Probably took off and left me here to pay for this place. No matter, I don’t need her.” She shrugged off the pang of sadness she felt and moved to the closed door—it flung open.

“We need to get out of here fast,” Remington said as she pushed clothes toward Parker. “But first we have to get rid of the chips.”

Confused, Parker took the clothes and started to put them on. “What’s going on?”

“My gut tells me that we’re in big trouble.”

Parker routed in a small black bag that she had taken from the safe house in Mexico. Every DOCO operative had a chip, similar to what pet owners have injected in their animals, embedded under their skin. It acted as a locator so DOCO could find their agents. The scanner would locate those chips.

After she pulled out a small device, she fixed her eyes on the Wolf. “You know once we take the chips out there will be no going back.”

Remington hesitated then said, “I know. We don’t have a choice.”

“How many chips?”

“One. Why would you think there would be more?”

Parker snickered. “I know I have two for sure.”

“How did you know there were two?” Remington asked as she dropped a chip into a bowl.

“When Olivia wanted to leave the company, they injected another chip into her—questionable agents get two.” She ran the small device over the Wolf’s body. “They don’t trust us,” she said solemnly. “Looks like you have only one.” She reached in her bag, took out a

scalpel, and made a small incision behind the Wolf's left ear. With tweezers, she gently pulled out the tracking chip. "Get me a glass from the bath room."

Fifteen minutes later, they had all their belongings in the Hummer and headed out of town. When they got to the outskirts of El Paso, they stopped at the first truck stop they saw.

"Why are you stopping?" Remington asked.

"I'll be right back," Parker said as she got out and sprinted for the convenience store. Moments later, she returned to the Hummer, started it up, and moved slowly around the building to where the semi-trucks parked. "This will buy us some time." She held up a roll of duct tape before she picked up the glass containing the small chips.

Remington smiled. "Brilliant move."

Once the tape with the chips was secure on the underside of a west bound truck, Parker got in the Hummer and laughed. "That should keep them guessing." She looked at the Wolf. "Where to now?"

"Your safe house."

Chapter Sixteen

They had driven for three hours when Parker gripped the wheel and groaned loudly as the Hummer swerved on the road. Pressing hard on the break, she managed to get the heavy vehicle to the shoulder. Resting her hand on her head, she cried out in pain. “God, I can’t believe the pain.”

Remington released her grip on the *oh shit* handle and reached out to Parker. “Let me drive,” she said softly.

With eyes filled with pain, Parker raised her head. “It’s the motion that seems to make it worse this time...everything seems to be rolling.”

Opening a road map, Remington looked to see where they were. “I see Fort Stockton is coming up let’s stop there for the night.” She shrugged. “With DOCO thinking we’re headed west we should be safe for the night.”

Parker undid her seatbelt and reached for the door handle. “I’m in too much pain to argue.” She got out of the vehicle and went around to the other side.

Remington gently squeezed Parker’s shoulder as they passed in front of the Hummer. Once back in the Hummer, she looked at Parker whose eyes were squeezed shut in pain. She picked up a bottle of water and handed it to Parker. “Here take one of your pills.”

Opening her eyes, Parker gave the Wolf a small smile, took the water, before she shook two Norco’s out of a pill bottle. “Thanks,” she whispered. “There’s a decent Hampton Inn up ahead.”

“Close your eyes...I’ll tell you when we get there.” Seeing Parker comply, Remington smiled before she narrowed her eyes. *We need to get a handle on her pain or we’re both dead.*

*

Parker opened her eyes, looked around the room, and frowned. “Where am I?” As her eyes focused on the paintings on the wall and the curtains covering the window, she knew she was in a hotel room. Her fingers touched the scar on her head that felt like a hot poker was searing her brain. She closed her eyes the opened them as she swung her legs off the bed and made her way to the closed door. When she stepped into the outer room, she was surprised to see the Wolf sitting at a table typing on a laptop. She frowned then looked around the room— packages were on the couch.

“How are you feeling?” Remington asked as she watched Parker’s expressive face.

Parker’s eyes fell back on the packages. “What’s that?”

Remington’s eyebrows lifted. “Are you feeling any better?” The look on Parker’s face was her answer—she was still in pain. “I thought we’d like some clean clothes. I also picked up a few toiletries to use until we get to your safe house.” Her eyes fell on Parker’s face. “Did you take more pain pills?”

Parker turned her head and gazed in the mirror above a dresser next to her. If she was honest—she looked like death warmed over. “I don’t want to take too many...I told you they make my mind fuzzy. Until we get to the house we both need to be on the top of our game.”

“You hungry?” Remington asked as she pushed back from the desk.

With eyes narrowing at the bright light in the room, Parker nodded. “Not really...I’m really thirsty.” She shrugged. “A side effect of the drugs.”

Remington moved closer to Parker. "You need something to eat."

Parker's forehead creased and her dark eyes narrowed as she stood almost toe to toe with the Wolf. "I don't need you to tell me what to do. You're not my mother," she bit out as the pain escalated.

Remington inched closer and let a small growl escape from her throat. "I don't need a liability. If you're in pain then your reactions are slower and *that* is a liability."

Parker smirked. "I've made it so far without a problem...I've got it under control so back off."

Standing so close that she could feel Parker's breath on her face, Remington said in a low ominous voice, "As long as you're working with me..."

For Parker, who prided herself on reading people and their body language, found the expression on the Wolf's face was unreadable. "What will happen to me?" she asked in a cool even tone.

Remington's eyebrow lifted. "I'll simply leave you here and go out on my own." She shrugged then inched forward so she was completely in Parker's personal space. "Is that what you want, Parker, to be left behind?"

Parker refused to let the Wolf intimidate her and moved so they were nose to nose. "I won't let you boss me around, Wolf."

A feral smile crossed Remington's face. "Don't take too long to figure out what you want to do."

After their standoff stretched to a minute, Parker blinked as she relaxed her shoulders and said, "Damn," before she pulled the Wolf close and gently kissed her. When she didn't feel resistance she encircled the Wolf in her arms and pulled her closer and deepened the kiss. Her tongue ran over the Wolf's pliant lips and they opened readily. At first, their kisses were unhurried until Parker's mouth and hands became increasingly insistent demanding and wanting more.

Remington pulled away, stepped back, and said. "This needs to stop right now."

Stepping forward, Parker reached for the Wolf who pushed her away. "Why are you doing that? I can tell you want me...you've always wanted me."

A humorless laugh filled the room. "You really are something else. Are you always this full of yourself?"

Parker grinned and moved in again. "Maybe you think you can hide your feelings but your kiss said you want more."

Remington shook her head and growled, "After what you did to Olivia there's no way I'd get involved with you."

