

*NIGHT
AND DAY*

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CHAPTER

1

GAELKAR, SCOTLAND

I don't like to lose, Eve. I did very well, but I don't like partial victories."

The woman's voice drifted back from the cockpit of the helicopter to where Cara was lying in the rear.

So hard, Cara thought dazedly through the thickness of the chloroform clouding her mind. The woman's voice was so hard and full of venom, and it was all aimed at Eve. Cara had heard that voice before as she had floated in and out of consciousness during the last minutes after Eve had come and talked to her, comforted her as she lay in the woods. The woman's voice had been hard and ugly then, too. But Cara couldn't remember exactly what she had said.

She had to protect Eve. It was all Cara's fault that Eve was here and had to face those terrible people. She should have known Eve would come after her. Just the fact that Cara was only eleven would guarantee that Eve would try to save her. Eve spent her life trying to protect children and punish the people who hurt them. But Eve hadn't been able to save Cara. She could hazily remember shots and explosions and that woman's hard voice giving orders to everyone around her. Giving orders to Eve . . .

She had to help her. Help Eve.

Cara tried to move, but her muscles seemed weighted. She tried to open her eyes. The second time she made it. She was still on the floor of the helicopter, where she had been shoved only minutes before. Why was she there?

It didn't matter. She had to get to Eve.

There was something bad happening . . .

Keep your eyes open.

Help Eve.

That hard, vicious voice again. "I want it all. I think I need to do something to impress you with that."

A shot.

"No," Eve screamed.

Terror seared through Cara.

Eve shot! Eve screaming!

Eve dying as Cara's sister had died, as her friend Elena had died.

Not again. Please, not again. Not Eve.

But the woman was laughing. "Let's get out of here, Nikolai. I believe that Eve Duncan has learned a lesson she'll remember."

Maybe that meant Eve wasn't dead, Cara thought. Maybe she could still save her. But the helicopter was lifting, she realized in a panic. She had to get them to land, to go back so that she could help Eve.

Once more she tried to move. Weak. So weak.

She managed to turn over and look around her. Find something to hurt them, to make them go back.

What was she thinking? She was only eleven, just a kid. How could she make anyone do anything?

How could she not do it? Eve was hurt, maybe dying. She had to help her.

Find something . . .

There was a flashlight and a tool chest on the opposite side of the

helicopter. Maybe there was something she could use inside that chest. She started to crawl toward it. She had to go very slowly. Her arms seemed to be working now, but her legs were still weak. She finally reached the tool chest and reached out to flip open the lid.

“I thought I heard something back here. What are you doing?”

Cara froze. Then she turned her head to look at the woman standing several feet away.

Dark eyes, with lustrous dark hair in a single braid and a face that was as beautiful as any movie star’s. She wasn’t smiling and her eyes were narrowed on Cara. “Or maybe I can guess what you’re doing. You may have been with Eve Duncan too long. What has she said to you? Has she completely destroyed your faith in me, Cara?”

It was the same voice that had spoken to Eve with such ugliness, but now this woman’s voice was no longer hard, Cara realized in confusion. It was soft, silky, and full of both sadness and affection.

“Eve . . .” Cara’s voice sounded hoarse, slurred even to her. “You . . . hurt . . . Eve.”

She shook her head. “Nonsense. Of course, I didn’t. Even though she hurt me more than you can imagine.” She knelt down beside Cara and took her hand. “But that’s all over. I’ll make you understand, Cara. After all we’ve gone through, we’re together now.” She touched her cheek with a gentle finger. “What a pretty little girl you are. I believe you look a little like me. What do you think?”

Cara gazed at her in bewilderment. “Why should I look—”

“Because it’s perfectly natural that you should, silly.” She was laughing, her beautiful face brimming with warmth and humor. “Because I’m Natalie Castino. Because I’m your mother, Cara.”

LOCH GAELKAR
TWO HOURS LATER

“Are you okay, Eve?” Jane MacGuire was walking toward her down the south bank of the lake. “I saw Joe up on the road with the local police getting rid of the last of the IEDs. I expected him to be with you.”

