



Erin O'Reilly

Sandcastles

When Hell Meets Heaven Series

Book 7



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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

Sandcastles

Requiem

Back of the Book

How can a person take back a life that was not theirs and make it work. Until Remington Wolf met Parker Davis, she knew no other life than that of a highly placed operative for a clandestine government agency—Department of Covert Operations. Once Parker came on the scene, the Wolf began spiraling into a life that knew no boundaries. That brought her to a point where it became necessary to choose which life she wanted.

Just as a sandcastle can withstand only the initial onslaught of relentless waves, the Wolf finds she is constantly reinventing her life in a desperate attempt to reclaim what is hers. Her only problem, Parker who is trying to reinvent herself, is in the way.

Sandcastles

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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

Prologue

She stood on a balcony with a glass of Pinot Noir in her hand and watched the ocean's waves crash onto the shore creeping further up the sandy beach. This was her favorite time of day. The sun was sliding behind the horizon giving the clouds a pink and purple hue—the beauty always astounded her. Her eyes tracked to the beach and the sandcastle they built that day. Soon the moat around it would fill with water and the castle would disappear as though it had never existed.

Arms encircled her waist and she smiled. “It is a beautiful night,” she purred. “Is she asleep?”

“Yes,” her lover whispered before kissing the nape of the woman's neck tenderly. “Come to bed.”

“I will. The sunset is almost over.” The bright yellow and orange ball sunk halfway into the horizon.

Her lover gently turned her around and kissed her lips. “I love you...I always have. Even when I pushed you away I loved you.”

“I always knew that,” she whispered before turning back to the sunset. The arms encircled her again and she felt a chin rest on her shoulder. “I've always loved you. Even when I thought I could never love I loved you.” She took a sip of her wine and watched the sand castle disintegrate in a strong wave that rolled over it. Tomorrow, they would build another grander one. A testament to their love until the tide rose once again.

“Come to bed,” her lover enthused. “I need to feel your skin next to mine.”

The glass of wine placed on a nearby table forgotten as she lost herself in her lover's embrace.

Chapter One

Remington Wolf sat in the last row, aisle seat of the 727 heading for Houston, Texas. She leaned slightly against the seat and felt the bulk of the Smith and Wesson 38 Special that was resting in the small of her back. Instinctively she moved her arms to feel the modified nine millimeter Glock under each arm. As she studied the people who were making their way down the narrow aisle, she smiled and shook her head slightly.

Parker Davis—how would she describe the woman who had saved her life and probably destroyed her career? There was a definite physical attraction—something that Remi clearly wanted to avoid. Although labeled as a rogue, there was no doubt that in her earlier years Parker was every bit a Department of Covert Operations agent. Her mind turned to the clandestine government organization that she knew in all likelihood would kill her on sight. That was why she was so heavily armed. She grinned at the image of Parker handing her the credentials of a Federal Air Marshal. How the woman had managed to do that along with adding the name, Claudia Sinclair, to the official Air Marshall list was a mystery and one Remi was grateful Parker had.

Once she allowed Parker to remove the DOCO tracking chip, she knew, but never voiced, that she would be marked for elimination. When she took her seat on the plane, she realized she needed to change her original plans that had her going directly to DOCO headquarters. Now, she needed to make her way back to Austin and her home there to see if she could salvage any hope of returning to the organization intact. Because of her position in DOCO, she knew that they had people everywhere on the lookout for terrorists as well as wayward agents. Known as *watchers* they memorized names and faces and worked at airports, bus and train stations, rental car agencies, and other forms of transportation but they were not limited to that—they were everywhere. If the *watchers* saw someone who was one of the people they were looking for, they'd relay that information to a global computer. Remi doubted that any of the people involved as watchers knew what the results of a positive identification were; they were just glad for the money they received.

Parker, who was well versed in the art of disguise, gave Remi a latex face that even she didn't recognize. Her nose and chin were elongated and her cheeks bulged giving credence to the fat suit she was wearing. Hair that was normally blonde was now auburn with slight blonde highlights and brown contacts finished the look. She was certain that no one would single her out as Remington Wolf, but a slight possibility existed that someone might recognize her by her walk. Parker had suggested that she walk with a limp if she was worried and she did just that when she walked through the airport to board the plane.

Remi's attention turned to a man who was standing in the aisle next to her seat trying to fit an obviously oversized bag in to the overhead compartment. A one word description of the man would be ordinary. She studied him making mental notes as the thought crossed her mind of the possibility that he belonged to DOCO.

"I paid the money," he grumbled, "and now the damn thing won't fit." He turned around and caught Remi's gaze. "What the hell are you looking at?" he asked. When Remi simply raised an eyebrow, he bent down and got in her face. "I asked you a question, bitch," he roared.

Although the man's breath reeked of alcohol, Remi held her ground. "Get out of my face," she quietly growled.

A tall, slim, dark haired flight attendant was immediately by the man's side. "What seems to be the problem, sir?" she asked in a calm manner as she eyed Remi.

The man stood and turned on the attendant. "I paid for storage of this bag and it won't fit in the fuckin' overhead."

"Sir, the size requirements for overhead baggage are clearly posted when you check in. I am surprised they let you through security with it."

"I don't give a rat's ass about that," he bellowed as he moved so he was face to face with the attendant before he grabbed her arm.

Remi stood and leapt into action as her fingers squeezed the back of the man's neck continuing to increase the pressure until he dropped the woman's arm. She looked at the woman who seemed to be taking the situation in stride. "Call security," Remi ordered as the man struggled to get away. Remi increased the force of the hold.

"Let me go, bitch," he bellowed before falling to his knees after Remi kicked the back of them. "You're killing me," he cried.

Remi leaned in close and whispered, "If I wanted to kill you, you'd already be dead." By the time she straightened, security guards were approaching and once they identified themselves, she relinquished her hold on the man's neck. She retook her seat and watched as the man and his bag left the plane.

"So much for keeping a low profile," she grumbled.

* * *

Once the plane had landed and everyone had disembarked, Remi made her way out of the plane and into the concourse. Her eyes scanned the area noting different places where a DOCO operative could take her down. She doubted that they would try anything in the airport since that would bring more attention to them than they would want. No, they'd wait until she was outside or driving in a car. One shot from a long rifle and she'd be dead—the assailant long gone. She knew that scenario well since she had executed it on many occasions. It was that knowledge that would keep her alive until she could make her way back to Philadelphia and DOCO headquarters.

She kept vigilant as she rented a nondescript vehicle. She knew that DOCO had three *watchers* at that particular kiosk and the way the agent checked her driver's license put her on alert. She had never used the name Claudia Sinclair and she knew that DOCO had never used the name. Yet, there was an outside chance the agent would recognize her as Remington Wolf. She intently studied the man as he entered her information into his computer and saw no outward signs that he suspected her of being anything other than a woman renting a car. Once the man handed her driver's license back, and she signed the contract, he directed her to the area outside where she could wait for the bus that would take her to the vehicle she rented.

As Remi strapped her seatbelt in place, adjusted the mirrors, and pulled out of the parking lot she wasn't convinced that DOCO wasn't on to her. What she wouldn't give for one of the bullet proof vehicles she often used in her clandestine assignments. Since that was not an option, she drove at a moderate speed trying to always be in a group of vehicles rather than out in a lane alone. It would extend the four hour drive to Austin by at least thirty minutes—she had no choice. When she was half way to her destination, she pulled out one of her numerous throw away phones and dialed the only number the instrument held. Her plans had changed and she needed to let Parker know.

“Hey, it’s me. The plans have changed and I am going home. I will call you when I know the lay of the land.”

“I’ll be there when you call,” Parker said.

The call didn’t last more than fifteen seconds.

A feeling of relief filled Remi as she neared her destination. She drove slowly past her home that she had last used for the DOCO sting of a drug lord Carlos Castellan. From what she could tell from the street, there didn’t seem to be any activity in or around the house, but she wouldn’t be certain until she actually got past the security and on to the grounds. She noticed that a home across the street was for sale and formulated a plan to use it if it was empty. It would take several days before she could breach the outer security of her home—years of practice taught her that rushing in without a plan was not only foolish but could result in her death. She would take her time, cover all the angles, and then make sure that she had them covered again. If she was to succeed, no detail was too small.

* * *

As luck would have it, the home across the street was indeed vacant. The night before, she had parked her rental and walked five blocks to investigate the house in hope of using it for her base of operations. Remi found that the place was empty and had no problem bypassing the security system and picking the lock. She knew better than use the key that the realtor had hanging from the handle of the front door; often such devices recorded when the key was used and by whom.

Once she ascertained the name of the owner of the house, she called the reality company and asked that they take the house off the market for a week while the inside of the house was painted. Remi laughed at the ease she had at convincing the agent she was indeed the owner. The agent assured her that they would remove the lockbox from the door for the duration until she received a call saying the painting was finished.

“Three days tops,” Remi said as she drove to a storage unit for which Parker had provided the key so she could open the door. In it, Parker told Remi, she would find all types of equipment that would be useful in her quest to take her house back. The size of the storage area didn’t surprise her for she was aware of Parker’s proclivity for having all the bases covered. When she pulled open the door, she was amazed at what she found. A car that looked like it had armor sat in the middle surrounded by benches covered with tarps where she suspected were different types of weapons and equipment. One by one, Remi pulled back the tarpaulins as she selected the items she’d need.

“Thank you, Parker, this makes my job easier,” she whispered as she rolled down the door and locked the unit. For a moment, she considered taking the armored vehicle but she would wait on that until she knew what she was had to deal with. For the time being, she felt that she was still under DOCO’s radar and driving around in what was a clearly armored vehicle would only cause suspicion—the *watchers* were everywhere.

The driveway to the surveillance house she was using didn’t have a gate and for that, Remi was grateful. It meant she could drive into the garage and unload the equipment. Remi had designated a place in the corner of the garage for her command center. Since visiting the storage unit, she no longer worried that a prospective buyer or real estate agent would discover what she was doing. In the unit, she found the standard issue DOCO cloaking device that would suitably

hide what was in the corner just in case someone entered the garage. It wasn't long before she had all the necessary equipment for surveillance in place.

* * *

One day later, Remi was reviewing the video feed from the cameras focused on the main driveway, a secret one used for escape, and on the area opened to the lake. Activity at any of the places was non-existent. The thermal scan produced no clear evidence that anyone was in the house but as far as Remi was concerned that was not solid intelligence. She had firsthand knowledge that that type of scan could be jammed to disguise the occupants—she installed such a device in her house and she had no reason to believe it wasn't being used. Her plan for gaining access to the property was solid but she reviewed it for the hundredth time calculating every possible scenario and what she would do if the unthinkable happened.

Since Remi was the one who designed the security system for the house and was the only one with access to all the security codes, she had an advantage over her opponents. There were entrances into the house that only she knew existed. As with any mission, she knew a lot rode on the intelligence she compiled before she made such an attempt. That night she would breach the security system of the property's perimeter and make more observations before she attempted to enter the house.

* * *

It was one in the morning on a dark overcast night as Remi donned her black cargo pants, black t-shirt, black boots, black gloves and, secured her weapons before she blackened her face. Once that was complete to her satisfaction, she pulled a black watch cap over her blonde head, affixed night vision goggles over her eyes, and left the garage.

In a semi-crouch position and keeping to the shadows, Remi made her way down the driveway. Once she saw that the street was clear, she scurried across and moved to the neighboring fence along the eastern side of her property. She cautiously made her way along the fence to the water's edge. In her plans for the security of her house, she had placed a module that would allow her access to her property from only this point. Once she pulled off her right glove, she ran her fingers along a palm tree that marked the edge of her property. When she felt the cleverly disguised button, she pushed it and a remote control device fell into her hand. Once she pressed the button, the device would flash for fifteen seconds disengaging the perimeter security that would look like an anomaly on the monitoring devices inside the house. She quickly stepped onto her property and watched as the blinking stopped—the perimeter security reengaged.

Remi reached into the front pocket of her pants and pulled out a device that looked much like a high tech entertainment center control. She knew that once she moved the lights around the property would come on alerting the house's inhabitants, if there were any, that there was a security breach. A sequence of numbers that only she knew would block the lights from coming on. Once she had punched in the last number on the pad, she stepped cautiously toward a position where she could watch the front door but still get away. The lights remained off.

It was because of Remi's attention to detail that all the windows of the house had black-out blinds. The logic that said she didn't want to announce that the house had occupants now proved to be a hindrance to going forward. "Damn!" She backtracked until she was at the palm tree where she moved over what she knew would sound an alarm then reengage the lights. The area

lit up and she waited in the shadows but not for long. When the front door opened, a lone man stepped part way out of the door. Remi held binoculars to her eyes and focused on the man. “Elliott Pembroke, I should have known,” she whispered. The man looked disheveled, which was the exact opposite of what she remembered of his attire. What was curious was the lack of anyone else joining him. As he stood in the lit doorway, he was a perfect target and Remi considered whether to shoot him then or wait and see. She grinned. “I think shooting you would be too good an end for you, Elliott.”