With a snicker, Parker said, "There are always two sides to a story...maybe you should get them both before you make a judgment."

"Get over yourself, Parker, rape is rape."

Parker sat down and slipped on her boots before her eyes fixed on the Wolf. "Ask your pals at DOCO what went down...you might find it enlightening." Then she turned, went to the door, opened it, and walked out leaving the Wolf behind with her mouth opened.

*

Remington stared at the closed door for several minutes before she touched her lips—she could still feel Parker's lips on hers. She had wanted more from Parker but refused to let those

emotions rule her judgment. Parker Davis was a she-devil who would stop at nothing to get what she wanted—except for now. “There’s no way.” Yet, something in Parker’s voice that made her words—*What was DOCO’s role and why did they save her?*—rang true.

Sitting in front of her computer, Remington quickly made several key strokes then smiled. Part of her success within DOCO was her ability to hack into any computer, particularly the database, and extract information. She found the backdoor into DOCO’s mainframe and navigated to the section she was looking for—Parker’s file. Most of what she saw was about missions, psych evaluations, and other pertinent information—she downloaded the entire file then quickly back out without detection.

I should have done this before I ever agreed to let her on my team. She quickly scanned through the missions Parker worked on until she came to the one involving Olivia Santos. Just as Parker said, she was in Texas integrating herself into the cartel until ordered to bring Santos back into the fold. Remington’s eyes read the mission’s objective. *It is to the company’s advantage and best interest to have Olivia Santos return to her status as a DOCO operative. The primary mission is to break the hold Dr. Amelia West has on Santos, with any means available. As long as that relationship continues, we cannot bring Santos back into the company.* She frowned then read the passage again and the words, *with any means available*, screamed at her. She continued reading. *The plan to infiltrate Dr. West’s practice and lay the foundation for suspicion is a sound, well thought out strategy. In addition, Davis is to abduct Santos and do whatever is necessary to persuade her to return to DOCO. If necessary, Davis will terminate Dr. West.*

Blue eyes looked away from the monitor as Remington digested the information. “Was Parker driven by her fascination with Olivia or was she carrying out her orders.” Her eyes tracked back to the monitor. Her eyes widened when she read, *Estevez has compromised the operation and we’ve ordered his termination.* At the bottom of the page she read, *Operation failed when Dr. West intervened and shot Davis. We have Davis in a private facility—status questionable.* Remington had worked for DOCO long enough to realize that there was the definite possibility that Parker was carrying out orders in her dealings with Olivia. The question—*did she have an ulterior motive?*

The psych evaluation of Parker fascinated Remington. Parker Davis is highly intelligent and excels in her thought process to recognize a situation, evaluate various scenarios, and have a viable solution. She is a narcissist driven by her need to excel and will do whatever is necessary to achieve that end. She will compromise her self-imposed set of rules if it is to her advantage. Davis does not seem to recognize that she has boundaries and that those around her are not merely extensions of herself. That makes it easy for her to assimilate into a group and become one of them while she remains unique. It is my determination that this quality alone will make her an excellent candidate along with her unrivaled ability as a problem solver, will make Davis an outstanding DOCO agent. The last psych eval had her reeling. Due to the head injury, subsequent amnesia, and recovery, the qualities that made Davis an excellent agent have diminished to such a degree that it is doubtful she will ever be effective again. It is my determination that she can no longer function at her previous level. Terminate.

“Why did they send her to me? Why hasn’t she been terminated?” Remington felt a shiver run up her spine. She always thoroughly vetted everyone who joined her team but for some reason she hadn’t done that in Parker’s case. *That is so unlike me but everything was escalating to the point that I needed her expertise as soon as she got there.* She shrugged as she considered the effect of her assumptions had on her feelings toward the woman. If she was truthful, what she

heard from Olivia had colored everything she thought about Parker. From what she'd heard from other agents, the assessment wasn't too far off the mark.

The word *terminate* floated into her consciousness and she trembled.

Going back to her computer, she retraced her steps back into the DOCO mainframe. Her fingers hesitantly typed, Ava Dupree followed by Peter McCrea, and Tom Edwards—all had terminate by their names. Then she typed Remington Wolf and gulped down fear as she waited for her file to appear. She held her breath as the cursor moved down the document until she came to the last entry. *Although the successfully elimination of Carlos Castellan, the mission is deemed a failure. It brought Wolf to the forefront of the assassins thereby creating the need to eliminate all the heads of the various divisions of the cartel. Now, we have to restart the mission reinstating our agents within the crime family. Recommendation: Terminate.* Remington's mouth opened then closed as she looked around the room—she knew what she had to do.

*

Parker walked for almost an hour in a light mist that covered her but did not quench her anger. She was attracted from the first time she saw her and their shared kisses said the Wolf was into her too. The confusing thing—why the negative response from the woman. Once she learned that Olivia and the Wolf were friends—perhaps more—she understood some of the suspicions. “If she read the file on the mission involving Olivia, surely she would believe what she read there.” Finding a bench by a bus stop she sat down then scratched her head. “She doesn't have to know everything just the surface stuff in the report.” Rubbing the scar on her head, she felt the pain gnawing for recognition.

Her thoughts turned to a time weeks earlier when she watched Olivia and that bitch Amelia West as they played in a park with two young children...

*

She knew who the girls were—Dan Estevez's kids. For a long time she watched the scene unfold paying particular attention to Olivia's interaction with the girls. She couldn't deny the difference she saw in her ex-lover—Olivia was happy and relaxed. “Why couldn't you have that with me, O?” she whispered as she swung her binoculars to the other woman there. As pain, the result of the bullet that the woman inflicted on her, escalated she snarled. “Why O, why her?” In the lucidity that her pain often caused, Parker knew that she'd never be with Olivia again.

*

Parker stood up and cast her eyes back to the direction she came from. “It's time I moved on.” Nodding her head, she began to walk quickly toward to the hotel before she took off in an all out run.

*

When Remington heard the keycard in the door, she picked up the hand gun she purchased earlier that day and held it in her lap. She watched as the door swung open and Parker Davis

appeared in the doorframe. Once the woman was inside the room with the door closed, Remington pointed the gun at her.

“What’s that about?” Parker stopped her forward motion as her eyes searched for safety.

“I won’t let you terminate me, Davis. I’ll kill you first.”

Parker held up both hands. “If I wanted to terminate you, Wolf, don’t you think I would have done it by now?” The Wolf’s eyes were cold and her expression unreadable—Parker took a step backward as she saw a finger tighten on the trigger. “Wait, Wolf, stop and think about it...I saved you. Why would I do that if I was ordered to terminate you?”

Remington’s lip lifted in a sneer. “So you knew about the termination orders?”