“What was he going to do? Hold my hand?” Eve shook her head. “You’ve been doing your share of that, Jane. I’m not the one Natalie shot. It was Joe, and he was lucky it was only a flesh wound. I believe she was only trying to show me that she could reach out and hurt us whenever she wished. Give the guy a break.”

“You mean give you a break,” Jane said quietly. “I know that you don’t want us hovering over you. But having Natalie snatch Cara like that had to be a traumatic wound in itself. Did you tell Joe to go and get rid of those booby traps?”

“I suggested it might be the thing to do so that everyone will have access to the lake. As soon as MacDuff is out of the hospital, I know he’ll be back here hunting for that treasure chest.” Her lips twisted. “And Joe needed to have something to do until we know something about Cara. He called his contact, Burbank, at Scotland Yard, and put him on tracking down that helicopter Natalie Castino used to take Cara. But it may take time. You know Joe would be going straight after Natalie Castino on his own if he wasn’t kept busy. Joe’s not the most patient person.”

“Neither are you.” Jane shook her head as she looked at Eve. She had been Eve’s adopted daughter since she was ten years old, and she knew her strength. Eve Duncan had become one of the foremost forensic sculptors in the world after her seven-year-old daughter, Bonnie, had been taken and died. She had given closure to hundreds of families who had lost their children over the years, and she didn’t deserve to have to face this threat to Cara. Eve had originally only

wanted to help and shelter the child who had known only fear and deadly risk. But Jane knew that had changed. Eve had grown to love Cara, and she didn't need this heartache and trauma. Particularly not at this point in her life. "It's been a rough day. How do you feel?"

"Angry, scared, panicky." Her lips twisted. "How do you expect me to feel? That bitch Natalie Castino has Cara, and I don't know what she's doing to her."

"I meant physically."

Eve glanced at her. "Oh, for heaven's sake. Fine. Just fine. There's no way I'd have a miscarriage. Do you think I'd let Natalie do that to me?"

"No, you're tough. Just checking. It's been one hell of a day." She looked up at the road, where Joe Quinn was working. "I'm certain that Joe asked the same thing."

"Of course he did."

"And that's why he's up there disarming IEDs."

"He wanted to do it. He's got those police experts helping. And he's got this water-blade gadget that makes it fairly safe. It's not as if I—" She broke off. "I wish I had something as valuable to do. I hate this waiting."

"I know you do." She took her arm. "Come on, let's get a cup of coffee. I believe we both need it." She guided her down the steep slope toward the camp area, where their living and work tents were set up beside the lake. "It can't be too much longer." She took the coffeepot simmering on the campfire and poured Eve a cup of coffee. "Scotland Yard and Interpol have all kinds of high-end satellite stuff. All they have to do is locate one helicopter." She handed Eve the cup, then poured one for herself. "And a child is involved. That always makes a difference."

"It didn't make a difference to Natalie Castino." Eve sat down by the fire and cradled her cup in her hands. "You'd think I wouldn't be so shocked. It's not as if I haven't run across all kinds of monsters

who didn't think a child was important enough to care whether they lived or died."

"But none like Natalie Castino," Jane said quietly as she sat down across from her. "She appears to be one of a kind."

Eve nodded jerkily. "She's clever and manipulative and a complete sociopath. I don't think Cara would have a chance if Natalie decided to focus all that poison on her."

"I'm not so sure," Jane said. "Cara may only be eleven years old, but she's smart and she's wary and she's been on the run since she was a child of three. She may be more able to deal with her mother than you'd think."

"Natalie Castino has been responsible for three deaths today." Eve shuddered. "I watched her shoot Ramon Franco in the heart because she just thought he might be a problem for her later."

"I don't think the world will miss Franco," Jane said dryly. "He was a killer for Alfredo Salazar's drug cartel and nasty as they come. And Joe actually took out Salazar by planting IEDs on that hill where you met with him and Natalie."

"Because Natalie set Salazar up to die on that hill," Eve said. "Just as she set up the ambush on her husband in Mexico City so that she could frame her lover, Salazar, for his death. It was all Natalie."

"I wasn't defending her," Jane said. "I was just pointing out that ever since Cara came into your life, you've been dealing with a pretty rough group of scumbags. It's a wonder you've survived them."