For years, Elliott Pembroke had dogged Remi chiding her at every turn as he tried to make a case that he was more suited for Remi’s job. Now, he was in her house and that just wouldn’t do. *I should have killed him years ago*, she thought as she made her way back up the line of the fence to the road. She stopped when she was parallel to the man standing in the doorway and once again considered killing him where he stood. No, she would wait. Elliott would suffer by her hand, of that she was sure.

* * *

The next night at one in the morning, Remi repeated her movements from the night before. This time, after the lights were disabled, she purposely allowed the sensor around the perimeter to go off as she sprinted to the southern side of the house before she allowed the lights to come on. With patience borne out of years of practice, she waited until she heard the front door open before she located the secret door and tapped in the number to open the door. As the narrow opening silently opened, Remi looked to see if lights were on in her office—they were not. She slipped inside the room and pressed the button to close the secret door.

Remi inhaled the smell of leather and polished wood and allowed a small smile to appear. She pulled the remote out then logged onto the internal camera system and disabled them so they would only show a static image of each room.

Remi moved to the left of the door and waited to hear the closing of the front door and to note where Elliott went after coming inside the house. A good fifteen minutes passed before the door closed with a resounding bang. She closed her eyes and focused only on the sound of the footsteps, as she pulled out her Smith and Wesson ready if Elliott came into her office. Glad that she insisted on a tile staircase, she let the breath she was holding go as she heard the familiar sound of someone going up the staircase. It wasn’t long before she heard the creaking of a chair above her head. *The bastard is using my bedroom.*

Satisfied that she was safe in her office she reached over and locked the door before scanning the room with a beam of light from her flashlight. She noted that everything seemed to be in place before the light rested on her desk—her computer was gone. Remi moved silently toward the bookcase against the southern wall where the false door was. Instead of opening the door, she moved to her right and slide several books to the side revealing a wall safe. With practice precision, she deftly pressed the number pad before pressing her thumb against the finger pad. Once the door was opened, she wasn’t surprised to find that everything she had put in there was gone.

“I wonder what DOCO thought by engaging these idiots,” she whispered as she closed the safe’s door and rearranged the books.

The beam of light focused once again on the desk as she made her way across the plush carpet, then slid noiselessly into the desk chair. It was Remi’s policy that the desk drawers receive a routine lubricant treatment so they would slide easily open. She opened each drawer

noting what was still there and what was not. It didn't matter for she hadn't left anything important for anyone to find. Even the computer held only cursory documents about various missions. The actual missions were hand written and stored in a safe that was impossible to open even if someone found it—the condition of the room told her no one had.

Once she reached under the desk and pressed a button only she knew about, an area on the wall across from her slid open revealing a high tech safe. Remi smiled as she made her way to the wall where she punched in the code, did a fingerprint scan, iris scan, and pressed two more numbers. The front of the safe seemingly disappeared revealing the contents within. All the files were there along with a backup hard drive of the missing computer. Satisfied that all necessary components of her office were still intact, Remi went to the door and unlocked it.

Years of practice let Remi open each door without a sound. The downstairs area of the house was clear with no evidence that anyone had used the rooms for some time. Even the kitchen look unused and that she found baffling. Over several days of monitoring, there was no evidence that any one left or came onto the property. In silence, she made her way across the tile floor, opened the refrigerator door, and pulled back from the stench coming from within. *Surely he eats*. Remi puzzled over the food situation for a few second before deeming it unimportant.

When she opened the door to the garage, she saw that Parker's red Mustang was the only vehicle there. Her mind flashed to the man she observed the night before. He looked rumpled and slovenly but it was in the early morning hours and he could have gotten out of bed to check the alarm. *What's he doing here?* She considered various scenarios for a few moments then closed the door and made her way to the staircase.

At the top of the stairs, she stopped and opened the door where Parker briefly stayed before the last mission. Going deeper into the room, she checked the closet and drawers and found that everything was in place. Her mind flashed to the images she saw on a surveillance monitor of Parker standing nude in the room and squelched the thoughts immediately. She shook her head as she wondered if she was losing it for she couldn't recall a mission when her mind wasn't solidly on the operation.

With her mind refocused, Remi made her way down the hallway, opening each door and thoroughly inspecting each room. When she came to the door that was hers, she stopped and listened. She heard the unmistakable sound of snoring. Remi then had to consider if the sound was genuine or if Elliott had somehow detected she was in the house and it was a ruse. After considering all the possibilities, she put her hand on the knob and turned it.

The light in the room was so bright that Remi had to shade her eyes as she surveyed the room. Elliott Pembroke was on the bed with his back to her. Pulling out her revolver she made her way to the bed then put the barrel of the gun to the man's head and pressed down hard.

"Wakey wakey, Elliott, your worst nightmare is happening."

Remi watched as the man slowly opened his eyes and continued to lie still on the bed.

"Wolf, I told them you'd be back."

"Did they believe you?"

Elliott sneered. "No, but I knew better—I knew you'd slither back here eventually. All it took was my patience and here you are."

"Indeed I am." Remi twisted the barrel of the gun and pressed harder. "Your first mistake was coming into *my* home uninvited. The second, making yourself at home in *my* bedroom. I'm going to have to burn that mattress to get your stench off."

"You think I'm afraid of you, Wolf? Well, I'm not. You're nothing but a bottom sucking cretin who's only been successful by climbing on the backs of people like me." He laughed.

“Everyone at DOCO knows how incompetent you are and how it was me who made you look good.”

“Funny thing about that, Elliott, is that *I’m* the one holding the gun.”

“And you think that scares me? You’re an idiot, Wolf. Why do you think DOCO hasn’t looked for you?” He turned onto his back. “They’re glad to be rid of you.”

“Then why are you here?”

Elliott snorted. “I want the bounty.”

There it was out in the open—DOCO wanted her dead. It wasn’t a surprise but she knew that Elliott wasn’t privy to all that was happening with DOCO. She seriously doubted they would have let him camp out in her house indefinitely. She pressed the gun harder and took a quick inventory of the room—trashed. *Did he hole himself up only in my room while he waited for my return? Possibly.* She surmised that he took the room the furthest away so if someone came in the house, they would assume no one was there. Not a plan she’d use but it did have its merits.

“Well, Elliott,” she said in her softest growl, “the only bounty you will get is in hell.”

“You’re going to kill me.” It wasn’t a question.

“Yes,” Remi said as she hit the man’s head with her gun.

There was no way she’d shoot the man in her house for that would leave evidence and that was unacceptable. She rolled him off the bed, bound his feet and hands with zip ties that she pulled out of her pocket making certain his shirt cuff and pants were between the tie and his skin. For added security, she stuffed one of his socks in his mouth. With ease, she dragged him by his shirt collar down the hallway, the stairs, and, after she disabled the outdoor lights, out the front door.

A fine mist fell and off in the distance Remi could hear thunder. Once she had Elliott at the dock, she pulled the sock from his mouth before shoving his face in the water. It didn’t take long for the man to die. With practiced movements, she removed the zip ties noting that she had left them loose enough that an autopsy wouldn’t find any evidence that he was bound. She carefully rinsed out his mouth to rid it of any traces of the sock. Once she was certain the body was free of evidence—it would be easy to surmise that the head wound was a product of a fall—that would indicate foul play, she let him float in the water as she got a kayak from the boat lift. Once she loosely tied the rope from the kayak to Elliott’s belt, she paddled away from her dock and guided the craft downstream and into the middle of the lake before she stopped.

As she released the body and watched it float away, she heard thunder and counted, “one-one hundred, two one hundred—” until she saw a flash of lightening. “Two miles,” she said as navigated the kayak back to her dock. With effortless, silent strokes, Remi’s kayak sliced through the water as she neared her home. It was almost four o’clock and with the approaching storm she knew that she had to work fast to expunge any evidence of her excursion into the lake.

* * *

Just as she reached the front door, thunder boomed overhead and lightening lit the sky before fat drops of rain fell to the ground. Remi smiled for the first time in days. The rain meant that the likelihood of people out fishing in the early morning hours was slim. She needed the time for Elliott’s body to float further down the lake and hopefully sink before anyone could find him.

As she entered the house, exhaustion tried to overtake her but she resisted for there was too much to do and sleep was not one of them. She needed to calculate the best and worst scenarios

for the discovery of the body and the length of time before the police started canvassing the owners of the homes on the lake. In her hand, she held all the ropes she removed from all the kayaks and would burn them along with all traces of Elliott in the house.

Her feet wearily made their way into the kitchen and she pulled open the freezer and took out a bag of Columbian coffee beans. Once the beans were ground she poured them into the coffee maker and set it to brew. Remembrances of the stench of the refrigerator had her bypassing it instead looking through the cupboards for something to eat. She found a box of Power Bars and tucked them under her arm as she poured herself a cup of coffee. As she sipped the hot dark brew, she closed her eyes and for a moment allowed herself to relax.

The coffee helped to rejuvenate Remi so she could make her way back across the street to the house she was using for surveillance. She quickly put all the equipment in the rental car and eradicated any evidence that she was there. After reattaching the realtor's lock to the front door, she drove in the cover of rain and darkness across the street, opened the gate, and rolled the vehicle down the driveway to her garage.

Remi stood in the hall with a cup of coffee mentally planning how she'd clean the house. As she did, she pulled out a cell phone and dialed to only number stored on it. After two rings, she knew that the person on the other end had connected. "It's done," Remi said before she disconnected.

Bang!

Her attention turned immediately to the incinerator room—someone was inside. The room was standard DOCO issue with the most sophisticated incinerator that was both smokeless and odorless. In Remi's line of work, it was important to have a means of completely destroying anything that might be construed as evidence that DOCO existed.

With purposeful steps, she made her way up two stairs, turned right, and took a few more steps before she stood in front of a door. With her gun at her side, she pressed a series of numbers on the keypad then pressed her thumb to it and saw a green light flash. Her right hand rested on the door handle and her gun was resting next to her head in her left hand. She slammed the door open effectively disabling anyone who was behind it then held her gun in both hands as she scanned the room.

When she saw the smallest of movement behind a large trash can she growled, "Show yourself." After a minute she again said, "Show yourself," then added, "if I come over there you *will* get a bullet in your head, asshole."

With hands raised, a muscular blonde man stood. "You're alive," he loudly whispered.

"What are you doing in my home, Demetrius?"

"I'm with Elliott. Ask him, he'll tell you."

The Wolf's eyes narrowed. "I'd have to ask him in hell and I'm not going there yet."

"H—he's dead?"

A feral smile curved the Wolf's lips. "And so will you be if you don't answer my question. What are you doing in my home?"

Demetrius swallowed hard and opened his mouth only to shut it immediately. When he saw the Wolf edge closer to him with her gun aimed at his head, he said, "Elliott brought me here to help in his search for you."

"Why was he searching for me?"

"The bounty—he wanted the bounty so he could be done with DOCO."

The Wolf was standing in front of Demetrius with the barrel of her gun against his head. "How much?" she growled from deep inside her throat.

“He told me five hundred thousand with an additional half million if you are caught alive.” Demetrius felt the increased pressure of the gun between his eyes. “I can help you,” he whimpered. “Elliott locked me in here and would only let me out to help him with hacking into databases.”

“Databases? Which ones?”

“All of them were government ones. He kept track of social security numbers, passports, and credit cards—everything in hopes of finding you.” Demetrius shook his head and the gun went with it. “I kept telling him you were too smart to be that careless but he is obsessed with you.”

The Wolf considered the man’s words and lessened the pressure of her gun against his head. She knew of Demetrius and his expertise with computers. He was good but not as good as Parker who was responsible for hiding her trail. Her eyes fixed on the man. “I don’t know if I can trust you, Demetrius, and that puts me in a dilemma about what to do with you.”

“I’ll do anything you ask, Wolf,—anything.”

The gun lowered and the Wolf nodded. “We need to rid this house of any evidence that Elliott was ever here.”

“What about the cleaners? Can’t they do that?”

The Wolf let out a laugh. “Do you really think I’m that stupid, Demetrius?” she asked before raising the gun again.

“No, no I wasn’t thinking. I know you’re not stupid,” his wavering voice said. “Please, I’ll do the cleaning—that is how I started out with DOCO. I know exactly what to do.”

Demetrius would die, the Wolf was certain of that, but she’d let him live so he could help with eradicating Elliott’s presence in her home. “One wrong move and it will be the last thing you do.”

Still shaking, Demetrius nodded and said, “You won’t regret it.”

“I already do,” the Wolf whispered as she pointed her gun toward the door.

Chapter Two

Parker Davis pressed the end call button and rubbed her hand over her mouth. At that moment, a wave of nausea flooded her stomach. She had been sick with the flu for close to a week and that was the last thing she needed. If she was going to be effective in helping Remi get away from DOCO, she didn't need to be puking every hour. "I won't let you down," she said as she popped a handful of TUMS in her mouth.

She knew that when the Wolf called her, she would say nothing but just hearing her voice made her melancholy. Not since her love affair with Olivia Santos ended had she felt an emotional connection to any other woman or man for that matter. There was the definite undertow of a strong emotional underpinning that she could not deny.

Remi.

A smile curved her lips until she felt her stomach roil and she covered her mouth as she ran to the bathroom.