“NO, all I was told was to take out Castellan. What’s going on, Wolf?”

Since Parker had already voiced what she was thinking, Remington lowered the gun and let it and her hand rest in her lap. “Come and look at this.”

Parker cautiously made her way to the Wolf. Her eyes looked at the laptop monitor where the Wolf was pointing.

“Read this.” Remington watched the expression on Parker’s face while she read and once the woman lifted her eyes she clicked to another page. “And this.”

After reading all the reports, Parker said, “Jesus, what the hell is going on? Who is making all these decisions?” She shook her head and captured the Wolf’s eyes. “I can see them wanting to terminate me. I fucked up big time on my job to bring Olivia back to DOCO, but you...I’ve heard only praise about your prowess from everyone including the higher ups.”

For several minutes, Remington studied Parker before she pushed back from the desk and stood up. “We need to get out of here and get to your safe house.”

Chapter Seventeen

For the next four hours, Remington and Parker rode in silence except for the casual comment about the landscape and the hour. Behind them, the sun was setting turning the horizon into a deep rich gold with blood red tendrils reaching for the darkening blue above. Parker navigated the Hummer down route ten until she turned right onto a two lane road. After fifteen minutes, she pulled the Hummer onto the wide shoulder of the road in front of the gate to her safe house. After deactivating the alarms, set when they left, she jumped out and moved quickly to the gate and released the chain that a padlock held in place. Back in the vehicle, she pressed a button and the gate swung open. After closing the gate and reattaching the chain and padlock, they continued toward the house.

"It's good that we came here," Remington said as the vehicle rolled to a stop. "We need to find out the why there are all those terminations." She put her hand on the handle, opened the door, and then looked back at Parker. "It will take all the cunning we both have. Are you up to the challenge?"

Dark eyes rested on the Wolf as grinding teeth made her jaw flex. "Are you?" Parker challenged. "You might not like what you find."

Remington considered the question. "You're right...I might not like what I find. At the same time, I'm under no illusion that I'm invaluable to DOCO." She turned and began to exit the Hummer only to turn back to Parker and say, "If push came to shove, they'd kill me without a second thought." She snorted softly. "That applies to you too."

Parker digested the words as the Wolf got out. "You're right," she whispered, "I know that first hand."

"Then, let's find out what's going on," Remington said before closing the door.

*

Once Parker put all the security in place, she turned to the Wolf. "Can you hack into the DOCO mainframe and download all the pertinent information?"

"It will take some time but yes, I can do that. It will require lowering the defenses."

Parker grinned. "Not with the set-up I have."

Remington narrowed her eyes. "I thought you said when we were here before that in order to communicate you needed to shut down the security."

"You're right, I did." Parker shrugged. "I didn't know you then."

"So that was a lie?"

"A necessary one. The cartel was after you and after your first contact with DOCO, it didn't seem they were going to give you the essential support you needed."

Nodding her head slightly, Remington's green eyes fixed on Parker and her body language. "Is it true?" she asked. "Were you merely following orders when you kidnapped Olivia?"

Parker squared her shoulders and straightened her back as she looked directly at the Wolf's eyes. "It would be so easy to say yes but we both know that isn't the truth...right?" Once she saw a slight nod of the Wolf's head, she continued. "My assignment was to break up Olivia and Amelia and bring O back to DOCO...I made it personal. What I did to Olivia was appalling and I can't take it back...ever." Her eyes held the green ones. "In the looney bin for all those months

I had a lot of time to think about what I did to someone I professed to love and how I could make it better. I wanted to find O and tell her I was sorry.”

Remington cringed. “And what good would that do? She thinks you are dead.”

“I know,” Parker whispered. “I did go back there...to Portsmouth...and found her in a park that we often went to when we were together. She was with Amelia and two small girls—Dan’s girls.” She chewed at her lower lip then said, “DOCO got wind of his communications with Amelia to warn her about me and what would happen.” She shrugged. “They gave me no options—I terminated him.”

“Because you didn’t want him to reveal what you were up to?”

Parker shook her head. “No...well sort of...if I didn’t do it I knew DOCO would take him out and kill me too.” She released the Wolf’s eyes. “O looked so happy. She was rested and relaxed—even in our early days together I never saw that look—it was then that I knew it was over.” Her eyes rested back on the Wolf’s face. “There’s nothing I can do or say to take back what I did to her.” She rubbed her head. “This constant pain is my punishment.” She shrugged. “Somehow it doesn’t seem enough. When I saw you lying in that limo bleeding heavily and close to death, I had two choices. I could take the money and run or help you. For the first time in a very long time I did the right thing.” She looked past the Wolf. “Perhaps in some small way I vindicated myself.”

Sardonic laughter filled the safe room. “You’re kidding right? Helping me will *never* erase what you did.”

“I became what I swore I’d never become,” Parker whispered as she ran her hand over her face. “I’ll leave you to it. Use whatever you need in here. I’m exhausted and am going to lie down...we can discuss what to do in the morning.” She turned away from the Wolf and left the room.

*

Remington sat in front of a large widescreen monitor as she worked her way into the DOCO mainframe before she downloaded the files. She’d spent the last hour trying to stop Parker’s confession from taking over her every thought. As she talked, Parker’s voice and body language conveyed sincerity and genuine shame over what she had done. *Is it just another ploy to gain sympathy from me?* Again she tried to reconcile the Parker she’d come to know over the last several weeks and the one that was little more than an animal.

As her eyes scanned the monitor, a vision of Parker sitting on the ground high above La Casa del Canon filtered through to her consciousness. She remembered how beautiful she thought Parker was and the stirrings of arousal that begged for acknowledgment. If she were honest, she had been attracted to the woman from the first time she saw her picture many years earlier. Fighting for equal billing was the look on Olivia’s face as she related what Parker did to her. *How can I ever forget that?*

Three hours later Remington’s weary eyes widened as she began seeing a pattern emerging. “Unbelievable.” Her hand navigated the mouse through a dozen other files before she sat back in the chair and tried to make sense of what she found. “If this is true I’m in a shit load of trouble...Parker too.” Her mind was too fatigued to think coherently about what to do. She pushed back from the desk and stood up. “Tomorrow I’ll figure out what to do.” A vision of Parker surfaced and she sighed. “If I’m going to pull this off I’ll need her help.”

Chapter Eighteen

Parker opened her eyes, stretched, and inhaled the smell of freshly brewed coffee. The nightmares she usually experienced never materialized and she slept better than she had in a long time. In spite of DOCO's termination order she felt safe and she credited the Wolf for that. She got out of the bed and headed for the bathroom before she made her way to the kitchen.