"It wasn't Cara's fault. She was a victim."

Jane knew that was true. She was saying all the wrong things. Cara deserved a chance for a normal life after years of running, and Eve hadn't even known Cara was involved at the beginning of the nightmare. She had told Jane she had been sent the skull of a nine-year-old girl to reconstruct by a sheriff in northern California. She had done the reconstruction and become involved with that skull in a very personal way. It was clear someone had not wanted that

child's skull to be reconstructed or her body to be identified. After Eve had sent off the reconstruction to the sheriff who had requested her help, the FedEx driver who had picked it up had been murdered and the reconstruction stolen. Eve had been upset and angry, and she and Joe had gone out to California to find out who that child was and who had killed her. After a heartrending, painful search, they discovered that the little girl was Jenny Castino, the daughter of Juan Castino and his wife Natalie. Castino was the head of a drug cartel in Mexico City, and his daughter had been kidnapped, together with her sister, Cara, and Elena, their nanny, over eight years before. Jenny had been killed shortly after they had been kidnapped, but Cara had escaped and was still alive and on the run. The hired killer, Walsh, who had murdered Jenny, was committed to finding Cara and killing her to protect himself from the possibility of anyone's finding out he was responsible for the crimes. Eve and Joe had stopped him, killed him, and saved Cara. But the nightmare hadn't ended. Salazar, who had hired Walsh, had gone on the hunt himself. Which was why Eve and Cara had ended up in the Highlands of Scotland, hiding.

And why Natalie Castino had suddenly emerged as the real monster of the piece.

"It's still hard for me to believe a mother would kill her own children," Jane said. "I can't get my head around it."

"Everyone has trouble with it," Eve said. "Maternal love dominates every family and, when it doesn't exist, it turns that family upside down. Joe said that even Detective Manez, who suspected Natalie wasn't a grieving mother, wouldn't commit her because he didn't want to believe it. It's a crime against the helpless from the person who should be dedicated to caring for them."

"You've seen it before?"

"Only a couple times in my entire career. The courts declared both women insane." She shook her head. "I told you, it's hard to prove, hard to believe." Her lips thinned. "Natalie isn't insane though she'd

accept that loophole if she had to do it. She's a sociopath, and that's even more frightening. She'll do anything she wants to do unless there's a danger to her in doing it."

"And she wanted to kill Jenny and Cara. You told me that she played the affectionate mother before they were kidnapped."

"She did, but they were in her way somehow. Her husband wanted sons and was toying with mistresses who might give them to him. She was probably afraid she'd be displaced. She liked being queen of all she surveyed. Juan Castino was the most powerful cartel boss in Mexico City, and everyone was afraid to cross him. She liked that power. Once the children were out of the picture, she would have been a bereaved mother, and her husband would have hesitated to set her aside. She was the daughter of a Russian Mafia boss, Sergai Kasikov, and he would not have been pleased. Castino would have found himself dangling headless from one of the bridges down there."

"And no one suspected her of having anything to do with the kidnapping of the children?"

"She seduced and manipulated Alfredo Salazar into hiring Walsh to do the actual kidnapping . . . and killing. He was the head of a rival cartel, who hated Castino anyway."

"Terrible," Jane murmured. "I knew some of this, but no details about Natalie Castino. Only the fact that Joe wasn't sure that Natalie was what she seemed to be and neither were you. No wonder you're frightened for Cara. Natalie Castino has to be totally ruthless."

"But we have a wild card. When Natalie found out that we might have found Cira's treasure, she lit up like the Fourth of July. She might have even moved up her plans about killing her husband and Salazar to make an adjustment that would suit her." Her hands were trembling as she lifted her cup to her lips. "She wants money and power, and Cira's gold could give it to her. We've just got to use that wild card to get Cara back."

"I'm sure it's not as if it hasn't been used before for less worthy

purposes,” Jane said. All through the many centuries since the eruption of Vesuvius had destroyed Herculaneum, that fabulous chest of coins had been a lure that had drawn everyone who had heard about it, she thought. But it had all centered around Cira, the young actress who had been born a slave, and who had taken the gold with her when she had escaped the raging volcano. She had schemed and fought to keep that treasure for herself and her family even to the extent of fleeing to the wilds of Scotland and establishing the MacDuff dynasty here at Gaelkar. “We’ll find a way.”