* * *

Parker nursed a cup of chicken broth as she watched a program she developed for silently hacking into databases and mainframes scan the FBI database for updated information. Once the Wolf agreed to remove the DOCO tracking chip, Parker had monitored every government agency, known and unknown, for any information that would do harm to the Wolf.

The Wolf left initially to go straight back to DOCO but those plans changed. As she continued to watch the screen, her mind traveled back to an earlier conversation—

"Plans change," the Wolf said cryptically in a soft growl that made Parker's heartbeat increase.

"Why? Where are you?"

"I need to secure my house first. I have a feeling someone is waiting there for me."

Parker answered, "I haven't seen any chatter on that."

"There are papers there that need to be destroyed."

Perplexed, Parker asked, "About what? Somehow I can't see you leaving anything important just lying around."

A silence ensued before the Wolf said, "Lying around no. It comes down to how through the search is."

Something on the monitor in front of her caught Parker's attention. "Hold on a minute," she said, as her eyes grew wide. "I have information that there is a contract on you—dead or alive."

"Verified?"

"Not yet."

"I'll contact you."

That had been two weeks earlier and this call confirmed that whoever was in the Wolf's house was gone. She could now make her way back to Austin to retrieve her Mustang and other belongings. Her keen intelligence allowed her to recall all the security codes pertaining to the

Wolf's home. A sense of sadness filled her as she realized that when she obtained her belongings her association with Remi would sever and she would once again be alone.

"I don't want that." She toyed with the phone in her hand debating whether to call Remi and let her know what she'd found out about the bounty. The half a million dollar reward for returning Remington Wolf to DOCO was astounding and she had to admit that turning the Wolf in had briefly crossed her mind. In her deepest part of her soul, she knew she would never capitalize on it for keeping Remi safe was paramount. "She can't go back there," she said with a note of panic. She quickly pressed speed dial and waited to hear Remi's voice. Instead, she heard nothing—the Wolf had already destroyed the phone.

Parker forced down another wave of nausea and grabbed the keys to the panel truck that carried the wounded Wolf to Parker's safe house after the assassination of Castellan. If she hurried, she might get to Austin before Remi left for DOCO headquarters. If not, it would be the Wolf's death sentence. "I won't let that happen."

* * *

The terrain along the familiar route to Austin was, as always, boring. The landscape blended into nothingness as the van sped along Highway Ten. Her foot, pressed firmly against the gas pedal, coaxed the vehicle to go faster. Parker snorted when she realized she was going ninety. A flick of headlights going in the opposite direction had her lifting her foot and letting the van ease back to the speed limit. Not long after, she spotted a state police car parked in the median with an officer sitting in the driver's seat holding a radar gun.

A new sense of panic filled Parker as she wondered if the license plate for the van was on a *be on the lookout for* list. The last thing she wanted was some local yokel arresting her for the possession of stolen property. "Damn, what's wrong with me? I should have swapped out the plate." She snorted as she recalled Remi telling her that Amelia shooting her in the head was a good thing. "Not if it compromises our safety, she whispered as she pressed the gas pedal to the floor.

* * *

It was mid-afternoon when Parker pulled the van into Remington Wolf's driveway and stopped at the gooseneck keypad. She watched as the gate slowly slid back and felt her stomach roil. It was not the flu that caused her discomfort but the gnawing fear that the Wolf had already left to meet her destiny. As the van slowly crept down the driveway, Parker kept an eye on the rearview mirror to make certain the gate closed and no one else had entered.

When she pulled to a stop in front of the garage, she let her gaze scan the area for anything that might give a hint as to what she was going to encounter. The only movement she detected were the sprinklers from an in ground system moving in jerky half circles across the lawn. The house didn't divulge what was behind its doors. To Parker it looked deserted and that made her bile creep into her mouth.

With purposeful silence, Parker got out of the van, partially closed the door, and made her way to the front door. After fishing the house key out of her pocket, she pressed a code into the keypad next to the door, and slid the key into the lock. A loud click resonated and for a moment, Parker froze before she slowly turned the doorknob. The door was only partially opened when she found herself looking down the barrel of what she knew was a Glock 35 semiautomatic.

Hands in the air, Parker waited as the door opened wider and she saw the Wolf looking at her through narrowed green eyes. Glad to see the woman, Parker whispered, "It's me, Parker." She watched the eyes scan the yard before the Wolf lowered her gun and signaled for Parker to enter.

"What the hell are you doing here?" the Wolf growled.

"I have some important information that you need to know before you leave here." Once she saw a nod, Parker continued, "There is a bounty out on you for seven-hundred-fifty thousand—going back there will be suicide."

"I know."

Just then, a man walked up behind the Wolf and Parker reached for her gun. She didn't recognize the muscular blonde man whose actions made it clear he belonged there. Parker looked away. "Um, I'm sorry to intrude—I was—worr...", she stammered. "I'll go."

In a very soft voice, Remi said, "No, don't go."

When Parker looked in the woman's eyes, she saw them soften. "I don't want to be in the way," Parker said in an equally soft voice.

"You aren't," the Wolf said as she nodded toward the man. "This is Demetrius, Elliott Pembroke brought him here to wait for my arrival." She turned to the man. "Isn't that right Demetri?"

The man confidently said, "Yes."

"Good, now that we have the introductions out of the way, why don't you go back into the kitchen and finish cleaning out the refrigerator you and Elliott let food rot in."

"But," Demetri began before he hesitated then added, "I'll be in the kitchen if you need me."

Once the man vacated the area, Parker said, "He is with Elliott?"

"I believe *was* is the correct word."

Parker gave a knowing nod. "And you let this man live?"

"Demetri started as a cleaner with DOCO. I needed all traces of Elliott erased along with a thorough scrubbing of the refrigerator. It was so disgusting it made *me* gag," the Wolf said in a voice laced with ice. She turned and walked away. "Come on—I don't trust him to be left alone."

Once in the kitchen, Parker stood close letting her arm rest against Remi's left arm. When the woman leaned in closer, Parker let out a sigh of pleasure. "I can clean the refrigerator out and we can be done with him," she whispered with her lips close to Remi's ear.

The Wolf visibly trembled as she closed her eyes and let out what Parker thought was a purr. Then, her demeanor changed and her voice dropped. She growled, "Get that barrel of trash and take it to the incinerator, Demetri."

Both women followed the man as he drug the plastic garbage barrel along the floor and bumped it up two steps before he opened the door to the room where Elliott had kept him locked in. Heat from the earlier burning of everything linked to Elliott made Demetri sweat as he pulled the heavy container to the incinerator door.

"If you want, I can put the trash can in there too," he offered. His face turned toward the Wolf and Parker saw his color drain out of his face. "You can trust me, Wolf, honest."

The Wolf held up a cell phone. "Look what I found hidden in your little hole over there, Demetri. And what a surprise—it works."

"I—I can explain that."

"Go ahead and try," growled the Wolf.

Demetri hung his head. "I had it there in case Elliott left me in here—I forgot it was even there." When he raised his head, the Wolf was standing next to him. "Honest," he said just as both of her hands shoved him into the incinerator.

"Liar," the Wolf spat out as she slammed the steel door closed and locked it. "I saw him find it when he was cleaning up Elliott's things and slip it into his pocket." She laughed. "There's no honor among thieves. For half a million I would too." She gave Parker a skeptical look. "What about you, Parker Davis, would you sell me out too?"

With cautious steps, Parker moved closer to the woman known as the Wolf. To her, she was Remi, her friend, her savior, and her confidant. "With what we've been through together, you should already know the answer to that question" She shrugged. "If the situation was reversed I'd ask it too." She moved into the Wolf's space, wrapped her arms around her waist, and pulled her close. With the lightest of a touch, she kissed the full lips. "No, I will never sell you out—there isn't enough money in the world to make me do that."

The next kiss was hard and hungry as the Wolf grabbed a handful of Parker's hair, pulled her head back, and growled before she began nipping at her neck.

Parker could feel the mounting need as the Wolf began to devour her body. She didn't want the Wolf, she wanted Remi, but the lust after a kill needed quenching and she knew the feeling well. "Not here. Take me to your bed," she whispered

Green eyes narrowed and the rumble from deep within the Wolf intensified before she grasped Parker's hand and began dragging her out of the incinerator room. Once they were upstairs, and the door to the Wolf's bedroom was kicked open, before the Wolf began ripping Parker's clothes and nipping at the exposed parts of her body.

Parker, caught up in the ardor and intensity of the moment, commenced grabbing at the Wolf's clothes until she was naked and they were both writhing on the bed.

* * *

The next morning Remi found herself waking with a smile as she remembered the night of love making. The first time, they ravaged each other with so much savage intensity that it left her exhausted only waking when she felt the naked body of Parker spoon her. What followed was sweet passion that ignited a flame the likes of which she had never felt. She was gentle and considerate as she slowly brought the woman she had wanted from the first time she saw her, to the brink of satisfaction only to slow before bringing Parker to a shattering orgasm. Remi couldn't recall a time when she had actually made love to a woman in such a way.

Her arm reached out for Parker only to find the bed empty and cold. She threw back her covers and called, "Parker?" Hearing no answer, she began walking down the hallway opening doors and slamming them shut. When she opened the garage door and saw that the red Mustang was gone, she let out a deep growl that was a mixture of anger and heartbreak. Naked she stormed to her office, opened a desk drawer, and dialed a number she knew by heart.

"How long before they get her to kill me?" she asked in an icy voice.

"Remi? What are you talking about?"

"Don't give me that innocent routine bullshit. You know exactly what I mean," she laughed bitterly, "and to think I actually believed you when you said you wouldn't sell me out."

"What the fuck are you talking about, Remi?" Parker asked in a hushed tone. "I'm in the checkout line at the HEB. In case you hadn't noticed you don't have any food in the house so I went to buy some groceries so I could make you breakfast."

“Nice try.”

“Did you look in the kitchen by the coffee maker?”

Remi dashed out of the room and headed for the kitchen. There under a coffee mug she saw a note.

R- What are you trying to do? Starve me by only having these disgusting bars? Gone to the market be back soon to make you a proper breakfast. -P

“I thought—”

“I won’t ever sell you out, Remi. After I’ve made breakfast, we will need to talk.”

* * *

Parker opened the door that lead from the garage into the house and walked in, kicking the door shut behind her. “Remi,” she called out. When she heard nothing, she took the four plastic bags she held into the kitchen. There sitting at the table in a knee length robe was Remi and she smiled. “There you are. I thought I’d make you blueberry pancakes.” She waited for a response as she put the bags on the counter. “I have a few more in the car to get then I’ll be right back.”

Upon returning, Parker put the groceries away, and then rummaged through the cupboards to find a bowl and a measuring cup. “You’re gonna love these, it’s my mother’s recipe.” Her gaze fell on Remi who was still sitting silently at the table. She saw that the robe was haphazardly tied revealing a firm breast—one she remembered from the night before—and she felt the stirrings of arousal. When her eyes tracked to Remi’s face, all thoughts of anything but fear filled her body. The woman who made such tender love to her a few hours earlier was not there. The Wolf was back.

“How long do I have?” the Wolf growled.

Parker knew what she was talking about but refused to respond to the Wolf’s anger. “I told you I’d never sell you out and I won’t.”

The Wolf snarled and looked away.

With a shrug, Parker continued making the batter for the pancakes. “I have several plans I’m working on to keep DOCO from finding you,” she turned and saw the Wolf glaring at her. “Maybe you should talk to Olivia and find out how she broke from them.”

An evil chuckle filled the kitchen. “Are you really that naïve?” The Wolf’s upper lip curled. “She is still firmly in DOCO’s grip—they never let go.”

Parker lifted her eyebrows in response as she recalled seeing Olivia and Amelia in the park with Dan’s two kids. “I’ve seen her since she left and there is no way she is still with them.”

“Then you are not as smart as I thought you were.” The Wolf stood up, walked to the coffee pot, and poured another cup. “Just tell me how much longer I have to live—you owe me at least that.”

For a split second, Parker allowed herself to wonder about the Wolf’s comment about Olivia before slamming her hand hard against the counter. “What the hell is going on, Remi? I told you I’d never do that.” She saw the cold hard green eyes glint with feral anger. “We just spent almost two months together,” she said in a softer voice. “You nursed me and I nursed you. We fought the cartel together and won. Everything I’ve done was to keep you safe. Why would you now think I’d call DOCO and tell them where you are? I could have done that without coming here.”

Silence.

“I have plenty of money—I don’t need what they are offering.” The white robe was open and Parker gazed at the Wolf’s nakedness and moved closer. “I thought after last night—”

“Thought what? That we’d go off blissfully happy into the sunset. That kind of happiness isn’t for people like us, Parker.” The Wolf let her lip curl before she snarled, “All we can ever hope for is to shoot first and die quickly.”

Parker had continued forward until she was within arm’s reach she whispered, “Tell me why you think I’d ever sell you out.”

The Wolf growled, “That’s what I’d do,” before roughly grabbing Parker’s arm. “I won’t let you kill me.”

Ice formed around Parker’s heart as she heard the words. She shook her head and said, “Think what you like, but I’d never do that,” before turning and leaving the kitchen.