Standing at the small bar between the kitchen and the common area, she watched the Wolf standing in front of the stove. The feelings that the scene caused were unmistakable—arousal. “Good morning,” she said as she moved closer to the woman at the stove.

Hearing Parker's voice, Remington turned slightly and immediately averted her eyes as her body reacted in pleasure. “How are you feeling this morning?” she asked as she quickly turned back to the stove and the cooking scrambled eggs.

Parker stood so close to the Wolf that she could feel the heat radiating from her body. Inching closer so their shoulders and hips touched, she said, “It was a good night for me what about yourself?”

Putting her cold and indifferent façade in place, Remington took a step, broke the contact with Parker's body, and immediately wanted it back. “Grab yourself a cup of coffee and once we've eaten I need you to look at what I found in the DOCO files.”

*

“Are you certain this is correct?” asked Parker after she read the Wolf's analysis.

“I ran it again this morning and the results were the same.” Remington leaned across Parker and tapped on the computer screen. “His name is attached to every one of the termination orders. In all, I'd estimate there are about thirty names marked for extermination—my crew isn't included in that.”

“How do you know he was the one who actually did it?” Parker shrugged as she looked directly at the Wolf's face. “You hacked into their system so why couldn't someone else?”

Remington laughed. “The DOCO security system is one of the best I've ever seen therefore it isn't something that just anyone could hack.” She bit her lip. “There can't be more than one maybe two people in the world that could do what I did.”

“Why?”

“There's a lot of misdirection in the code that makes a hacker go round in circles then back to where they came in. The real backdoor is cleverly hidden in an inconsequential code—I know because I put it there.”

Parker nodded and moved so her arm was touching the Wolf's arm. “So, the information is correct...what now...how do we bring Director Berkowitz down? Is there anyone in DOCO that you trust?”

Once she removed her arm from the contact with Parker, Remington stood up. “At this point I'm not sure. I trusted my team and they are all gone.”

“What about Edwards? He was still alive when I left him.”

Remington shook her head, set her jaw, and let out a growl. “He died when the others did.”

Parker frowned. “That can't be. His left arm was bleeding but it didn't look serious.”

“The crime scene photos show him with a bullet hole between his eyes.” Remington looked at Parker. “He was executed—did you kill him?”

Anger flared in Parker's eyes as she stood up and went toe to toe with the Wolf. "Again, if I was the assassin sent to eliminate your team you would be dead by now. In case you've forgotten my name is on the terminate list too."

Green eyes pierced the dark ones and saw only truth. "Berkowitz isn't in this alone," Remington said as she paced the floor. "We need to find out who else is involved."

Parker's eyes never left the Wolf as she watched as she restlessly moved around the small room like a caged animal. "There always is a paper or computer trail. If we find that and follow it we will know who that is."

Remington stopped and looked at Parker. "That's true as long as they haven't deleted them." She looked at the equipment in the room. "Unless his mail is on the DOCO server...there's no way I could do that from here." She squeezed her lower lip between her thumb and forefinger and pulled on it as she contemplated various scenarios.

"I think the logical link to Berkowitz is the cartel," Parker said before green eyes fixed on her.

A genuine smile crossed Remington's face. "Of course. We know that someone from DOCO was working with the cartel." She did a slight shrug before adding, "I'm willing to bet that the cartel's computer security isn't anywhere near as sophisticated as DOCO's is."

*

It didn't take long for Remington to gain access to one of the cartel's servers. Or, to find that not only did Berkowitz communicate with Carlos Castellán, but he also was a high ranking member of the organization.

"This put a whole new spin on this mess," Remington said as she leaned back in her chair. "The question is, what side is Berkowitz on. If he's infiltrated the organization for DOCO our outing him could do serious damage." She blew out a long breath. "If he isn't, then we need to stop him from ordering the termination of other operatives."

"You know, there's a simple fix—terminate him."

Remington lifted her face and looked at Parker. "I guess that would take care of the problem. Too bad, we left that sniper rifle in Mexico. It would've come in handy."

Parker grinned. "It's in the back of the Hummer."

With a quizzical look, Remington said, "No way. Do you know what would have happened if they searched the vehicle when we crossed the border?"

"I knew we wouldn't be stopped—we don't fit the profile."

"Nevertheless, it was a fool hardy thing to do. You can't keep doing this, Parker."

"Doing what, Wolf? Trying to make sure that we have the necessary equipment to defend ourselves. That hardly seems reckless to me."

Remington narrowed her eyes and lowered her voice. "You can't go off half-cocked on your own with complete disregard for the consequences, Parker. How many times do you have to land in hot water before you get the message?" She put her hands on Parker's shoulders and shook her. "That is exactly why you have those headaches...all you had to do was follow orders and Dr. West never would have shot you."

Parker shrugged the hands off her shoulders and advanced in a threatening manner only to take a step back when she saw the look on the Wolf's face. "You're right, I'm nothing but a fuck-up and I take complete responsibility for everything that has happened to me, Wolf." She lowered her eyes as her shoulders slumped.

In an uncharacteristic move, Remington engulfed Parker in her arms and held her close. “Just think before you do,” she whispered.

Parker let her head rest on the Wolf’s shoulder as her body relaxed into the comfort she felt. She tried to remember the last time she let someone comfort her in a nonsexual manner—only her mother came to mind. Reluctantly, she pushed away from the hug before she made eye contact with the Wolf. She swallowed hard then said, “How certain are you that no one else in DOCO is connected to Berkowitz?”

“I’m not,” Remington said without skipping a beat. “That’s why termination is the only option.”

“Where do they think you are now?”

“I suppose they think I’m on my way back to headquarters.” Remington laughed. “Or heading west in a big rig.”

“Where did you tell them I’d be?”

“I didn’t.” Remington saw a look of panic cross Parker’s face. “What’s wrong?”

“My family...will they go after them?”

Remington frowned. “Why on earth would you think that? I’m certain they think you and I are both going back to the east coast and headquarters.”

Parker let out a snort and shook her head. “Maybe...I was at my parent’s farm before I left for Texas. It wouldn’t be a stretch to think I’d go back there. With the termination order out on me they will be watching for me to show up there.”

For a minute, Remington watched various facial expressions cross Parker’s face. “We will not let that happen, Parker.” She touched her arm. “I doubt they will go to the farm...like I said they are expecting us to show up there. Trust me ok?”

“It would be best for everyone if I make myself out to be a sitting duck and let them terminate me.” With that said, she turned and left the room as green eyes followed her.

Chapter Nineteen

The door closed quietly as Parker walked out of the house determined not to look back. She was convinced that she had put her family, the only people who she knew would always love her, in danger and that emphasized just how messed up her life was. She had finally voiced all her misdeeds along with her fears and doubts to the Wolf and cold indifference was her reward. The hot sun beat down on her as she walked away vowing not to let anyone—the Wolf in particular—see just how vulnerable she was.