Eve looked down at the huge lake, with its eternal mist hovering over the entire north bank. “What do you think the chances are that it’s really down there?”

“Sometimes I think that it is, sometimes I just don’t know. That chest of coins has been missing for centuries, and you know that Cira has been a mystery I’ve never been able to solve.”

“You know MacDuff would argue with you,” Eve said dryly. “He’s convinced that you have some kind of ancestral connection or something with Cira and that you can lead him to that treasure.”

“Because I had those dreams about Cira when I was seventeen? That doesn’t prove anything.” But it had meant a great deal to Jane while she was going through that chaotic period. Those dreams had been so real, they had dominated her thoughts and her life. And when she had been driven to do in-depth research and found that Cira had actually existed, they had led her to MacDuff, the Laird of MacDuff’s Run. “I don’t dream about Cira any longer.”

“Except that one dream that led us all here,” Eve said. “You may not be sure that chest is out there somewhere lost in that mist, but MacDuff believes it.”

“He’s grasping at straws because no one has even gotten close to finding Cira’s gold.” She smiled. “But maybe Cira is ready to release her secrets. And I couldn’t think of anyone more worth her doing it for than Cara.”

“Neither can I.” Eve moistened her lips. “I hardly knew Cara when all this began. I felt sorry for her. I wanted to help her. But then I got to know her. She was brave and honest and sometimes a kid, but most of the time more mature than she should be.” Her voice was unsteady. “She wanted to help me. She wanted to take care of Jock Gavin. One of the last things she asked about was Jock.”

“He was her friend. She didn’t have any friends,” Jane said. “And because she’d lost so much, she didn’t want to lose either of you.”

“I don’t want to lose her, either,” Eve said. “I . . . care about her, Jane. I won’t let her be taken from us.”

“I know you won’t.” She frowned as a thought occurred to her. “But Cara isn’t going to let Natalie Castino hurt you, either. That may be a problem. I’ve gotten to know Cara. She’d fight for you, Eve. And that might mean she’d piss off Natalie Castino. Is that possible?”

“God only knows,” Eve said wearily. “It depends on how Natalie handles her and what she wants from her. Cara hasn’t seen her mother since she was three years old. I know that Elena, who raised her and took her on the run when her sister was killed, told her it wasn’t safe for her to go back to Mexico to her parents. But it wasn’t because Elena suspected Natalie. It was because the cartel situation was so deadly there that she thought it wouldn’t be safe for her. They had no idea who was behind the kidnapping of the girls. Elena thought it might be Salazar, who was a rival cartel boss. He was an enemy of Castino and wanted to hurt him by taking and killing his children. We didn’t suspect Natalie ourselves until Joe recently found out Natalie and Salazar were lovers.”

“But you didn’t tell Cara?”

“It didn’t seem the time to tell her that it was her mother who had probably murdered her sister,” Eve said bitterly. “How do you tell a child something like that? She was safe with me. I thought I could keep her that way. And she was having enough to face at the time.”

Jane was silent. But now Cara was going to have to face that truth and make her own judgments . . . and mistakes.

“I know.” Eve was reading her expression. “Hindsight, Jane. I should have prepared her. I left her alone and vulnerable. I just have to trust her and hope for the best.”

Eleven years old, Jane wanted to tell Eve. Cara was only eleven years old, and she was up against a woman Eve had called a monster. She didn’t say it. “Cara’s very smart. She’ll get through this. We just have to—”

“Burbank just called me.” Joe Quinn was striding down the slope toward the campfire. “They’ve located Natalie’s helicopter. They think it’s heading for Liverpool. Natalie will probably be switching to a private jet there. Let’s go.”

Eve jumped to her feet. “Can’t Scotland Yard intercept them? After all, it’s a kidnapping.”

“It would be difficult. Proof. Family rights. Natalie is her mother.” Joe took Eve’s elbow and headed toward the road. “It’s probably going to have to be us.”

Jane felt powerless. “What can I do to help?” Jane called after them. “Should I come along?”