* * *

Parker stood in the bedroom that she occupied when she first arrived at the Wolf’s home. Her hands were trembling as she pulled out the three folders she’d prepared for the Wolf’s escape from or the rejoining of DOCO. For a moment, she wrestled with whether to give the woman the documents or just leave the Wolf to her own means. Her mind took a detour as she recalled that it was only a few hours ago that she laid in Remi’s arms feeling safe and secure. She shivered at the memory of fingers trailing feather light across her body before they found her breast and nipples.

“That wasn’t the actions of someone who feared and hated me. But, I could see in her face the fear of betrayal. Why?”

With a shrug, she went to the closet and pulled out the suitcase she left there two months earlier and began collecting her belongings. Once she had everything packed, she headed back down the stairs and out to the garage. With her belongings secure in her Mustang, she went back into the house and made her way to the kitchen.

* * *

The Wolf was pouring a cup of coffee when she heard the garage door open again. Her eyes tracked to the door and watched as the woman who was in her bed the night before come into view. “How long do I have?” she asked.

“Until I leave? If you want me to stay, I will.”

“You mean *until the cleaners come and take me or kill me.*”

Parker tossed the three folders on the kitchen table. “I worked up three different scenarios—two for escaping DOCO and one for going back alive.” Her eyes narrowed. “You have nothing to fear from me, Remi. I have not betrayed you and never will.”

Disinterested, the Wolf asked, “Where are you going?”

“So you can turn me in? I don’t think so.”

“You really have an inflated ego. DOCO isn’t interested in you—you’re nothing but a has been, a misfit.”

Parker let out a humorless laugh. “Obviously you haven’t been monitoring DOCO then. The bounty on me isn’t as high as yours but it still is a tempting offer for you.”

The Wolf's eyes, filled with doubt, continued to gaze at the woman. She was conflicted. On one hand, she remembered the times she spent with Parker and knew she would never betray her but on the other hand, she knew never to trust anyone but herself with her life.

Parker continued, "They have many operatives with sniper skills but none are as proficient as me. With the world the way it is, that my dear, Wolf, is far more enticing to them."

Remi sipped her coffee and eyed the folders. "Which would you recommend I try?"

With a shake of her head, Parker lifted her lip in a snarl. "There's no way I'll tell you that—it is up to you what you do. As for me, I'm out of here before *you* send them after me."

"Do as you like, Parker. I won't stand in your way."

"But in a heartbeat you'd turn me in." Parker snorted. "I can do without that." She then turned and walked out of the kitchen and headed for the garage.

The Wolf stood still and listened as the garage door opened and the roar of the Mustang's engine filled the silent air. She watched the monitor of the driveway as the vehicle made its way up the driveway before the gate opened then closed after the car slipped on through. Every molecule of her body told her that she should do something to stop Parker, to bring her back into her arms but she stood stock still and squared her shoulders.

"Goodbye, Parker," she whispered as she picked up the folders and headed for her office.

Chapter Three

Once again, in the guise of Federal Air Marshal Claudia Sinclair, Remington Wolf sat in the aisle seat at the back of a plane. After considering the three plans that Parker gave her, she choose the one that would allow her to be a DOCO agent again. For her, it was the best plan.

* * *

After her mother abandoned her for a man who didn't want a child, she lived on the streets doing odd jobs and saving all the money she could. The library was her refuge. There she could spend her free time reading every book she could, teaching herself math, English, science and history. She liked history the most for it afforded her the opportunity to understand what had happened and how to avoid it happening again. It was there that she learned the art of being a leader—that helped her get better jobs so she could live somewhere other than an alley.

With the knowledge she garnered at the library, Remington was able to obtain her GED and with her diploma in hand, she enrolled in a community college. It was there that she became involved with her first true love, Inez Montalba.

Inez was five years older and Remington fell head over heels in love. Her life until Inez was one of survival. She couldn't recall a moment when anyone loved and wanted her as Inez did. She did not turn away from her even when she found out about the woman's connections with a local drug dealer. All she wanted to do was bask in the glow of the love lavished upon her. Whatever Inez asked of her she did with the zeal of the love she felt, never questioning the motives behind them.

When the police arrested her for selling drugs she waited in the cell for Inez to come and get her out—she never came. At the age of seventeen, Remington was a convicted felon and sent to a juvenile detention center to serve out her term of eighteen months. Once released, she searched for Inez fearing that she too was incarcerated or maybe even dead. When she saw the woman in a restaurant they use to frequent she felt relief—her lover was alive.

Remington rushed into the restaurant and threw her arms around Inez. "You're alive," she cried. "I thought you didn't come for me because you were arrested or dead," she said before kissing Inez soundly.

Inez pushed Remington away. "Stop that!" she roared.

"But, I'm back, Inez. I finally got out of jail."

"Get lost," Inez said as she pulled the woman next to her closer. "I want nothing to do with you. You're nothing but last week's trash."

Remington creased her forehead and looked at the woman. "I went to jail rather than rat you out—you love me," she sobbed. "Don't push me away."

With a look of disgust, Inez sniffed. "You smell like prison trash. How many women were you with?"

"I—I couldn't stop them," she wept.

Inez let out a sarcastic chuckle. "And you think I want their leftovers? That is something I have no need for." She squeezed the woman next to her. "Right, baby? I get all I need from you." Her eyes tracked to the girl standing next to her. "Go find someone who doesn't care if you're used."

For a long time, Remington stood looking at the woman she loved. “You don’t mean that,” she whispered.

“Get the fuck out of my sight—you disgust me.”

In shock, Remington left slowly as she tried to make sense out of what had happened. She walked for miles before finding herself at the outskirts of the town alone and unwanted. For three days, she huddled in a small stand of trees. When she realized that the love she thought Inez had for her was nothing more than a figment of her imagination, she crumbled and felt herself dissolving in a pit of nothingness.

It was a long time before Remington rejoined the living. She obtained a job as a waitress and went about it along with her daily activities in a comatose state feeling nothing and giving nothing. The lesson Inez taught her was never to trust anyone else with her heart or her life. Never again would she let anyone get close to her.

* * *

Dan Estevez sat in a booth at Dusty’s Diner looking at the menu. The diner was a place he frequented and the blonde haired green eyed waitress who always waited on him intrigued him. Although she was friendly enough, the sadness in her eyes made him want to help her.

“What’ll it be today?” Remington asked in a flat tone.

“What do you recommended,” Dan asked. It was the same every time. He’d try to engage her in conversation and she would always resist.

“They say the pot roast is good.”

“Do you have a nickname, Remington?” he asked.

“No. What can I get you?”

“I think Remi is a good nickname for you.” He smiled. “I’ll have the pot roast, Remi.”

“My name is Remington.”

“Yes, I know,” said Dan. “I’ll have a salad with ranch and a cup of coffee.” He watched as she walked away and once again noticed how listless she was. Someone hurt her bad. When he felt his pager vibrate, his thoughts turned to his job as a DOCO operative.

Two weeks later, Dan was again in the diner ready to have his last meal there before he headed back to the Philadelphia area and his home. Once again, Remi—she had consented to him calling her that—stood by his table ready to take his order.

“What’ll you have today, Dan?” Remi asked.

Dan smiled broadly. “What do you recommend?” he asked.

With a slight smile rimming her lips, Remi said, “This is Wednesday so it’s meatloaf today.”

“Hmm I don’t know,” Dan said. “I was kinda leaning toward the chicken pot pie.”

Remi drew closer to the man. “Take my advice and have the meatloaf.”

Dan let out a hearty laugh. “Then meatloaf it is.” When he saw the young girl smile, he looked around the empty diner and said, “Will you join me?” When the girl’s face turned red, Dan shrugged. “You do get a break don’t you?”

After she nodded, Remi said, “It wouldn’t be right. I’d probably get fired.”

“I wouldn’t want to get you fired,” said Dan as his attention turned to what was going on in the street outside the window.

Remi watched as a thin man stood next to a Mercedes talking to another man who was much taller and more muscular. “Someone you know?” she asked.

The man in the street turned and looked at Dan just as he was reaching for the gun tucked in his back. “Fuck,” he said in a low voice. “Get down,” he screamed as he dove for the girl and pulled her to the floor just as a bullet shattered the plate glass window.

“Come with me,” Remi whispered as she began crawling toward the back of the diner. “There’s a back door.”

Dan scrambled after the girl stopping only to tell the cook, “Stay down and call the cops.” When he arrived at the door, he pushed in front of Remi. “Stay behind me,” he said as he slowly opened the door.

A bullet whizzed by his head and Dan drew a bead on the shooter and took him out. He grabbed Remi’s hand and said, “Come on, we have to get out of here fast.”

Remi didn’t have time to think as she ran along with the man and hopped into his car when he opened the door.

Once he slammed the gear into drive, Dan took off down the alley until he got to a street and turned away from the diner. It wasn’t long before the Mercedes was roaring after him. Dan reached over and pushed Remi’s head down. “Stay down,” he ordered as the wheels squealed when he took a sharp left followed by a right. When he saw his opening, he screeched to a stop, got out, stood boldly in front of the car, and squeezed the trigger just as the vehicle came into range.

The Mercedes swerved to the left then the right before it came to rest against a concrete post.

Dan watched as the door opened and a man staggered out with a gun pointed at him. It took only one of Dan’s bullets to make the man fall to the pavement. He turned and walked back to his car. When he heard Remi shout *watch out*, he rotated on one heel and with an efficient move took another shooter out. With his gun held at the ready, he moved cautiously toward the vehicle. He kicked the man lying on the macadam and then looked inside the Mercedes—no one was there. As he was checking the second man, Remi came up to him and grabbed his arm.

“Are they dead?” she asked in a calm voice.

“Yes,” Dan said as she turned and looked the girl over. “Are you hurt?”

“No.” Remi asked, “Are you a drug runner?”

Dan cocked his head. “That’s a strange question.”

Remi shrugged. “I went to jail for selling drugs.”

With his eyes fixed on the girl, Dan gave her a thoughtful look. “How attached are you to your waitressing job?”

“It’s a means to an end,” Remi replied.

Dan smiled. “I might have something better for you.”

* * *

That was how it all started for Remington eighteen years earlier. She proved to be a natural leader who could easily cajole anyone. When Olivia Santos became one of her team members eight years earlier, the Wolf took an instant interest in the woman. Because of the nature of what they did, her whole team needed release of one sort or another after a mission in the form of alcohol, drugs, or sex. Olivia Santos was no different. She felt the stirrings of sexual need as she recalled how Olivia responded to her.

The woman was as insatiable as the Wolf in the need to quell the bloodlust that a kill would inspire. Their sexual encounters were intense as well as physically rough. Nothing was out of

bounds as they took from each other repeatedly until they both felt satisfied. There was no romance or tenderness—just a savage need that demanded fulfillment. Olivia was a close to a friend as Remington ever had and in her own way, Remington felt protective toward her.

That was how the Wolf always took the women in her bed. Never did she display any type of response other than by taking what she wanted—until the night with Parker. At first, the need they both felt outweighed all else but later, after that first encounter, they made love. The gentleness she showed and the time she took to make sure Parker's needs and wants were satisfied before hers surprised her.

Remington felt an attraction to Parker from the first moment she saw her five years earlier at DOCO headquarters. The woman's beauty, her uncanny ways of disguise, her unequalled proficiency with a long rifle, and her one hundred percent success rate were the stuff that rumors made into legends. When Parker Davis came to her house several months ago as a damaged agent on the outs with their employer, the Wolf could still sense the danger in her and the determination to succeed. *Perhaps the head injury caused her trouble but all I saw was how vibrant she was.* It wasn't until she was lying by Parker's side while they were taking out the cartel members that Remington regretted allowing Castellan and his flunky Vince to rape Parker. At the time, she justified the rape as getting revenge for what Parker did to Olivia Santos. Now she knew it was her way of seeing if Parker was strong enough to rebound and be effective.

"She showed me," she mumbled.

"Pardon me," the husky man sitting next to her said.

The Wolf glared at the man's brown eyes and saw him tremble in what she knew was fear. At that moment, one of the flight crew's voices came over the speaker system announcing take off. Remington gave the man one last look and settled into her seat before fastening her seatbelt. The weapon's she felt in her back and on her sides gave her some comfort in protecting herself for what was to come. If the plan Parker laid out for her worked, she would be back in DOCO's good graces in a few days.

Why did I push Parker away? That wasn't what I wanted—I'd never sell her out and I know she'd never do that to me. Remington closed her eyes and the vision of the dark haired beauty found its way into her consciousness. *Will I ever see her again? I doubt it—if she doesn't want anyone to find her then no one will.* As the plane taxied and lifted off, the Wolf felt a pang of sadness, begin in her heart and spread throughout her body.

Chapter Four

Parker drove aimlessly around the streets of Austin, Texas before settling on staying at the Hyatt Regency. Once settled in her suite, she stepped out onto the balcony that overlooked Lady Bird Lake and took in the sights. From where she stood, she had a view of the Congress Street Bridge where people flocked at night to watch the bats emerge from underneath it. She cared nothing about that for what she was facing was far more important.