“When did my hopes and dreams turn to this?” she voiced as she kicked a rock across the arid land that was much like her life—desolate and bleak.

Parker continued to walk as her thoughts replayed her life—she didn’t much like what she did and where it took her.

*

She had left her parent’s farm to attend college to get a criminal justice degree—she always wanted to be in law enforcement for as long as she remembered. She excelled in all aspects of college and found herself with a job in a one horse town as a deputy. The chief, Conrad Hopkins, had been a NYC police captain before he moved his family to the sleepy little town of Hamilton. The man had taught her more about the practical side of police work than any college course ever did. When she left the Hamilton Police, her goal was to head for New York City and join the NYPD, but her Mustang broke down and she was short of funds to pay for the repairs. That led to her joining the Portsmouth Police Department and her fascination with Olivia Santos.

To Parker, Olivia was everything she’d ever dreamed of in a woman, a lover, and a partner. Their partnership on the job and off was both fiery and passionate. Never before in her life had she felt so connected to someone—she was so captivated that she wanted to be around Olivia twenty-four-seven. Then it all went sour, Olivia began to move away from her. No matter what she did or tried, she felt the coldness in Olivia’s heart and in her body—that was unacceptable. Then, after Olivia murdered the district attorney for killing her brother, Parker lost her completely. It wasn’t until years later when she joined DOCO that she discovered that Olivia was working for them. It was then that she started dreaming of ways to get Olivia back—a bullet in the head at the hand of Olivia’s new lover was her reward.

*

Parker kicked another rock. “I’ve really fucked everything in my life up.” She looked back at the house and it wasn’t more than a speck. Her mind tracked to the Wolf. “Wonder if she misses me?” She shook her head and continued on the path she began until she stopped dead in her tracks.

*

Remington watched the monitor in front of her with her mouth agape. “Can that really be?” She looked at the time in the corner of the screen and frowned—Parker had been gone for almost

two hours. “Wonder where she went?” She looked in Parker’s bedroom and frowned when she wasn’t there. A sudden chill made her rub the back of her neck where the hairs were standing straight up. A furrow deeply creased the space between her eyebrows as she walked quickly toward the back door. “I heard her leave,” she said as she opened the door and stepped outside. The heat was overpowering and she shaded her eyes as they scanned the horizon—Parker was nowhere in sight. Remington went back inside, picked up a hat, water bottle, binoculars, and for good measure slid her Glock in the back of her jeans. Then following her instincts, she began walking briskly out toward the vast horizon.

The intense brutal heat slowed her pace as she kept moving toward the west. Stopping, she brought the binoculars to her eyes and searched for Parker—nothing. Her gut told her that she was going in the right direction as she took a gulp of the water before she picked up her pace as a feeling of urgency overwhelmed her. She stopped the third time and scanned the arid land in front of her. She saw Parker standing stock still as a coyote had her backed up against scrub. In an all out run, Remington took off holding her gun in the air squeezing off rounds as screamed at the beast. When she got closer, she saw that the coyote running away and slowed down to a brisk walk until she reached Parker.

The woman had her shirt tied around her head and was standing there in her sports bra and jeans—sweaty. Remington held out the water bottle and Parker took it and gulped down the water. “Not so fast,” Remington said. “What the hell are you doing way out here without water?”

Vacant eyes looked at the woman who had just come to her rescue. “I didn’t realize how far I’d gone. I was on my way back when my friend decided to visit.” Her dark eyes fixed on the Wolf’s green eyes. “Thank you. I figured I might be able to take him but once he started howling I knew his friends would soon join him.” She looked around. “We should get back to the house before the pack gathers...we’re sitting ducks out here.”

*

Back inside the comfortable adobe dwelling, Remington said, “Get cooled down then we need to discuss what I’ve discovered.” She looked at Parker who downed her second glass of water. After all the time together, Remington could spot the facial features that told her Parker was in extreme pain—this was such a time. Fighting the urge to hug and take care of the woman, Remington said, “You better take your meds,” in a low growl, then added, “When you get yourself together I’ll be waiting for you in the safe room.” She squared her shoulders and left without looking at Parker.

With a quizzical expression mixed with agony, Parker’s eyes tracked Remington’s departure as her hand cupped her head. The fact that the Wolf had come to find her and rescued her was not lost on her. “If my head didn’t hurt so much I’d make a move on her.” She let a small smile crease her lips before it turned to a grimace. “I need my meds,” she slurred as she got up and headed for her room.

*

Remington didn’t look up from the monitor when she heard Parker enter the room. “Are you going to be able to focus on what I have to tell you?” she asked in a cold indifferent tone. “If you’re not a hundred percent I don’t want your input or help.”

Parker's eyes narrowed. "Look, I can run rings around you at fifty percent so don't go getting all high and mighty with me, Wolf. She crept closer to the Wolf. "Show me what you have?"

With irritation and anger bubbling just below the surface, Remington pointed to the screen. "Over the last two years, teams have been systematically terminated and replaced with who I believe are members of the Castellan Cartel. Director Berkowitz was directly involved in each termination order."

Parker frowned. "I can't believe he did all that and no one in the organization caught on."

"My thinking exactly," Remington said as she tapped on a name. "The other person involved is Dana Bordello." She looked at Parker. "Do you know who that is?"

Shaking her head, Parker said, "Not a clue."

Remington ground her teeth before she rubbed her face hoping the action would stop the threatening headache. "Your take?"

"I don't see we have any option but to terminate them both."

"I agree." She lifted her eyes and fixed them on Parker. "We need a strategy."

Chapter Twenty

Parker and Remington lay on their stomachs side by side under an awning on a rooftop three quarters of a mile from their targets. Their sniper rifles held in place on tripods as they adjusted the sites to compensate for wind speed, trajectory, and the natural curve of the earth.

“Wind speed, calm with gust to three miles per hour...that’s negligible,” Parker said as her rifle automatically adjusted.

“On target,” Remington said as had the person named Dana Bordello in the rifles cross hairs.

“Steady,” Parker softly said as her finger wrapped around the trigger. She watched as Director Berkowitz shook hands with each of the new cartel bosses—her site set on his temple. “Now,” she growled as she squeezed the trigger and watched as seconds later the director’s head exploded. She swung her rifle to see the same fate befall Dana Bordello.

Without words, they quickly and efficiently gathered their equipment and left the rooftop leaving nothing behind to identify them. Once they arrived at the panel truck, they tucked their equipment inside before they got in and Parker drove casually away from the building—their targets eliminated.