“No, stay here and hold everything together,” Joe said over his shoulder. “The local police aren’t pleased at those booby traps on the road. They’re asking a lot of questions I don’t have time to answer. The first thing that came to their mind was terrorists. They’re going to ask a lot more if they find out we’ve blown up the top of one of those scenic hills, and there may be bodies to deal with.”

“How are you going to get to Liverpool in time?”

“I parked the helicopter about seven miles from here when I arrived in that heavy fog. We’ll grab one of the cars and drive there and hop on it. Try to cover for us, Jane.”

“I’ll do what I can.” She gazed after them as they hurried up the slope toward the road. “But I’d rather be with you. Be careful, Eve . . .”

• • •

Be careful . . .

The time for being careful was over if they could manage to reach Liverpool in time, Eve thought, as she waved back at Jane in response and turned to Joe. “What are our chances?”

“Natalie’s pilot is bound to reach there before we do,” he said curtly. “They have a big head start. But they may not be able to pick up a private jet right away. Burbank said they’d checked the rental companies, and there was no advance rental to Natalie or any Russian company or entity. We have a chance of getting there before they find one to rent.”

“That’s not like Natalie,” Eve frowned. “She planned everything else out to the last detail. Why would she slip up there?”

“Maybe it wasn’t up to her.” Joe’s brows rose as he glanced at her. “You’re very sure. You seem to be on the same wavelength as Natalie Castino.”

“Heaven help me if I am,” Eve said. “There’s no way I’d want to have any bond or similarity with Natalie Castino.”

“But you believe you know how she thinks.”

“Yes.” She and Natalie had only shared phone calls and one traumatic meeting that had ended with Natalie’s shooting Joe and giving him that flesh wound before taking Cara. But there was no doubt that Eve knew the woman in a very real and terrifying way. “And she knows how I think.” Her lips tightened. “Though she believes I’m a sentimental fool and will try to use it against me to get her hands on that chest of coins she wants so desperately.”

“Which she won’t be able to do if we can stop her at Liverpool. Then we can—” He stopped short as they reached the road. “Shit.”

Eve’s eyes flew to his face and then followed his gaze to a black limo that had parked a good distance down the road behind the yellow tape put up by the local police. A man in a brown suit and gray-

ing hair had gotten out of the car and was walking down the slope toward the camp. "What is it? Who is he?"

"Agent Jason Toller. Justice Department. Bad timing."

Worse than bad timing, Eve thought. Joe had told her that Agent Toller had been investigating Jenny Castino's death after he'd received a tip the skeleton found in California was the daughter of drug Czar Juan Castino. He'd not been pleased that Joe and Eve had taken Cara, Castino's other daughter, and hidden her away from both the Mexican and U.S. governments. So displeased that he'd threatened to toss Joe into jail for interfering with an international immigration case if he got in the way of his investigation. He would definitely consider Joe's leaving the U.S. and rushing here to help Eve and Cara as getting in his way.

"We don't have time to make excuses or try to talk him out of anything." Eve added with frustration, "And, dammit, we can't have him chasing after us."

"And what do you suggest?" Joe asked. "He's not a bad guy, just a hard-ass. I'd really prefer not to shoot him."

"No choice. You go and try to stop Natalie." She turned on her heel and started back down the slope. "I'm not going to let him grill Jane when she doesn't have any idea what's happening. I'll try to delay him myself. Hurry. Get out of sight and on the road."

He started up the slope. "I may get to Liverpool too late, you know."

"And you might not. Call me, Joe."

He didn't answer.

When she looked back, he was gone.

And Toller was heading toward Jane, who was still standing by the campfire.

Eve increased her pace as she glanced over her shoulder.

No sign of Joe. Good.

Jane was always careful and discreet, but Eve hadn't mentioned Joe's trouble with Toller to her. Still, there was no way Jane would say anything, and in a few minutes, Eve would be there.

And hopefully Joe would be halfway to that helicopter he'd parked several miles away.

She wanted to be with him. She wanted to be there when he tried to stop Natalie. As she had told Joe, she *knew* her. If Natalie panicked, Eve might be able to talk to her, deal with her.

And keep Cara safe.