With a heavy heart, she sat down in one of the chairs on the balcony and began planning her next move. She was in trouble and she needed to concentrate on how and where to go without leaving any traces to follow. What she really wanted to do was go back to the Wolf's house and never leave. The tender way Remi made love to her wasn't a figment of her imagination—it was real. She bowed her head and rubbed her eyes with her thumb and forefinger as she recalled in detail what holding Remi in her arms felt like. How the soft kisses to her body made her react as never before. At some point in the night, she admitted what she had felt all along—Remington Wolf meant more to her than a casual sex partner. She wanted to be familiar with the woman on a level other than just sexually; to know all there was about her in every way.

Her hand went to the left side of her head and she rubbed it as the pain that she hadn't felt in a month began to intensify. "Fuck," she cursed as she got up and went into her room. She fumbled through her bags until she found the pill bottle that held the white ten milligram Oxycodone pills. After shaking out two white pills she cursed again, "Fuck, there's only two left." She closed her eyes and concentrated on the pain before putting the two pills back in the bottle. "I've had worse," she said before stretching out on the bed and closing her eyes once again.

* * *

A knocking on the door followed by, "Housekeeping.," woke Parker. When she heard the door open she stood up just as a small woman opened the door.

"Sorry," the woman said as she averted her eyes and made a hasty retreat into the hallway. "I will come back later."

Parker shook her head, dug a hand into her jean's pocket, and approached the woman and handed her a twenty. "I don't need the room cleaned today," she said.

With a skeptical look, the woman took the offered money and nodded. "Thank you," she said before pushing her cart further down the hallway.

Once she closed the door and pulled the safety latch into place, Parker rubbed her face. It had been a long time since she had slept longer than a few hours and for once, she actually felt alive. That feeling of well being alerted her to the fact that she hadn't eaten anything substantial in several days. Without another thought she picked up the phone.

"Room service," a female voice said.

"I'm like two eggs scrambled, sausage, toast, and coffee," she casually said. "Oh, and put a rush on that I really need my coffee fix."

"You got it," the voice said before she let out a chuckle. "I will deliver it myself."

Parker smiled. "I'd like that," she said before she hung up. "Where'd that come from?" she asked. "I don't do nice."

As she waited for her breakfast, Parker took out her laptop and accessed the DOCO camera that scanned the entrance in the main compound. She saw nothing of interest and began scanning all the cameras in hope of seeing the Wolf there—nothing. If the Wolf used her plan to get back into DOCO she would be flying into Scranton, Pennsylvania then driving a rental to the Chester County location of the DOCO headquarters. As she access the camera feeds from the Scranton Airport started, she pushed an earbud into her ear just before she heard a soft knock on the door. Still intent on watching and listening as the feed came to life, she carried her iBook to the door and opened it.

“Is this fast enough?” a voice asked.

Parker immediately identified the voice as that of the woman who took her order. “Put it on the table over there,” she said as the security area of the airport came into view on her iBook.

“Can I do anything else for you,” the voice asked.

Engrossed in what she was watching, Parker ignored the woman until she heard a throat clearing. When she looked up she saw a pretty blonde girl who she thought was in her early twenties or late teens. The look in the girl’s eyes was unmistakable. “What did you have in mind,” Parker asked in her most seductive voice.

“I get off in an hour—I could come back for your dishes then,” the girl said as she moved a bit closer to Parker.

At that moment, Parker heard the announcement in her ear for the flight that the Wolf would be on if she stuck to the plan that she had given the Wolf.

“Well, what do you say?” the girl asked.

Parker froze when she realized how close the girl was to her. I can’t believe I let that happen. “Sorry, sweetheart, I’ve got business to do and it is going to take all day.”

“I could come around later,” the girl said as she moved into Parker’s personal space.

In the crowd of people moving from the arrival area, Parker saw the Wolf. “No, I don’t think so,” she said as she moved to the door and opened it. “I’m not into jailbait.” Once she shut the door, Parker moved to the table and began to scan the other airport monitors until she saw Remington at a car rental kiosk.

“Good girl,” she said to the screen as she lifted the dome off her breakfast and began to eat.

* * *

For the rest of the day, Parker hacked into different cameras along the Pennsylvania Turnpike as she watched the Wolf progress south toward Philadelphia and Chester County. It was then that Parker recalled the Wolf’s words about turning her in for the reward.

She had a wide variety of places around the world she could go and no one, not even DOCO, could find her. “I shouldn’t have ever told her about my safe houses,” she mumbled as she paced around her room before going out on the balcony. Her eyes focused on the lake and several people out in the water in kayaks. “Never underestimate your enemy,” she said. “If they want to find me badly enough they will—but only if I let them.”

The question—did she want the Wolf to find her? The answer was unclear and that bothered her. As she continued to watch the water, she mulled over where to go where no one would find her. There was every possibility that the girl who delivered her breakfast, the man at the front desk, or any number of people could be *watchers*. They could have already alerted DOCO of her whereabouts.

Once she decided where she was going she packed her belongings, checked out, and headed for her Mustang. Where she was going no one would ever find her.

Chapter Five

“You’d better be right, Parker,” the Wolf whispered as she pulled up to the gooseneck number pad at the gate to DOCO headquarters. She sucked in a breath and schooled her features before lowering the window of the Prius she was driving and pressing the call button. Remington was under no illusion that her being there was a surprise. She noted an almost imperceptible look of recognition from the rental car agent. She couldn’t see what the monitor showed, but when the stout woman looked at her again, it was in recognition. There was no doubt that DOCO had monitored her entire journey to their headquarters.

“State your business,” a low gravelly voice crackled through the speaker.

“Wolf has returned.” Within seconds, Remington watched as the black wrought iron gate slowly began to open. Once she determined there was enough room for the small rental to go through she pressed the gas pedal and started down the driveway toward the house.

The house was a large Garrison Colonial, which was typical of the area. No one would suspect what was lying deep in the earth below the house—the nucleus of the covert organization was located three stories down and below that barracks where the staff and agents resided when working in the area.

Once the Wolf exited her vehicle she walked toward the front steps and was about to climb them when the front door opened.

Nigel Bradford, the head of DOCO, was a tall imposing man with steel gray hair and a thin moustache above his upper lip. He nodded at the Wolf and when she came in front of him, he turned and walked away—he knew she’d follow.

* * *

Remington followed the man down a long hallway before he opened a door on the left and went in. Once inside, Nigel pointed to a chair in front of his desk and proceeded to sit in the leather chair behind the desk.

“We thought you were dead.” Nigel commented as he pulled a folder from his desk. “And, now you just show up without as much as a phone call.” He fixed the Wolf with cold, dark eyes. “Care to explain.” It wasn’t a question.

Remington’s shoulders relaxed some as she said, “You know about the shootout with Castellan and the cartel.”

Nigel nodded. “I understand you were shot.”

“Yes, they had snipers who began shooting at us. Castellan and his muscle, Vince, were killed.” She closed her eyes for a moment then continued. “I was shot and bleeding heavily when Ava Dupree and Parker Davis drove into the warehouse and I remember Ava talking to me but I can’t recall what she said. The next thing I knew, I was being helped out of the van and guided into an adobe looking house.”

“Do you know the location?”

Remington shook her head. “No, all she told me was that it was a safe house.” She scratched her face. “I know it was isolated and to me it seemed we were in the desert,” she shrugged, “but I can’t be positive of that.”

“Why?”

“She drugged me and held me prisoner.”

Nigel’s eyes narrowed. The story sounded like what happened to Olivia Santos. “Did she rape you?”

The Wolf lowered her head. “Yes.”

“We couldn’t locate you. Why do you think that was?” he asked with a note of suspicion.

“She had all kinds of gadgets—I learned that she had some sort of cloaking device when I heard a helicopter overhead and told her DOCO was coming to get her. She laughed and said they would never find us. She also told me that there was a mole in DOCO and I was safer with her.” The Wolf snorted. “I don’t think being drugged and forced to have sex is *safer*.”

“How did you get to Mexico?”

“She drugged me and the next thing I knew we were climbing up a hill overlooking what she said was where the rest of the cartel members were meeting to elect someone to replace Castellan.”

Nigel stood up, placed his hand flat on the desk, glared at the agent, and said, “What I don’t understand, Agent Wolf, is how you managed to get in touch with your DOCO contact while being heavily drugged.”

Remington’s eyes focused on the man. “She held a gun to my head and made me make the call.”

The director chuckled and shook his head. “Do you seriously believe that for a minute I would think anyone could hold a gun to your head and make you do anything, Wolf?”

The Wolf seemed to bristle with anger as she said, “What did you want me to do let her kill me?”

“It is what I would have expected.”

“The woman is demented—she was going after the cartel and said she didn’t want anyone else taking away her kill. I made the call because I thought you could trace it to where she was holding me.”

“I know that for a brief moment we had located you in Mexico and had dispatched a team to the location. When they arrived, no one was there.” He paused then asked, “So tell me when was this exactly?”

“We were on the hill overlooking the compound. It was just before she started her assault.”

“Tell me, what happened to your chip?”

“Davis had some sort of device that she said jammed all signals that would identify us. It was after we arrived back in the States that she removed my chips.”

Nigel raised his eyebrows in surprise. “*Chips?*”

“Yes, one behind my right ear and she had two.”

“The records showed that you called your handler.” He glared at the Wolf. “Now, here you are, expecting me to believe that Davis kept you drugged and a prisoner, yet you were able to call your handler who said the sound of your voice demonstrated quite the opposite.”

Before Remington could answer, Nigel pressed a button and the recorded call she made with her handler began playing. “Be very careful in what you say, Wolf,” he cautioned.

The Wolf sat straight backed in her chair with her never wavering eyes fixed on the man across the desk. She knew he was studying her face for any sign of deceit. If he thought he could beat her at that game, he was dead wrong for she was the master of deceit. “I made her think she could trust me. It wasn’t easy, but eventually I convinced her that she could go to sleep and I would still be there when she awoke. It was when we were in a hotel in El Paso that she finally succumbed to what I thought was a sound sleep.”

“Go on,” Nigel said when the Wolf remained silent for several moments.

“I picked up the phone, testing whether she would wake or not—she didn’t. I called the handler and as soon as I did, she moved ever so slightly and I began relating to my handler what had happened, as I always do. Something told me she was awake and when I saw her eyes open, I knew I’d been found out.”

“What did she do?” he asked with skepticism.

“Her gun was pointed at me with the trigger cocked. I knew she would kill me right there.”

“Obviously she didn’t, and you want me to believe that one of DOCO’s top agents was hoodwinked by one of lesser stature?” He raised an eyebrow.

The Wolf’s face remained composed as she said, “You underestimated Davis. She was playing everyone. Beneath that shot in the head façade of hers, lays a very dangerous woman.”

Nigel clasped his hands and said, “Perhaps. Let’s go forward to us following the trail of your microchip heading west on a truck.”

The Wolf knew that Nigel was still studying her waiting for her to slip up—she would not allow that to happen. “It was right after that call,” she rubbed her head, “she hit me in the head with her gun and when I woke, I was bound and she told me she was going to take my chip out. You said they were on a truck—I know nothing about that.” She shrugged, but her eyes were unwavering. “We stopped at a truck stop after we went into New Mexico—I don’t remember much after that for she injected me with something after the car stopped.”

“What sort of car?”

“It was a black Escalade.”

Nigel rested his elbows on the desk and clasped his hand together. “I find everything you’ve said implausible.” He continued to search her face but could not discern any sort of deceit. Yet, what she was telling him was so outlandish that he found it hard to believe. “That was over six weeks ago. Do you really expect me to consider what you’re telling me to be the truth, Wolf?”

“Sir, I have worked for the company for almost twenty years. In that time have I ever given you cause to doubt my loyalty to DOCO? I know that Davis is considered a rogue, nevertheless we have underestimated her intelligence and abilities.” She touched her chest. “I know I did and that is a shame I will live with forever.”

With his finger tips touching, Nigel tapped them in a one, two, three rhythm as he thought about what the Wolf had said. She was right, she had been loyal, but that didn’t mean she was being truthful now. Had Davis not done something similar to another agent, he would have dismissed her story completely. Therein laid the conundrum—believe her or kill her. “Tell me how you got away.”

“Davis had a every device imaginable at her fingertips. She kept a constant surveillance of what seemed like every possible government department. Somehow she found out that Elliot was at my house waiting to capture me.” She shook her head. “I didn’t know why she wanted to go back there but I agreed knowing that I could get a firmer footing against her in my own home.

“We watched the house for a week before she was convinced that Elliot and Demetrius were holed up inside and would not come out. I knew of a secret entrance and shared that with her since I was desperate to get inside and have an advantage over her.” Remington shrugged one shoulder. “Once inside she killed them both and made me clean up the mess that created.” She grinned. “That was her undoing. I was able to reach a gun I had hidden near my bed and get the drop on her.” Her eyes hardened. “I shot every bullet in the clip into her body and then I tossed her in the incinerator and watched her burn,” she growled. “I was free of her at last.”

The anger and hatred that Nigel saw in the Wolf's features told him she truly despised Davis and that lent credibility to her story. He was still not completely convinced but it was enough to remove the bounty on her and ease her back into the organization. His motto was trust no one and he would adhere to that. The Wolf would have to prove herself just as a novice agent would.