*

It had taken a month of intense surveillance before Parker and Remington found the perfect time and place to take out Berkowitz and Bordello. During that time both women fell into a comfortable camaraderie that grew out of a common need. Often, late at night when they were at the safe house, they would sit out on the porch and listen to the sounds of the desert night. Coyotes that had once cornered Parker, howled but never ventured close enough to see.

Over that time, despite her growing attraction to the Wolf, Parker held her libido in check—the stakes were too high to compromise the mission with a sexual liaison. Yet, each night when she retired, she would lie in her bed and fantasize that they were making love. Often the feelings her dreaming evoked were so overpowering that she would get up and go after the object of her desires only to stop. At last, she realized that going *all in* as she did with Olivia had dire consequences. Where Olivia caused immediate arousal that bordered on reckless, the Wolf caused a smoldering desire that she knew if acted upon would be earth shattering in its intensity.

Often she would catch the Wolf looking at her with what she identified as want and need. When Parker attempted to illicit more from the woman, she received cold indifference. Yet, she had seen the look many times before and knew it was only a matter of time before they would deepen their relationship—the Wolf would be hers.

*

Now, driving the van sitting so close to the Wolf, Parker could feel the warmth emanating from her body. “We need to monitor the chatter,” she said as her eyes watched the road ahead. She chinned at the police vehicle and the ambulance that sped through the upcoming intersection. “Right on schedule I see.”

Remington nodded. “We’ve got to ditch his van.”

"I will. Once we get out of town and back to the apartment I'll take care of it," Parker said as she stopped at the curb for a police car that screamed past them. "It doesn't look like they're looking for us."

"Not yet." Remington rubbed her forehead. "Once they see the caliber we used they will expand their search." She looked out the window. "It will then only be a matter of time before they find that rooftop."

"No way will they link anything back to us." Parker turned the van's steering wheel sharply and headed away from the crime scene and out of town. "We left that place clean."

Remington turned her head and looked directly at Parker. "I've seen a case turn on clean so don't get cocky—we're not in the clear yet."

Parker knew the truth of the words. It wouldn't have taken long for DOCO to discover that their tracking chips were gone. The question—would they connect the dots—would they know who killed Berkowitz and Bordello? "We'll be back to the apartment in five minutes then we will find out."

*

Sitting next to Parker, Remington scanned through all the sites she knew DOCO operatives frequented. Most surprising—her name and password still worked. Pushing back in her chair, she turned to Parker. "Nothing."

"Hmm, maybe it's too soon."

Remington gave Parker a sharp look. "You can't possibly believe that."

Parker lifted one shoulder and looked away. "I'm getting myself a cup of coffee you want one?"

"No thanks."

Looking at the unyielding profile of the Wolf, Parker let out a small snort before she left the room. "Suit yourself."

Remington heard the clanging of a coffee cup and looked toward the door. *What's with me lately? The mission was a success so why am I so distracted.* Her eyes tracked beyond the door and waited for the return of the woman she had worked closely with over the last six weeks. Parker Davis was a paradox—what she had heard about the woman was completely different from the person she now knew. When she saw Parker start to enter the room, her stomach did a flip and she felt the stirrings of arousal. Shaking her head to rid her mind of her x-rated thoughts, she scowled. "Something is not right. We need to figure out what it is and how it affects us."

Once she put her coffee cup on the table holding the monitor, Parker sat down and scooted the chair closer to the Wolf.

With their shoulders a hair's breadth from touching, it took every ounce of resistance for Remington not to forget everything and kiss Parker. *I won't let her get to me that way.* Clearing her throat, she said, "There is absolutely no chatter about them—that fact alone speaks volumes." She moved the cursor and the screen changed to a different page. "There's nothing in any news source about the shootings."

With her fingers tapping on her coffee cup, Parker nodded then said, "I'll get rid of the van...we need to stay put until we figure out what's going on."

"I've resisted calling anyone since this all started...I have one contact I can call for information." Remington picked up the phone only to have Parker's hand cover hers. "Don't."

"If you're wrong, we're both dead."

Remington yanked her hand and the receiver free. "I'm not wrong."

"They why haven't you called this person before this?"

With her jaw set, her voice low and ominous, Remington said, "I don't need to answer to you."

Parker moved so she was within an inch of Remington's face. "My life is on the line too so yes you do."

Ignoring the words, Remington dialed the number and waited. "It takes one to know one," she said into the receiver. After hearing the response, she said, "Only if it rains tomorrow." When she heard the appropriate response she said, "Tell me everything." When Remington hung up, she looked at Parker and grinned. "It seems that we did DOCO a favor by eliminating Berkowitz and Bordello."

Chapter Twenty-one

Parker traded the panel truck for a Jeep Cherokee, which the two women loaded with all their equipment before they headed back to the safe house.

“Once we secure the rifles and the other equipment, we can head off on our separate ways,” Parker said after she finished pumping gas. “I figure we have about another hour and a half before we get there.” She turned briefly to look at the Wolf. “Did you make your reservations to go back to DC?”

Remington rotated her head and looked out the window—she didn’t want Parker to see her face. “No,” she said softly. “I need to wind down first.”

“Yeah, I know how that is,” said Parker before she added, “do you want to stay at the house or are you going elsewhere?” she asked holding her breath.

With her eyes focused on the passing landscape, Remington whispered, “I’d like to stay at the house if it is ok with you.” The words were out of her mouth before she could stop them and she let out a low growl. *God, when did I become so pathetic?* She was dog tired and she didn’t want to acknowledge her emotions that were swirling around her non-stop.

The words from the Wolf made Parker smile. “I’d like that.” She laughed. “Do you think we’ll know what to do with all the free time?”

Smiling herself, Remington looked at her traveling companion. “Maybe we can work up a detailed plan about how we will relax,” she said with a chuckle. “It’s been a long time since I’ve had time to just chill and read a book or something.” The truth of her words hit Remington square in the jaw and she flinched at the blow. Absently she said, “I’ve been so caught up in murder and mayhem that I forgot there is more to life than that.” She then resumed her observation of the landscape passing by—the discussion was over.

*

The interior of the house was cool as both Parker and Remington entered through the front door. Parker could feel her shoulders relax and the headache that was her constant companion seemed to give up some of its hold over her. Turning to look at the Wolf, Parker noticed the exhaustion along with something she couldn’t quite figure out on her face. She heard the Wolf’s comment about *murder and mayhem* and knew exactly what she meant. She unconsciously rubbed her head. The words described her before the bullet in her head made her stop and eventually reevaluate her life. If she were truthful, the three missions over the last six weeks didn’t illicit the same thrill that similar tasks had before the shooting.