But she had made the right decision, she realized reluctantly. Toller was far more likely to be antagonistic and interfere with Joe than with her.

And Joe could fly the helicopter.

Trust Joe.

And pray he got there in time.

“Here you are, Eve.” Jane smiled and turned to her as Eve reached her. “I was just telling this gentleman I had no idea where you'd disappeared. He was looking for either you or Joe.” She gestured. “Agent Jason Toller with the Justice Department.”

“Well, here I am,” Eve said. “And I'm sure Joe is somewhere about.”

“Exactly where, Ms. Duncan?” Toller asked.

“I saw him down by the lake several minutes ago,” Jane said quickly. “I think it's something to do with our Cara, Eve.”

“*Our* Cara?” Toller repeated sourly. “You do know, Ms. MacGuire, that Cara Castino has been held illegally by Joe Quinn and Eve Duncan and that your knowledge makes you an accomplice?”

“She knows no such thing,” Eve said bluntly. “Jane only knows that Cara is going to live with Joe and me on a trial basis before we commit to adopting her. I brought her on this trip to the Highlands so that Cara could get to know Jane. I'm sure you're aware that Jane is my adopted daughter.”

“Yes, I’m aware of everything about Ms. MacGuire,” Toller said curtly. “Including the fact that she’s friends with John MacDuff, Lord of MacDuff’s Run, who organized a hunt for a lost family treasure that included her and a few other intimate friends of the earl. Let’s see, they were Jock Gavin and a Seth Caleb . . . It’s very convenient that you suddenly felt the urge for a family reunion and joined them. Particularly since the hunt was to take place in the wilds of the Highlands.” He looked at the surrounding rugged hills that plunged down to the large crystal blue lake. “A very good hiding place, wouldn’t you say? I might have to have a talk with MacDuff.”

“You will *not*,” Eve said. “MacDuff is presently in the hospital, as you probably know. He was injured during the hunt and had to be airlifted out of here. You won’t bother him or Jane or anyone else to try to get information from Joe or me.” She turned to Jane. “Will you excuse us, Jane?”

“Are you sure?” Jane was gazing at Toller. “Stop worrying about me, Eve. If he’s trying to intimidate me, he’s not succeeding.”

“I know that. I just don’t like for you to have to fight my fight.”

Jane smiled. “It’s always my pleasure.” She turned and walked toward the lake. “If you need me, call.”

“Very loyal,” Toller said. “But she should be intimidated. She’s involved herself in a tangle that’s of concern to our government.”

“Back off,” Eve said. “You’d have a hell of a time proving Jane was doing anything but being a good daughter and extending hospitality to me and Cara. As far as questioning MacDuff, you’re in his country, and he has more influence here and in London than you’d ever dream. He’s a war hero and something of a folk hero, too. You’d find yourself very unwelcome if you push him.” She added, “But that was probably a bluff. Joe said you were smart and efficient and wanted to avoid international incidents. You wouldn’t go up against MacDuff.”

He was silent, staring at her. He shrugged. “No, I wouldn’t.”

“Then why did you try to bluff me?”

“Because I’m pissed off that Quinn made a fool of my agents and skipped out of the country. By doing it, he also made a fool of me. I warned him against that. I could tolerate his hiding you and the kid away. I knew we’d find you eventually. But I warned him that I’d toss him into jail if he made a move that would hurt my investigation. He did it anyway.”

“To save Cara’s life, to save my life.”

“I have no proof of that. And he made me scramble to find him. But not too hard, he wasn’t covering his tracks when he decided to go to you. He was just in a hurry. Which let me piece together a little of what was happening with you.” His lips tightened. “Very little. There are too many blanks. MacDuff is in the hospital with broken bones, but they examined him for internal injuries that might have occurred from a blast. Would you like to tell me what happened to him?”

“Not unless you prove to me that it would help Cara.”

“And those local policemen on the road up there brought in an explosives expert to disarm IEDs. Same answer?”

“Same answer.” She paused. “But aren’t you curious why someone would be so determined to kill an eleven-year-old girl that they’d plant IEDs to keep her from escaping?”

“All the more reason why you should turn her over to us to keep her safe.”

“And you’d turn her over to Child Services and start negotiating with the Mexican government to return her to her loving parents. Isn’t that right?”