"Welcome back, Agent Wolf. Let's get you situated and I'd like you to see our psychiatrist so you can let go and begin again."

"Thank you. I always wanted to come back home."

Chapter Six

Remington sank into the soft mattress in the room she once again occupied. All her belongings were there and she wondered if they had moved them back in or was the room left as it was for her return. She learned very early in her association with DOCO to lie convincingly. It had gotten her out of jams and none as important as the story she told Nigel. She had to walk a very tight, thin wire as she let her story unfold. It was imperative that she show no outward sign that what she said was not the truth. Most important—protect Parker by convincing them that she was dead. She was glad that she had the foresight to remove all traces of ash in the incinerator.

In the folders that Parker had left for her, the woman had mapped out the strategy for getting back in the good graces of DOCO. She had to school her features when Nigel asked the very questions that Parker proposed he would. It was not a given that Nigel was entirely convinced but she felt that he found enough truth in what she said to give her some leeway. But, she would have to be ever vigilant if she were to survive in the long term.

Her thoughts turned to Parker and the sadness she felt in them parting as they had. It was clear from the documents that Parker left behind that she was completely engaged in the Wolf's successful return to DOCO. *So why did I send you away?*

In a covert fashion, Remington let her eyes roam the room searching for traces of both cameras and microphones. She spotted two but knew that there would be more. From here on in she was on a short lease and any slip on her part would mean certain death. It was ironic that the very place she felt the safest in the past was not laced with danger and fear. She would bide her time and make her way back to where she was before she had a price on her head.

* * *

Lana Fox was a lean blonde with a manner that matched her body. She had a no nonsense attitude and expected everyone on her team to do the same. When she found that the legendary Wolf would be part of her team, she went straight to her immediate supervisor.

"How can you do this to me?" she questioned her handler, Hank Foster. "I don't want her and don't need her on my team."

"Not my decision. This comes straight from the top so you'd better keep that yap of yours quiet if you know what's good for you."

Lana leaned in close so only Hank could hear. "She will try to take over my team and I will not let that happen. I'll see her dead first."

Hank's deep brown eyes glared at Lana as he moved away from her. "The last time I checked this isn't a democracy. You will do your missions with the team assigned to you. If you have a problem with that, Fox, you'd best leave it at the door if you know what's good for you."

Lana lifted her lip in a snarl and nodded before turning away from the man. "Why do I get stuck with her?" she asked as she whipped back around. "She's a rogue and everyone knows that and now it's up to me to babysit her," she mumbled as she turned for the door and left.

Once she was inside the alert room, she looked at her team who were sitting around a large table. She nodded at Mitch Brewer, a small wiry man who had a knack of getting into places no one else could. Next to him sat Reggie Nash, a tall slender woman who was their technical

expert. Reid Balfour, who had blonde, wavy hair and light blue eyes, was the team's sniper. Her eyes then stopped at the blonde, green-eyed woman who sat opposite the others.

"You must be the Wolf," Lana said as she stood at the head of the table. "The four of us have gotten along quite well without you so your job will be to sit there and be quiet. When we go out on missions you can tag along, but will stay out of the operation." Her eyes fixed on the Wolf. "Do I make myself clear?"

Remington nodded. "Perfectly."

Lana looked at the others in the room and was surprised to see their frowns. "You have a problem?" she asked Reggie.

Reggie bit the inside of her cheek before she said, "Don't you think she can contribute to the team and our missions?"

"Yeah," Reid said. "She's a legend and practically wrote the book on covert missions—her success rate is phenomenal."

When Lana slammed her fist on the table, everyone looked at her except the Wolf, whose green eyes were on her the whole time.

In an instant, Lana was next to the Wolf and in her face. "You think you're so god damned great but you're not. You may have the others fooled but not me. I'll be watching you so you'd better be prepared for what's going to happen to you."

In a voice so cold that the temperature in the room dropped, the Wolf said, "Is that a threat, Fox?"

Lana moved away but only by a fraction.

"I assure you," the Wolf stood, "that you are no match for me. If you want to try then bring it on—and it should be you, Fox, that's watching her back."

Not backing down, Lana said, "We will see about that."

"Once again you have a false sense of bravado. The fact that the vein in your neck is pounding, there's sweat forming on your forehead, and I can detect the tremor in your body tells me I frighten you." Remington smiled but it did not reach her eyes. "I am not someone you should take lightly, nor am I someone you want to have as an enemy."

As she forced her body to stop betraying her, Lana smiled too. "You certainly have a big ego. If you think that you frighten me, you should know that I don't frighten easily, Wolf." Lana then turned and let go of the breath she was holding. *I will not let her intimidate me.*

Once she was back at the head of the table, Lana turned on the overhead projector and began briefing her team about their upcoming mission.

* * *

Later that day, Remington listened as her new team leader struggled not to look at her. The woman's name suited her for she had hazel eyes and strawberry blonde hair that she had pulled back in a ponytail. The mission she was describing was one that Remington had executed a hundred times or more. She saw flaws in what Fox was describing but did not speak letting her shaking head do her talking.

"You have a problem with what I am saying, Wolf? If you do, there's the door."

Remington laughed and everyone looked at her.

"It is my good fortune that you have relegated me to the sidelines for if you use that plan, you will all be dead."

All the eyes in the room darted to the team leader.

“And there you have it, everyone. The Wolf is now starting to usurp me by making you think I am in error with my strategy for this mission.”

“How many missions like this have you been on, Fox?” Remington chided. “I have been down that road so many times I’ve lost count. You have a gaping hole that is going to get everyone here killed—but me, of course.”

“Where is the hole,” Mitch asked.

“Take some time and go through all the steps. It will be abundantly clear once you do.” The Wolf smiled again. “As for me, I was offered the door and I am going to take it.” Remington pushed back her chair and got up. As she passed by Lana, the woman grabbed her arm.

“Don’t you dare,” Lana warned.

The Wolf’s fingers were around the team leader’s neck so fast that everyone just looked in surprise. “Don’t you ever touch me again,” growled the Wolf before she let go exited the briefing room.

A visibly shaken Lana Fox watched the Wolf leave before she sat down.

* * *

“Hey, Wolf, wait up,” a voice from behind Remington called.

She turned and saw one of her old team members walking quickly toward her. “Roman,” she said with a nod.

“I’m glad you’re back,” the bear of a man said. “No one ever had my back like you.”

Once again, Remington nodded as she waited for the real reason the man was keeping her from her lunch.

Not meeting the Wolf’s eyes, Roman said, “The boss wants you.”

Remington was not surprised by the turn of events as she knocked on the director’s door. When she heard, “Enter,” she walked inside.

“You requested my presence.”

Nigel Bradford fixed the Wolf with a cold stare. “What happened in the team meeting?”

The Wolf did not sit, but moved so she was directly in front of the director on the other side of his desk. She leaned in and said, “Let’s not play this game. We both have been here long enough to know that nothing happens here that isn’t recorded.” Then she growled, “That woman, who relegated me to the sidelines, is going to get them all killed.”

“That is Agent Fox’s team *not* yours. She is experienced and has a high rate of success. She is in charge and you *will* do what she tells you to do.”

Ice laced Remington’s voice as she said, “They will all die. Is that what you want?”

“There was a time when that wouldn’t have bothered you.” Nigel stood up and met the icy glare with one of his own. “You disappear for over two months, have your tracking device removed, and then come back here with an unbelievable story and expect to just pick up where you left off,” he said in a low whisper. “That is not going to happen.”

“Do I correctly understand, Director? Are you telling me that you are willing to let operatives die so you can prove a point?” The Wolf snarled, “You’ve demoted me to a grunt position isn’t that enough?”

The director breathed deeply, and then retook his seat. “We are finished.”

The Wolf looked at the man for a moment more and then with a turn of her heel, she strode out of the office, closing the door behind her. As she walked away, she recalled the director’s words, *there was a time when that wouldn’t have bothered you*, and knew the truth behind them.

When did that change? When a vision of Parker Davis floated into her mind, she knew the answer.

* * *

Later that day, Remington sat at a table by herself half heartedly eating her dinner. She was alone with her thoughts and that was how she liked it. Her body language told others that she was unapproachable and they respected that. The Wolf had no need for others in her life. On many occasions she had seen how others who had serious relationships faltered and wanted out when it came down to life or death. A prime example—Olivia Santos. In the early days, her prowess in efficient kills was without equal. Once the nun, as Parker called the woman, came into her life, Olivia lost her edge. Yet, DOCO kept her on their roster as an active agent. Remington puzzled over that for she had never seen Olivia at headquarters in over a year. *Maybe even longer.*

A voice behind her said, “Ah, an empty seat.”

Remington rolled her eyes and said, “I prefer eating along. What do you want, Hank?”

Lana Fox’s handler ignored the Wolf’s words and pulled out the empty chair out and sat down. “We need to talk.”

“Didn’t you learn before that I am not someone you want as an enemy?”

“With your status right now, it doesn’t matter,” he commented in a low threatening voice.

The Wolf gave him a rakish smile. “I wouldn’t be so sure of that, Hank. The reasons for kicking you off my team still apply. If they didn’t, you’d be a team leader instead of a handler.”

Hank bristled at her comment. “What the fuck do you know? I’m not the one who took off.”

Remington let out a slight laugh. “I suggest that you get up and leave or you will find that you have no life at all.”

“You don’t scare me.”

One look in the man’s face told Remington all she needed to know. In a flash, her gun was resting between Hank’s eyes. She saw his fear increase as all those around them looked on in fascination. Most of them knew her before the drug debacle and gave her the respect due her previous position.

“Your only choice, Hank, is to walk away.”

Hank nodded and got up. As he walked away, over his shoulder he said, “This isn’t finished.”

The sound of a gun firing rang throughout the room and Hank fell to the floor. “It is now,” Remington said before she turned back to her meal—the Wolf was back.

* * *

Remington wasn’t surprised that no one called into question her killing Hank Foster. He had obviously fulfilled his mission and the price for that was death. By nightfall, a messenger from Nigel’s office informed the Wolf that she was the new mission chief. That meant that all teams involved in with assassinations had to run their strategies by her before they engaged in the mission.

When Lana Fox entered her office, Remington could see and smell her fear. She had missed the power she had over everyone. She looked up at the woman but said nothing.

“You were right,” Lana said with a shaky voice. “I found the hole and reworked the mission to reflect that.” When the Wolf didn’t answer, Lana added, “Would you like to take part in the briefing?”

With her hands folded on the desk, Remington’s green eyes raked over the woman’s body once, then fell onto Lana’s face. “If I find another flaw in your plan, you will be pulled from the mission and someone more capable will take your place.”

“B—,” Lana started to say but stopped when she saw the challenge in the green eyes. “I understand,” she said before leaving the Wolf’s office.

Remington’s face glowed. “How I’ve missed that power,” she said for the benefit of the cameras. She realized after walking out of Fox’s briefing the day before, that Nigel was testing her by pushing her to what he thought were her limits. Little did he know that her *limit* was far greater than he could imagine. She was toying with him as she had from the time he arrived as director ten years earlier. The man was no match for her. No one was—except for Parker Davis.

Now she was in the position to access the DOCO database and look for Parker’s whereabouts. She had the access code that let her enter the bank of computers via a backdoor. *I will find you, Parker, and make sure you are safe.*

* * *

Parker was in the one place she knew Remi could find her. She monitored the Wolf’s return to DOCO carefully listening and watching her every move. The story that the woman gave the director about her time away almost convinced *her* that it was the truth. When she watched as the Wolf casually murdered a man that she recognized as Hank Foster, she knew that act alone would convince those in power of her loyalty. It was then she decided to head back to the desert and the safe house she once shared with the Wolf.

She had spent a week holed up near Austin in the only sleazy hotel she could find that offered free internet. Her persona as a man with a thick beard and paunchy midsection, allowed her the freedom to come and go, if needed, without raising suspicions. Now, it was time for her to go back to the desert and wait for Remi to arrive.

There she would be safe and the equipment she had would keep her up to date with the woman she couldn’t get out of her mind. The fact that Remi told Nigel that she had killed her was a bonus for it meant that hope of her seeing her again existed.

Chapter Seven

The Wolf spent many frustrating hours trying to find Parker's whereabouts. DOCO had permitted her to return to her home in the small town of Parkesburg. She knew that monitoring devices were still in place and suspected there may be more. Once she had covertly located all of them, she had undetected access through a backdoor in the DOCO database.

Parker had obviously been correct in her assumption that DOCO did not know about her safe houses spread throughout many countries. The only information on Parker she found was service records and evaluations from the company shrink.

One early morning as she sat in a Hummer surrounded by Lana Fox's team, she realized she had been looking at the problem from the wrong angle. She had spent the last six months with DOCO doing all the right things that would convince them of her loyalty. It was now time to put that confidence in her to the test. Once they were safely ensconced beneath the white Garrison colonial home, she would put her plan into motion.

* * *

A week later, Nigel looked up from the file he was reading and seemed genuinely surprised that the Wolf was standing in front of his desk. "Was the mission successful?"

"Yes," the Wolf said.

"Why are you here, then?"