“You look beat,” Parker said. “Why don’t you sit down and rest and I’ll get everything unloaded.”

Remington looked into Parker’s eyes and saw genuine concern. “I could stubbornly refuse and tell you that you are crazy but the truth is...,” she rubbed a hand across her face. “I never thought I’d say this, but I’m out of steam.” She looked at Parker and smiled. “You don’t look that much better...why not leave the unpacking until later.”

Parker regarded the comment feeling her shoulders relax even more. “Want a beer?”

“Sounds good. What do you say I take you to the diner in town later for an early evening hamburger?”

Laughing, Parker put her hand over her heart. “Be still my heart...,” she laughed, “they actually do have one hell of a good burger. You’re on.”

With one smooth motion, Remington fell into a leather chair and sighed at the comfort. For all the time she’d spent in the adobe house she had never sat on any of the furniture and she wondered why. *Oh, yeah I had to figure out how to get my ass out of the mess the assassination of Castellan caused.* Her eyes tracked to the woman reentering the room and she felt something she hadn’t felt in a long time—an affinity to another person. She watched Parker approach her and smiled. Taking the offered cold bottle of beer she said, “Thanks.”

Parker flopped onto the couch and she too sighed at the comfort it afforded her. She laughed. “No one’s after us, we have no directors out to end our lives, so what do we do now.”

“Good question.”

*

Remington woke and her eyes cautiously glanced around the room. Parker was sitting on the couch reading a book. She felt a light blanket covering her body as panic filled her mind and body. There never was a time that she could remember when she’d let her guard down and fell asleep while another was awake. Not even on that hill where she and Parker lay in wait to assassinate the cartel leaders, had she slept so deeply—it simply wasn’t in her nature. Yet, for some unknown reason she had fallen into a deep sleep that let her be vulnerable. When she heard Parker speak, she shook her head and looked at the woman.

“You’re awake,” Parker said with a lilt in her voice.

“What time is it?” Remington inquired as she pushed the blanket off and sat up straight.

“Just a little before six.”

Closing her eyes and running a hand across her face, Remington said, “Morning?”

Parker laughed. “No, early evening. You slept about three hours.” Looking directly into the Wolf’s eyes, she saw what she suspected was panic. “I wouldn’t let anyone harm you.”

Remington rolled her shoulders, stretched slightly, and let her in command exterior show. Yet, she still felt vulnerable—Parker made her feel that way.

With her stomach growling loudly, Parker smiled and rubbed her palm over it. “I remember you saying something about taking me out to the diner. Is that still on?”

She knew she should say no, that she should gather all her belongings, and get as far away from Parker Davis as she could. Instead, she stood up and smiled at the woman. “Yeah, I’m starving.”

*

“You were right, Parker, this burger is amazing...thick juicy and not overcooked.” Remington smacked her lips. “And these fries are so good. I bet they use lard.”

Parker laughed. “I think you’re right about that.” She let her eyes rest on the Wolf’s face taken again by her beauty. “Any idea of what you’re going to do next?” she asked.

Remington put her hamburger down on the plate and shook her head. “Not a clue.”

Knowing she was on thin ice, Parker said, “I don’t think I want to work for DOCO again.” She bit the inside of her cheek then swallowed hard. “I imagine that all you and I have been through over the last few weeks might be a positive note for DOCO, but...”

“But...”

In a soft voice, Parker said, "I don't think I can do the job." She rubbed the scar on her head and looked away—she didn't want to see the look of contempt on the Wolf's face.

When she reached across the table and took Parker's hand, it surprised her. When the woman's hand stiffened then relaxed into hers, Remington said, "In the last month or so working with you I never doubted your abilities. In fact, I think we made a good team." She squeezed Parker's hand slightly before she let go.

Parker snorted before she let out a humorless chuckle. "We both know I'm a fuckup and I suspect DOCO knows that too. After what we just did without their sanction I'm fairly certain they don't want me back." She fixed her dark gaze on the Wolf's blue eyes. "You on the other hand, are a valuable commodity...they probably think I somehow coerced you into working with me."

"My, my you do have a big ego," Remington countered. "No one and I mean *no one*, coerces me into doing anything." Bristling with anger, she pushed her plate away. "What makes you think they want me back, Parker? If I recall, I was knee deep in everything we did...my bullets killed too."

A small sarcastic smile curved around Parker's lips. "You are the golden child...their top agent and you can do no wrong."

"Bullshit. If I was that valuable, why didn't they do something about the contract out on me? Why did they let Berkowitz and Bordello take out my whole team? If it hadn't been for you, I'd be dead too," Remington said her voice thick with emotion.

The door to the diner opened and both women looked toward it. The kids that they chased off the property six weeks earlier walked into the area laughing and talking loudly. After they sat down, the tall boy with red hair, eyes opened wide before he hit his friend's shoulder and whispered something. Then, all the boys were looking at Parker and Remington with looks of horror on their faces—they left in a hurry.

Parker laughed. "I guess they weren't hungry." She looked at the Wolf's partially eaten burger. "You done?"

Remington scrunched her nose. "Kinda lost my appetite." She looked down at her plate. "It was very good though."

"Why?"

"Did I lose my appetite?" Parker nodded *yes* and Remington lifted her eyes and looked toward the door. "My choices for a future are limited. Yours, on the other hand, are not." She then made eye contact with Parker. "Amelia West did you the biggest favor of your life, Parker."

Laughing, Parker said, "Yeah, right."

In a low growl, Remington said, "She gave you a way out, Parker. With that head wound and all that entails what are your options with DOCO?"

Parker raised her eyebrows. "You know what they are," she said in an ominous tone. "Unless you take me along with you I don't stand a chance."

"Then the question becomes is that what you want...back with DOCO?"

"I could ask you the same question. As for me, DOCO paid me well for my services. I have several houses around the world and a seven figure bank account in Switzerland, so I don't need to work, but I need to do something. I'd go crazy." She eyed the Wolf. "Are you going back to work for them?"

"I have no choice," Remington whispered. "You know how they pursued Olivia...they will treat me the same."

The sharp pain Parker felt at the thought of the Wolf leaving surprised her. “Are you taking me with you?”

“Not now. I need to see what the lay of the land is there before I bring you in.” *Or risk your life, Parker.* Remington felt her back stiffen at the thought. *What the hell is going on with me? Since when do I start caring if something happens to another agent?* Her eyes tracked to Parker’s darker ones and she blew out a breath. “There’s a distinct possibility they will eliminate me once I get back. The fact that I removed the tracking device is a cause for eradication...you know that as well as I do.”

Parker saw the sadness in the Wolf’s eyes and desperately wanted to reach out and take all the doubt away. She did not. “They already think I’m a whack job...it won’t be much of a leap if you let them think it was all my doing—that I forced you to remove the device.”