“That’s the law.”

“And someone would be worried that she knew too much, had seen too much, and she could end up dead. Joe and I aren’t going to risk that.”

“You have no choice unless you intend to stay on the run.”

“We’ll find a way.”

“Look, I told Quinn that, good as his intentions were, Cara Castino is a Mexican citizen who could cause us boundless red tape and years of diplomatic problems if we let her stay in the U.S. She’d be the focus of all kinds of activists on both sides of the border.”

“He told me,” Eve said coldly. “Screw your red tape. We’re not sending her back to Mexico. She’d be surrounded by the worst elements if we did. The Mexican citizen who was her loving father was Juan Castino, a drug dealer who was high up on the Mexican government’s list of killers and criminal kingpins. You’ll notice I say ‘was.’ We were informed that Castino was killed early this morning. I assume you heard the same thing?”

“I did. But I’d be curious to know your source. The story hasn’t been released to the press yet. I’ve been told the coalition of cartels down there is in a turmoil. The word is that Salazar, one of his rivals in the drug trade, took out Castino because he was afraid Castino had found out that he was responsible for his children’s kidnapping eight years ago.” His gaze narrowed on her face. “You wouldn’t know anything about that?”

“I know that with Castino dead, Cara is safer, and your red tape has dwindled enormously.”

“Not necessarily.” Toller smiled. “Castino’s wife, Natalie, is still alive, and I’m sure that the members of his cartel will support her claim for her lost child. On the other hand, Salazar will probably be denying any knowledge of either the kidnapping or the killing of Castino.”

“I don’t agree,” Eve said. “I don’t think you have to worry about Salazar.”

Toller’s gaze narrowed on her face. “And why is that?”

Eve had a fleeting memory of Salazar’s dead body torn and broken by the blast Joe had set at the top of the hill not more than an hour’s walking distance from here. She forced herself to keep her gaze on Toller and not glance at that hill. “You told me yourself, the cartels

are in turmoil. If Salazar is guilty of Castino's assassination, then it would be smart of him to keep a low profile." She paused. "But I would look closer to home than Salazar, Toller."

He stiffened. "What are you talking about?"

She shouldn't say this. It wouldn't do any good until they could gather evidence. She should let it go right now.

To hell with letting it go.

Tell him and let it simmer.

"Natalie Castino."

"What?" He shook his head in disbelief. "I know you're reaching because you don't want Cara to return to Mexico, but there's no suspicion that Natalie Castino is involved in her husband's murder."

"There's suspicion," she said grimly. "Joe, me, and Detective Manez with the Mexican police. Don't believe Joe and me, but check with Manez."

"And does Manez have proof?"

"No one has proof. Natalie Castino is very careful about leaving evidence about. She pays attention, and she makes sure that she dots every i."

"I understand she isn't even in Mexico at the present time. She's visiting her father in Moscow."

"That's the story." She couldn't risk telling him much more. The situation was too volatile, and anything, even a call from this agent from the Justice Department might cause repercussions with Natalie that involved Cara. "Or it might be a fairy tale. Why don't you find out?"

He was silent a moment, gazing at her. "Because my job isn't to investigate Castino's death. It's to keep our government out of a knock-down drag-out fight for custody of a child that would be bad politically no matter how it turned out."

"Why do you think that she'd arouse such a hullabaloo? She's just a kid."

“This kid.” He reached in his jacket pocket and pulled out a wallet and flipped it open to the photo section. “A kid with that face. Big trouble.”

She glanced down at the photo. Cara. Winged brows, pointed chin, hazel eyes looking out of the picture with the intensity and wistfulness Eve knew so well. A face to touch the heart.

“And I hear the kid plays the violin, too,” Toller said as he took back the wallet and put it back in his pocket. “Her teachers reported that she’s a phenomenal talent. Put it all together, and she’s an activist’s dream.”

“Put it all together, and she’s a sweet, remarkable child who deserves the good life she’s never had,” Eve said. “Don’t try to take it away from her, Toller.”