"I am planning on selling my home in Austin and will leave in a few days to put my house in order. I will be gone for two weeks."

Remington watched the man's facial expressions as he processed the information. His minute pause told her he was not happy.

With a shake of his head, Nigel said, "We need you here," before he returned to what he was doing.

In a low, threatening growl, the Wolf responded, "I wasn't asking for your permission I was merely informing you of my plans." Remington then watched as the always unflappable Nigel Bradford's face turned red and the veins in his neck bulged.

"How dare you come into my office and make such demands," the man said through clenched teeth. "Just who do you think you are?"

The Wolf smiled. "I am your worst enemy, Nigel. I'll see you when I get back."

"You will not go anywhere without an escort," Nigel blurted when the Wolf reached the door.

Remington turned and gave the man her coldest glare. "I will not take anyone with me." As her hand rested on the doorknob, she added, "Don't fuck with me," she snarled. Nigel didn't know she was in the power position—soon he would.

As Remington closed the door behind her, she walked to the front door knowing she had left the man with the impression that she wasn't leaving for several days. If he was dumb enough to fall for that, he would think he had time to secure the right resources to watch her. There was no doubt in her mind that at that very moment the man was on the phone ordering to tail her. Little did he know that she had already secured a private jet to take her to Texas. She was confident that it wouldn't take Nigel long to dispatch someone to watch her home there. All she needed

was a few hours head start. Once she was in her house and she put the second part of her plan in motion no one would find her. Of that she had no doubt. She chuckled softly. “What an imbecile.”

* * *

After telling Nigel what she was going to do, Remington knew that timing was everything. She did not go home but went directly to a small airfield that was a few miles away. Her current position with DOCO gave her access to the entire list of *watchers* so she was able to find a pilot that was not on the list. Several days earlier, she removed the tracker attached to her sleek black Porsche Cayman S and placed on a car in her neighborhood that never moved. Now in her vehicle, she engaged the instrument Parker had given her to block the signal that the tracking devices in her body were giving.

Secure in the knowledge that she was for the moment free, she pulled up to a hanger and got out.

A short man wearing glasses said, “Are you ready to go?”

“Yes, can I store my vehicle in the hanger until I return?”

“Of course,” the man said as he continued his visual check of his aircraft.

It wasn’t long before Parker was onboard the Learjet that would fly nonstop to Austin. As she clicked her seat belt, she went over all the minute details that would help her evade DOCO monitoring, keep her in their good stead, and allow her the time to find Parker. Contrary to all the preparation necessary for a successful sniper mission, her plan was relatively simple. Go to her home, remove the tracking devices, leave them in the house, and go to Parker’s safe house. Once there, she hoped to find something that would indicate where the woman’s other residences were. If she came up empty, she would stop her searching knowing that Parker Davis did not want anyone finding her.

That thought pained Remington in a way she hadn’t felt since she found out that Inez Montalba had only used her. As the last six months with DOCO progressed, Remington realized that she had lost her edge, not that anyone but her noticed. Parker invaded her thoughts regularly. The number of missions she was part of was limited. Often in the long moments when she would lay in wait for a target, thoughts of Parker would drift into her consciousness. On her last mission, those thoughts almost got the entire team killed when she failed to realize that events were about to unfold. Her team was fortunate that day for her instincts overrode her musings just in time.

Once the plane had flown for fifteen minutes, Remington removed the anti-tracking device. In all, she had been under the DOCO radar for thirty minutes. She told Nigel she was going to Austin to sell her house and that is what she’d let him believe.

* * *

Her home in Austin was just as she left it. The surveillance tapes showed nothing out of the ordinary—DOCO hadn’t visited. Once she retrieved the small object Parker had given her for detecting the tracking devices in her body, she set about removing them. She wasn’t surprised to find a total of four for it was a testament to what she already knew—those in power at DOCO did not trust her.

Remington had been in her home for less than an hour and knew her window of opportunity was running out—it wouldn't be long before a surveillance team arrived. After putting a few changes of clothes along with two handguns in a bag, she slipped a smaller Smith and Wesson pistol into the holster located in the small of her back. With one last look at all the monitors that assured her that no one was watching her home she knew it was time to leave. With a quick fluid motion, she went into the garage, mounted her black Ducati motorcycle and rolled out to the hidden back gate. There she viewed a remote monitor. Once she was convinced that no one was watching she surged out onto the road.

* * *

What she knew was the gate of Parker's Texas safe house, had a chain wrapped between it and a wooden fence post. Remington recalled Parker telling her she used the chain when she was away and took the chain being there as a sign that the woman was not there. It took no time to pick the lock, remove the chain, and enter the access key. Once she was through the gate she closed it and reattached the chain.

The place looked the same as when she was last there and Remi felt her heart sink. She had forced herself for so long not to care that she didn't recognize the growing attraction for Parker. *Why did I send her away like that?* She wanted—no needed to find Parker and tell her—What would I tell her? There, standing in the hot sun in the middle of nothingness, she realized the truth—she was in love and wanted a life with Parker.

It was with renewed determination that Remi made her way to the front door and took out her pick to open the door. Once inside, Remington stood quietly as a myriad of visions filled her mind. She could almost see Parker there with the quirky smile that Remi associated with the woman. She took one step toward what she knew was the hidden room and stopped when she heard a sound.

With her pistol in hand, and her ears straining to detect where the sound came from, she looked at the door at the end of the hallway. *What is that?* The next sound she heard was a scream of anguish and pain.

The Wolf carefully twisted the doorknob, kicked the door open, and held her gun at the ready as she scanned the room. Darkness filled the room. She heard another moan, focused her eyes on the bed, and saw someone lying there. Once her eyes adjusted to the darkness, she realized that it was Parker.

Her arms dropped and her feet quickly move to the bed. "Parker, what's wrong?" After she turned on the bedside lamp and she reassessed Parker, her hand flew to her mouth. "Shit."

Chapter Eight

“How long have you been like this,” Remi asked as she knelt by the bed.”

Parker closed her eyes. “If you are going to turn me in—” she grimaced in pain, “can you at least wait a while?”

Remi gently ran her fingers along Parker’s cheek. “I’m not going to turn you in—I should never have let you go,” she said softly.

Parker cried out in pain.

“Let me get everything ready and I will do what I can to help.” Her eyes drifted to a table on the other side of the bed and saw that all she needed was there. “How on earth did you think you’d do this by yourself?”

With a weak snort, Parker said, “Indian women would lean up against a tree, deliver the baby and then go back to work—it can’t be all that hard.”

All Remi could do was shake her head. “How close are the contractions?”

“Every minute or two.”

With her lips pressed together, Remi gently felt Parker’s protruding abdomen before she pulled the sheet back. Parker’s knees were bent, her feet rested on the mattress, and her legs were far apart. After moving to the foot of the bed, she leaned forward and inserted her fingers into Parker. “You’re fully dilated—it shouldn’t be long.”

Parker frowned. “How do you know that?”

“I’ve seen it in the movies.”

“Bitch,” Parker said before crying out as a hard contraction tightened her bulging abdomen and she pushed.”

Amazed, Remi said, “I see the head.”

Parker bore down and pushed when the next contraction came almost immediately after the last.

“On the next one I want you to push as hard as you can and not let up.” Remi’s eyes looked up at Parker. “Do you think you can do that for me?”

The answer was a scream and a baby being pushed into life.

Remi caught the child, clamped the umbilical, cord and took the scissors off the nearby table and cut the cord. “It’s a girl,” Remi said unable to stop emotion from filling her voice. Once she had the child cleaned, she wrapped her in a blanket and gave her to Parker. “Isn’t she beautiful?”

“Well hello there little one,” Parker whispered. “Welcome to the world.”

While the mother cared for the baby girl, Remi began massaging Parker’s abdomen and watched as the afterbirth slid out. “You have a good sized tear that needs stitching, Parker. Where do you keep the lidocaine and the suture kit?”

An hour later, Remi had stitched Parker’s tear and changed the bed linens. “I bet you’re hungry,” she said in a soft voice. The baby had suckled and fallen to sleep in her mother’s arms.

“Not really. I’m more tired than anything.”

* * *

Over the next five days, Parker slept only waking long enough to let the baby suckle. Remi kept watch over both of them and would take care of the baby while the mother slept. One of the

first jobs she had after she left home was taking care of a baby of one of the street people who befriended her. Remi would often sit for hours cradling the little one while she gently rocked her while sitting in a rocking chair.

Remi was in the kitchen holding the baby in a sink of water while she bathed her. When she felt a hand on her shoulder, she instinctively pulled the baby close to her for protection. When she spun around, she saw a weary looking Parker just as the baby began to wail.

“Shh, little one, it’s your mama coming to feed you,” Remi cooed as she began to gently sway while wrapping the baby in a towel. Once the baby’s protestations stopped, she laid her on a pallet of towels on the counter and diapered her.

“I didn’t mean to startle you,” Parker said as she accepted the child from Remi. “I must say, this is a side of you I never expected to see.”

Remington shrugged slightly and turned back to the sink where she let the water drain away. “Are you hungry?” she asked without turning around.

Parker was already sitting in the rocking chair, holding her daughter close as the baby suckled. “Not really.”

“If you are going to continue nursing you need to eat, Parker.”

Eyes that seemed to have softened since the birth looked at Remington. “Why are you here, Wolf? The last I heard, you were going to turn me in for the reward, so what changed?”

“I would never do that.” Remi said. “Why didn’t you contact me so I could help you?”

Parker closed her eyes. “I couldn’t take that chance.”

“You knew you were pregnant then?”

With her eyes fixed on the green ones of the woman, Parker shook her head. “Yes, but at the time I was going to have an abortion. Besides,” she looked at the baby in her arms, “I saw no need to tell you since I didn’t think you cared.” She returned her gaze to the Wolf. “Again, why are you here?”

Remi felt herself wince at the cold hard tone in Parker’s voice. *Why am I here?* As she crouched beside the rocking chair, Remi took one of Parker’s hands in hers. “Life, especially the one I’ve led, taught me to be wary and keep everyone at arm’s length. I—I didn’t want to care.”

Parker snorted. “And now you do?” she laughed but it didn’t reach her eyes. “The Wolf caring—that’s rich.”

“I do care,” Remi said softly as she felt her gripe on the situation begin to slip through her hands.

“Really? Frankly, I find that incredibly hard to believe.”

In one fluid motion, Remi stood up and glared down at the woman. “Why the hell do you think I stayed around and took care of *your* baby? What else do you think I should do?”

The baby stirred and her face crunched up before she began to cry.

As she began to rock and pulled the infant closer, she looked at Remi and sneered. Then she bowed her head and kissed the baby’s cheek. “What changed? Why did you come here looking for me?”

Remi felt her shoulders slump before she whispered, “I wanted to find you.”

“So you could kill me?” Parker asked as she protectively pulled the baby even closer to her.

“No!”

“Then why are you here?”

Once she sat in a soft cushioned chair next to the rocker, Remi said, “I followed your outline and tried to get back in DOCO’s good graces,” she paused, “Your plan worked perfectly. It

wasn't easy to regain their trust, but eventually I was able to. That gave me the opportunity to access their agent files—I wanted to find you.”

“So you could get the reward?”

Remi shook her head. “No, I wanted to make sure you were safe. I told them that I shot you and destroyed your body—It was you who got me back there and I wanted—no needed to know you were safe.” Her eyes met Parker’s. “My search came up empty since you had eradicated all the information about you—this was the only place I knew to look.”

In a soft voice, Parker asked, “How can I take a chance that what you say is true, Remi. We both know what the persona for an active DOCO agent is.” She looked down at her sleeping daughter. “I have to keep her safe and I don’t see that happening with you around.”

Remi whispered, “I need to see you—to be with you,” she sucked in a breath, “no one was more surprised than me when I realized that I love you.”

Parker leaned forward, got up and walked into her bedroom closing the door behind her.

In stunned silence, Remington listened as the door to her heart shut.

* * *

There was nothing in Parker’s life that prepared her for hearing that the Wolf, her Remi, loved her. When she had left the Wolf’s home in Austin, her world was crumbling around her. All the hope of a meaningful relationship that she built over the months she spent with Remi had suddenly disintegrated before her eyes. Now the woman her heart knew she loved without a doubt, had confessed her love.

She looked down at her daughter. “What should I do? Can I trust her to keep you safe?”

The baby slept on.

Ever since she held the Wolf in her arms after she was shot, Parker felt a tug at her heart like none she’d ever known. It was then she began to fall in love with the Wolf. The feelings she once had for Olivia, paled in comparison. After the one night of passion with Remi, Parker knew she would always love her and that is why the Wolf’s cruel words hurt her so much.

After she placed her daughter in the bassinet, she sucked in a deep breath and headed for the door and the woman she’d left sitting in the living room.

* * *

Remi lifted her eyes and looked at Parker.

“Forgive my skepticism, but the Wolf I know doesn’t have the capacity for love.”