A thin smile curved Remington’s lips. “I can’t do that, Parker.” She pushed back her chair, picked up the check, and said, “Dinner is on me,” before she walked away from the table—the discussion was over.

Chapter Twenty-two

Parker woke up with a start. The only sound was the howling of the wind outside as granules of sand pummeled the panes of glass in the windows. The wind did not wake her—it was the dream that had haunted her ever since the bullet entered her head. The Wolf’s words earlier rang truer than any Parker had ever heard. *Amelia West did you the biggest favor of your life.* It was all so obvious to her now, clearer than anything else in her life had ever been. “Amelia did save me,” she whispered as she recalled the events leading up to the shooting.

Her obsession with Olivia Santos was nothing more than a way to get the woman back in her life so she, Parker, could be the *one* to leave. She had spent years plotting how to get back at Olivia for walking out of her life. And, that mania had turned her into a monster, which she now realized had fit neatly into DOCO’s plans. Over the last six weeks, working alongside the Wolf, the fragments of memories that always were blurred came into focus. Now, in the darkness, with the wind whipping and rattling the windows she understood how her handlers at DOCO continually fed on her desire for vengeance against Olivia so they could control her—to turn her into a demon. What she thought of as her being in control was nothing more than a well choreographed puppet show where the puppeteer’s strings manipulated her every move.

A small smile curved her lips as the vision of the Wolf came to mind. There was no denying that they worked together as if they were partners for years rather than weeks. She also couldn’t deny her growing attraction to the woman—she knew she had to get her own life together before she could think about any type of relationship with the Wolf or anyone else. And, it was clear to her that she would never work for DOCO again—her life would take a new and different path. Although, she didn’t know who would want to employ an ex-assassin of a covert government agency, she knew she would survive—she always managed to land on her feet.

After she let out a small satisfied sigh, Parker snuggled back under the sheets, yawned, and went back to sleep.

*

Yawning and stretching, Parker felt better than she had in over a year. The pain that was her constant companion was still there but only peripherally. Once she’d pulled on shorts and a t-shirt she made her way to the kitchen where she started the coffee before pulling out the ingredients for an omelet.

“That smells good,” Remington said as she made her way to the coffee pot. When her arm brushed against Parker, she shivered. That reaction now happened every time she was near the woman.

Parker looked up and took in the Wolf. Her green eyes that were normally bright were dull and dark circles framed them. It wasn’t much of a leap for Parker to guess what was happening. “You’ve decided haven’t you? You’re going back aren’t you?”

Remington sipped her coffee before she made eye contact with Parker. “I don’t have a choice. You know what they’re like...they will not be dissuaded.” She shrugged. “What about you?”

The bubble of excitement Parker felt spread over her face. "I'm going to take some time and decide what I want to do," she said before she added cheese to the omelet on the griddle. "You know you can stay here. I don't think they'll find you."

Closing her eyes briefly, Remington felt a swell of sadness engulf her. "I wish I could. It just isn't an option. Eventually they'd find me and that would compromise you."

"I'm a big girl and can take care of myself," Parker said as she plated two omelets. "Sit down, breakfast is ready."

Not moving, Remington softly said, "I won't compromise you," before she moved toward the table. "I've made arrangements for a limo to pick me up in town and take me to the airport," she said as she sat down.

"Why?" Parker asked. "I'll take you to the airport."

Around a forkful of eggs, Remington shook her head. "They know I'm coming in...it isn't unreasonable to think they'll be watching." She put the fork down. "There's no way I'm going to let them get their hooks back in you, Parker."

Parker, taken aback by the emotion that colored the Wolf's words, said, "But you will let them do what they will with you?"

"It's the best solution all the way around." She looked directly into Parker's eyes. "There's no way I'll let them know where you are." Pushing away from the table, Remington stood and gently squeezed Parker's shoulder before she left the kitchen.

"Wait," Parker said as she too got up and followed the Wolf. When she reached the woman, she reached out and stopped her. "I know you won't let them know my whereabouts."

Remington spun around, her jaw set with resolve. "I'll never betray you," she said in a cold even tone.

Parker took a step closer and cupped the Wolf's face in her hands. "You don't have to go...you can stay here with me."

"I can't," Remington whispered.

Trembling lips met in a soft gentle kiss that said so much in its simplicity.

Taking a step back, Parker sighed then leaned in and let her forehead meet the Wolf's soft skin. "Let me take you to the airport," she urged.

"No," Remington said with a note of sadness. "That's not a chance I am prepared to take." She wrapped Parker in her arms. "I have a few aces up my sleeve that may convince them to let me go."

Parker hugged the Wolf closer and whispered, "I'll be here waiting."

*

Parker watched as the Wolf put her suitcase by the door. "Let me take you to the airport," she said again, for what seemed like the hundredth time.

"You know I can't do that, Parker. Just letting you take me to town is risky enough. That's why we will arrive there two hours before the scheduled time."

With a light laugh, Parker said, "What makes you think the driver has anything to do with DOCO?"

Remington ran her palm over Parker's cheek. "I don't but, as I've already said, I won't do anything to compromise the life you can have without DOCO." She smiled and picked up her suitcase.

"Do you have all the Federal Marshall documents and badge?"

“Yep,” Remington said patting her pocket.

“And the weapons?”

She pulled up her pant leg and divulged a small revolver before opening her jacket to reveal a shoulder holster. “I will keep all the passengers safe,” she said with a snicker. “I know for a fact that DOCO will be monitoring the airport for me. At least this way I’ll have some sort of protection if I’m to be eliminated.”

Parker shuddered at the cold matter-of-fact way the Wolf said those words. “We’d better get going then,” she commented with little enthusiasm. “We can share coffee at the café until the limo arrives.”

*

From a distance, Parker watched as a small woman in a black suit loaded the Wolf’s suitcase into the trunk of the limo. Remington Wolf looked in her direction and a smile curved her lips for a moment before it disappeared. Once the back door closed and the Wolf was out of sight, Parker let a tear roll down her cheek. She wished things were different but she knew that the choice to leave wasn’t hers to make. Just as she needed to follow a new path so did the Wolf. If the fates were good to them, their journeys would bring them back together. For now, their attraction occurred at the wrong time and place. Her chance for a new life may or may not be with the Wolf and that was ok.

Tomorrow is another day she thought as she started the Hummer. She watched the limo fade from sight and a satisfied smile curved her lips. “And it will be a new start for me.”

The End



Affinity E-Book Press NZ Ltd.
P.O. Box 71
Kingsland, TX 78643

Please visit our website

<http://www.affinityebooks.com>