“I’m just doing my job.” He shrugged. “And the lifestyle she’ll be exposed to in Mexico City may not be pristine, but she’ll have a mother to care for her.” He held up his hand as she opened her lips to protest. “Which she hasn’t had for the last eight years. And I’m not buying that Natalie Castino killed her husband. They seem to have had an ideal marriage. What’s the motive?”

“What’s the motive everyone is laying at Salazar’s door?”

He went still. “My God. Her own kids? You expect me to believe she was the one who—No way.”

“I don’t expect you to believe anything. I’m just throwing the truth out there and hoping it will take root.” She looked him in the eye. “And hoping that you’ll let Joe and me keep trying to save Cara. Because if you don’t, if you interfere, you may be responsible for getting Cara killed. You have that photo. How are you going to feel when you pull it out and look at it on the day you hear Cara has been murdered?”

He was silent for a moment, then gave a low whistle. “You’re a very passionate woman. And very convincing, Ms. Duncan.”

“And did I convince you?”

“You’ve convinced me that I’d better stop listening to you and do my job.” His gaze was still on her face. “No hard feelings. I had great respect for you before I came here. I have even more respect for you now.” His glance shifted away from her to the lake, then to the road. “Would you care to tell me what the hell has been going on here?”

What would he say if she told him that Salazar and Natalie had tracked Cara and her down, and they’d had to fight for their lives in the last twenty-four hours? That MacDuff had been injured in a blast that could have killed him. That they were all still fighting to survive since Natalie had taken Cara. She was tempted to do it. She was tired of fighting, and maybe he would believe her.

Too much risk.

“No, I wouldn’t. You’re an investigator, so investigate. If you can manage to get clearance from MacDuff, who owns this property. Which I very much doubt.”

His expression hardened. “I see. Then are you going to tell me where I can find Joe Quinn, or do I start looking for him?”

“You start looking for him.” She went over to the campfire and poured herself a cup of coffee. “Would you like a cup of coffee, first? This mist that hovers over the lake may be chock-full of atmosphere, but it can be chilly.”

“No, thank you. It’s kind of like eating in the house of the enemy.”

“What a medieval thought. I wouldn’t hold it against you.” She took a sip of coffee. “Until you actually prove yourself an enemy.”

“And then you’d remember?”

She nodded. “Just as you’d remember. Every single time you look at that photo.”

He smiled. “I shouldn’t have shown you that photo. You’re going to use it against me, aren’t you?”

“Of course. I’m fighting for a life, you’re fighting for red tape.”

She threw the rest of her coffee into the fire. It hissed as the liquid hit the burning wood. "I'll use everything I can against you. So will Joe." She glanced at him. "Where are you going to look for him?"

He tilted his head, thinking about it. "I'm not quite sure," he murmured. His gaze went to the fog-covered lake. "That entire north bank seems completely impenetrable. Interesting. I heard stories about it from my driver, who grew up in this area. Is it true that the mist never vanishes from it? That there are all kinds of legends that the mist hides either the beginning or the end of the world?"

"It's true enough."

"Pure nonsense, of course. Still, it would be an excellent place for a man to hide, wouldn't it?"

"If you think so." She wasn't going to discourage him from searching for Joe in that mist. He'd find out soon enough how futile it was, but it would give Joe more time. "Is that where you're going to look for him?"

He shook his head.

"Then where?"

He smiled. "The place where you came from when I first saw you. I'll go back up to that road."

Shit. She tried to keep her face expressionless. "Really? Why?"

"Because it's close. If I had a woman like you, I'd stay as close to her as possible. I have an idea Quinn feels the same way."

"Really? Yet he's been in Atlanta, and I've been here since I've had to hide Cara away."

"Then it must have been driving him crazy." He turned and headed back across the bank. "I'll have to ask him about that . . ."

Eve's fists clenched as she watched him stride up the slope. Had she given Joe enough time? It would take Toller only minutes to question the police on the road and determine that Joe had taken a car and left the property. After that, he would have to decide where Joe had gone. If Toller had traced him here, he must know that he'd rented

a helicopter. The next step would be to go after him and try to reach him before he boarded the aircraft.

She didn't doubt he'd work it out. Toller was very sharp. She just hoped Joe wouldn't be there when Toller located the helicopter.

She just hoped she'd given him enough time.

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