With her nod at the comment, Remi began, “My mother abandoned me at an early age and I was left alone to make my way in the world. At the age of seventeen I became involved with a woman whom I desperately loved.” Remi’s eyes focused on the floor. “When I was arrested and sent to jail for selling her drugs, I foolishly thought she’d come and rescue me. She didn’t.” Her gaze returned to Parker’s eyes. “When I got out eighteen months later, I looked her up thinking that I hadn’t heard from her because she was arrested too.” She snorted. “Not the case. What I learned because of that experience was never trust to anyone with my heart. The only two people I loved, my mother and Inez, betrayed me.”

For a long moment, Parker was silent. “So how do I fit into that picture, Remi?”

“Honestly, the first time I saw you I was physically attracted to you. When I watched those bastards rape you it took everything I had to not castrate them both.”

“But you didn’t,” she said quietly. “Now, I have a child whose father could be a drug lord or a hired thug.”

Remi’s eyes sought out Parker’s before she continued. “When I saw Vince fall I did something I had never done before on a mission—I lost my focus. Because of that I was shot.” Remi fell silent. “In that one moment, I thought of you and that set me on a course I never expected.”

“And what was that?” Parker asked softly.

“To you.”

Parker saw something she never expected when she saw the genuine regret on Remi’s face before she brushed a lone tear off her cheek.

Remi knelt before Parker and took her hand before brushing her thumb over it. “I never told you this, but when I first woke after being shot, I looked at you and saw an angel.”

With a grin, Parker said, “We both know I’m no angel.”

“You were to me.”

Eager to hear more, Parker asked, “So what changed?”

“I did.”

Parker saw the Wolf’s face relax.

“I was leading a sniper group in Liberia. As I watched for the target to appear so I could give the go order, I was thinking about finding you and almost missed seeing the entourage that was accompanying the man. It was then that I realized I needed to find you.” She tilted her head and smiled. “When I entered my home in Austin earlier this week and you were not there I realized that what I was feeling for you was love.” She rested her head in Parker’s lap “I’m tired of the subterfuge and the killing, Parker. I want a different life,” she lifted her head and gazed into Parker’s eyes, “I want a life with you.”

With her right hand, Parker rubbed the left side of her head. The pain that her pregnancy seemed to abate was roaring back to life. She felt a cool hand replace hers and she closed her eyes. “Is it really possible that you love me?” she asked.

Remi cupped Parker’s face with both her hands and gently turned it so they both could see each other’s face and eyes. “It is more than possible, Parker,” she cooed before kissing her lips softly. “Never doubt my love for you.”

The loving look in the Wolf’s eyes was so opposed to the image Parker had of the woman that she had a hard time relating the Wolf to Remi. The woman looking at her with love was definitely Remi. *Can I take the chance that would be all I’d ever see?* Would the Wolf come back and shatter all her dreams? *I have my daughter to think about now.* Parker rubbed her head again. “I want to believe you but right now all I can think about is the pain.”

Remi kissed Parker’s cheek. “Let me take care of the baby,” she said. “I’ll watch over her while you sleep.”

For a moment, Parker’s heart clutched to the sincerity in Remi’s voice. “I guess trust has to start somewhere. I know she will be safe with you,” Parker mumbled as the emotional and physical pain became too much to bear.

Before Remi could roll the bassinet out of the room, exhaustion had finally overtaken Parker as she fell into a deep sleep.

* * *

Later in the day after the baby suckled and Parker had toast and tea, Remi smiled at the woman sitting next to her. “Have you thought of a name?”

Parker smiled at the child in her arms and shook her head. “I thought we could come up with one together—after all you were there at conception.”

Remi closed her eyes as a vision of the night of Parker’s rape filled her thoughts. “Not one of my most stellar moments. Most of what I’ve done in my life I have no regret for except when I stood by and watched as those bastards—raped you.”

“I wasn’t accusing you—it was a poor choice of words on my part. If we are to be a family, you need to be a part of our lives and that means giving this sweet girl a name.” With a cleansing sigh, Parker said, “I am tired of the subterfuge that has surrounded my life for all these years. I am ashamed for what I did to Olivia and I know that I will never be able to take back the damage I’ve done to her.” She ran a finger down the baby’s cheek before she looked up at Remi. “Do you think it is possible to start over with a firm foundation that I,” she gestured toward the baby and Remi, “we can build upon?”

“When you’re up to it, I’d like to take the two of you to the Greek Island of Rhodes in the Mediterranean. I think we will find peace there and we can begin to mend.”

Parker leaned into Remi’s arm that was around her shoulders. “I’d like that.” Her brow creased. “What about DOCO?”

“I’m done with them,” Remi said in a flat tone. “They won’t bother us.”

“How can you know that, Remi? They put a bounty on both of us. Why won’t they do that again?”

Remi pulled Parker closer and kissed her head. “Because they think you are dead and I—well let’s just say I have an ace in the hole.”

“Don’t joke with me, this is serious. How can we put her,” she nodded toward the sleeping baby, “in so much danger?”

After her fingers ran across the soft fuzz on the baby’s head, Remi gave Parker a sharp look. “I will *never* let anything happen to her or you. DOCO is in our pasts and they won’t be a problem.”

“How can you say that?”

“Trust me, Parker. I have made it so they will never come after me.”

“Tell me.”

“I have copies of all their activities over the last decade and they now know I have them.”

Parker frowned. “All the more reason for them to come after you.”

Remi smiled. “They won’t. If they do, all the information will become public. After the fallout after the WikiLeaks debacle, they won’t let that happen. They won’t want the exposure.

For a long moment, Parker considered what Remi said. “I have the same information and can set it up so that if anything happens to either of us the information goes public.” She nodded, then grinned. “I do think that will work.”

“Since that problem is solved,” Remi ran a finger gently over the sleeping baby’s face, “what shall we name this sweet baby?”

“What do you think about Eliza?”

Remington smiled as the baby chose that moment to open her eyes. “Hello there, Eliza.”

Chapter Nine

Parker breathed in the salty air and smiled as she watched Remi and Eliza frolic in the water. They had stayed in the safe house for six months until they cemented their relationship as lovers and as a family. She smiled as she recalled how they came to live on the Island of Rhodes eighteen months earlier—

She had spent the months in the desert constantly monitoring DOCO for any traces of a plot against her or the Wolf. Remi's confidence that DOCO would not bother them seemed to hold water. Yet, Parker was not entirely convinced and kept vigilant. Just as the Wolf declared that she would protect her family, so did Parker.

One night while searching the familiar data, Parker felt arms wrap around her neck before teeth lightly bit her ear.

"I want you so much, my love, come to bed." Remi cooed into her ear. "When will you trust me that you're going to find nothing there? Come with me,"

"But what if—" Parker began.

"There are no *what if's*, Parker, only what *is*." Remington let go then spun the chair around until she had hold of both of her lover's hands. "Come with me, my love."

Parker never knew the depth of love until Remi held her in her arms and literally loved her. Every touch, caress, kiss, or words, spoke of her deep and abiding love. She had known unbridled passion but she never truly realized what love meant. After they made love and lingered in its afterglow, she felt euphoric and knew that she would never let anything come between them.

At first, it was hard for her to equate how diametrically opposed the woman in her arms was to the persona of the Wolf. She never imagined that the cold, emotionless Wolf could be anything but savage when she took what she wanted. Yet, underneath all the walls, Parker found a woman who was capable of such tenderness that it often made her cry.

With their naked bodies touching, Parker leaned over and kissed Remi's cheek. "I love you," she whispered. "Never has anyone made me feel the love you give to me."

Remi rolled on her side and pulled Parker closer. "It never occurred to me that there was something other than unbridled sex." She ran a finger down Parker's cheek. "You've taken my tattered heart and made it whole again," she intoned before she passionately kissed her lover.

They always made love twice. The first time was to satisfy their physical need and the second to make love.

Remi trailed kisses from Parker's mouth down her neck, stopping to suck a beating pulse point gently, before she licked the turgid nipples. When her lips encompassed the Parker's nipple, she gently sucked delighting in the mother's milk that squirted into her mouth.

Parker's hand held Remi's head in place as her sensitive breast thrummed with need. Only when Remi looked up at her with a smile did she release her hold for she knew where those lips would travel to next.

With great patience and attention to the needs of her lover, Remi tongue licked the length of Parker's sex. When she heard her lover's moans of pleasure, Remi began darting her tongue in and out before lips clamped down and let her tongue enter as far as it would only to pull back out.

The movement of Remi's tongue inside her made Parker whimper in need of more. "I need to feel your fingers in me," she begged.

Remi pulled out her tongue before she began sucking on Parker's hard swollen clit. As she did, she inserted three fingers into her lover. Soon her tongue and fingers synchronized with the rocking motion of Parker's hip.

Parker felt her orgasm build knowing that Remi would take her higher until both her fingers and mouth made her climax. It was then that she began to explore her lover's body.

"It's time for us to leave," Remi said as Parker held her in her arms.

"I still worry about what is out there waiting for us," Parker cautioned.

"Do you trust me?" Remi asked as her thumb ran up and down Parker's arm.

"With my life and our daughter's life."

"Then believe me when I tell you we are safe and no one is going to hunt us down."

Parker considered the words and swallowed hard. Before she and her daughter would travel anywhere with Remi, she needed to know the answer to the one question she hadn't. "How did you become involved with DOCO?"

Remi fixed her lover with her green eyes. "Why do you want to know that?"

"Because it is the one part of the Remington Wolf puzzle I haven't seen."

"Dan Estevez recruited me and became my mentor for a time."

"He was your friend."

Remi shook her head. "Parker, you know as well as I do that DOCO and friends are an impossibility. He was good to me and when he died I felt some loss but not enough for me to cry."

Parker felt her heart clutch and her eyes begin to fill with tears. She turned away from her lover trying to gather the courage to say what needed saying.

"Look at me, Parker."

When she turned back to face Remi, she wiped away her tears.

"Please tell me what's wrong?"

"Wh—" she started, "I—Dan and I were partners."

"I knew that. Why does that make you cry—do you miss him that much?"

"No," Parker blurted. "It's nothing like that. Not even close."

"Then tell me."

"When it became apparent that Olivia Santos wanted out, they sent me to do whatever was necessary to bring her back into the fold, so to speak. I was told to make sure the nun became irrelevant to Olivia however I could." She lowered her eyes. "Dan," she whispered, "—he wasn't as on board as he should have been and that threatened the mission." She lifted her head and let her eyes hold Remi's. "I killed him then put him in car and let it sink in the river." As she finished she waited to see the Wolf emerge.

"That's when you kidnapped Olivia?"

Parker nodded. "They wanted me to make the nun believe Olivia wanted me and not her."

"The sick bastards," growled the Wolf.

Fear crept between Parker and her lover causing her to move away.

Remi closed her eyes and said nothing.

"What I didn't plan on was getting shot in the head," Parker offered. "I now have a constant reminder of what I let myself do. Killing a low life I can justify but doing what I did to Olivia, was unconscionable."

Remi's face softened. "Why don't we agree to leave all our past deeds in the past and focus on the lives ahead of us?"

Parker rubbed her head. "I can try but I do have a constant reminder."

Remi leaned in and gently kissed the scar underneath Parker's hair. "If that happens think of Eliza and me, if you want, and focus on what you have instead of what happened."

With a slight smile, Parker said, "I'll try."

"Good, that's my girl." She grinned. "Shall I make our travel arrangements tomorrow?"

"Yes. You're right. It is time to move on. We owe that to Eliza."

Parker returned to the present when she heard the laughter from below. Both Eliza and Remi were waving at her. A smile wreathed her lips as she returned the wave then watched Remi swung their daughter around before she pulled her into a hug. Again, Parker felt the surprise of how the Wolf was gone and in her place was a woman who had the capacity for intense feelings of love—it flowed from Remi in everything she did now.

How can that be? Parker asked herself early on in their relationship. It was when Remi was with Eliza that she realized the woman's capacity for love. And when they made love, it was so gentle and intimate that she felt the love radiating from her.

Now, she looked down on their private beach and saw her family sitting in the sand building a sand castle. She smiled. They made one almost every day and it would always be gone with the high tide. When Parker asked why they didn't build it so it was out of the reach of the waves, Remi simply said *if we do that, we wouldn't be able to start a new one.*

That one statement defined their lives together. Each day the slate became clean ready for a new day's adventures or misadventures. In her hand, she held an envelope addressed to Remi and recognized the sender's address. From the numerous forwards, the letter had a long journey until it finally reached its destination. She folded it, stuffed it in her pocket, and started down the steep path to the sea and to what was now her world.

About the Author

Erin O'Reilly resides in the Texas Hill Country on Lake LBJ for the last five years. Erin previously lived in various cities around the world. When not enjoying the lake she owns and runs a computer consulting business. A lifelong bird watcher, Erin also likes to cook, sew, read, and do various crafts in her spare time. Erin belongs to the Sapphic Readers, which is a lesbian book club in Austin, Texas.

First challenged by a friend to write a story, Erin has since written numerous online and publish works. Her story Deception was a GCLS Finalist in 2008. That book also garnered the Sapphic Readers Award in 2009. Story creation involving strong characters always seems to dictate the story and invade her mind at all hours. It always amazes her when the characters she is developing suddenly take on a life of their own and lead the story down a completely different path. She thinks that the characters make an impact on the storyline the story is better for it.



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