

Crowded Dreams

8/31/2015

DKeegan

## Chapter I

"Sure you want to take her out?" James drawled, pointing to the clouds, "Looks like a squall's coming up."

George Bates looked at the early evening sky and wondered if he should not wait until tomorrow to go to the island. Clouds were building and there were three foot swells in the bay, but he had to get this business finished.

"I'll be fine, let her go."

The boy threw him the ropes and pushed the boat away from the dock. George throttled and pulled the craft away from the sheltering marina cove and out into the chilly autumn sea blow. He shivered and reached into the inside pocket of his jacket, took out a silver flask of brandy and took a swig. Liquor burned his throat going down and it warmed him a little for the journey. Once past the No Wake Zone, he gunned the engine. The front of the crimson cigarette boat lifted out of the water and banged down hard after each swell, taking a beating, but he was an experienced boater and was too preoccupied to be concerned.

In his briefcase was the contract his attorneys drew up for Herbert Kimball to sign. This was George's fifth trip to Kent Island in two weeks. He pulled back harder on the throttle and the boat cut through the waves, flying up higher and coming down harder, water stinging his face. It was queerly cleansing, like a monk taking a thrashing to purify his soul.

When he arrived at the island dock, he eased the boat into the slip as he had a hundred times before and tied up. The light was dwindling quickly and it was a fair hike to the Kimball cottage. He grabbed a few things from the boat and walked up the beach hoping to see the old man on his nightly stroll, but there was no sight of him. Quickening his pace, he negotiated with the hereafter for Kimball's life. By the time he arrived at the Kimball cottage, it was dark. His flashlight scanned the exterior of the cottage.

"Herbert? Mr. Kimball are you here? It's George." He yelled into the black night air.

Nothing stirred. He rattled the door and banged hard, calling to him again. No answer. He shoved and the door opened and found the light switch but there was no juice. The place was freezing.

"Kimball, are you here?" George tripped over trash on the floor as he moved through then finally saw a figure on the bed huddled under mounds of blankets. At first, he hesitated, then went over, and shook him. "Mr. Kimball . . . Herbert? Are you alive?"

The old man stirred and looked into the flashlight. "Cold," he stuttered, "SSSo cold."

"Oh, thank God! You're alive. Here, drink this." George pulled the flask out of his jacket and poured some brandy down Kimball's throat. "Here, you drink some more of this and I'll get the heat on right away."

He went out and checked the propane tank, the generator, turned a switch, tightened a wire, and there was light. While the heater was warming up, he went out and got a few pieces of driftwood to light a fire. Within an hour the cottage was cozy and lit and George had soup simmering on the stove.

He carried it into Kimball on a tray. "Get up Herbert and eat some soup. The heat's coming up now."

Kimball sat up in bed while George put some pillows behind him, but the old man was still shivering and shaking. He put the tray on the bed stand and felt his head. "You're chilled, finish the brandy." The old man sat up so George could feed him some soup, "That's it . . . Now some soup . . . starting to feel better now?"

Kimball finished the soup, then slumped back into the pillow and took George's hand. "Thanks . . . so much . . . I'm sorry, do I know you? You look familiar. Are you a doctor?"

George hesitated before he answered, weighing the possibilities, "Err, yes, yes I am. Dr. Cavanaugh . . . you rest now, okay Mr. Kimball?"

"Sure, sure. You're not leaving are you? Don't leave."

"I won't leave you Herbert. I will be right here when you wake up. You forgot to sign some insurance papers in my office. I brought them with me. You get some rest and we'll take care of that later."

Kimball dozed right off, belly full of soup, bloodstream full of alcohol and warm for the first time in days. George regarded Kimball sound asleep, his mouth open, his eyes sunken in, the smell of decay and dampness pervading the cottage. He escaped to the living room, knowing he couldn't leave now until this business was done.

George fished the contracts from his coat, took off his glasses, wiped them clean, put them back on, and began separating the copies. Kimball was only to see the last page where he had to sign his name and most of it was signature lines and legalese. He hoped the old man did not ask too many questions. The evening lay out in front of him like an unwelcome invitation. No TV or radio to distract him from the deed at hand, he spent this time recounting everything he had done to make this deal work, to make certain there were no errors; to insure he had left nothing undone that could get in the way.

Two months had gone by since that evening he found Kimball on the beach and realized something was very wrong with him:

George was on the island to help his parents close their summer cottage for the winter. It was his ritual to come down, board up windows, and eat some of his mother's chicken soup before taking them to the airport. His parents wintered in their condo in Boca Raton. George especially loved the island in the autumn. The sunsets were spectacular feasts for the eyes. While he was slowly strolling, admiring the view he saw a figure off in the distance.

"Hello. Who's there? Mr. Kimball, is that you. Mr. Kimball?" George shouted into the night air. The figure weaved and staggered on the beach. He knew this time of the year it could only be Kimball. As owner and caretaker, he stayed on in the winter, making certain the docks and cottages were maintained.

Kimball turned away from him, swerved on the banked sand, and fell to his knees. George rushed over to him and knelt beside him.

"Herbert, are you all right?"

"Who is it?"

"It's me Herbert, George."

"Who?"

"Georgie Bates. Kate and Jim's boy. Remember?"

The old man squinted up at him in a daze, then opened wide, "Georgie, oh Georgie porgy, yes, yes . . . you have grown up."

"Let me help you." George was short compared with Kimball and the old man was dead weight in the sand.

"Give me a minute, Georgie to catch my breath."

"It's okay. Take your time, Mr. Kimball."

"Always so respectful, heh, Georgie. A good boy."

George chuckled to himself, "It's been sometime since anyone called me a boy. I guess you can't see my bald spot in this light."

The humor was lost on Kimball. He was deeply concentrating on standing up on his own. George helped him and the two jostled in the sand for a few moments before he was steady on his feet. George brushed the damp sand off both of them and then got his first good look at Kimball.

"Did something happen to you, Mr. Kimball?"

"Happen? Oh." He looked down, surveying his wrinkled and stained clothes, "Haven't been well, Georgie. Age is catching up to me I guess."

Kimball straightened himself up and brightened. "How's your parents? Still using the old cottage?"

"Yeah, that's what I'm doing here, helping them close the place for the winter. They like to wait until the last minute to leave. They love it here."

Kimball took a deep breath of the night air and gazed off at the water. "It is a pleasant place, isn't it? You always liked it here. Liked fishing, didn't you?"

"No, that was my brother Ben you used to take fishing. I had the sailfish. I used the pond behind the Grande house."

Kimball seemed to cloud again, "Ben? Took Ben fishing? Hmm." He began walking again. "Like your parents, Georgie, always glad I sold them the piece. They have been good neighbors." He stopped walking and tried to button his sweater as both tasks were obviously too difficult to accomplish at once. "Not easy to walk on this crooked beach, but I cannot resist a sunset stroll now and again."

George took his arm, "I know what you mean. I was out here myself doing the same thing. Watching that glorious sunset." They stopped in unison to take in the last hint of orange in the pewter sky behind them. "Is it all right if I walk with you a way? I'd like to."

"Sure, Georgie, come along, I like the company. Getting quite chilly now."

They slowly made their way down the beach to the Kimball cottage. George studied the man he had spent time with every summer since he was nine. Herbert was like part of the Bates family, even though now George only saw him at the start and end of the season. He had been too busy the last few years to spend time on the island with his parents except for a few short outings. Usually George gave Kimball and the other cottage owners a hand getting the docks in shape for the summer and then helped them raise the docks and store them for the winter. Only a few months ago they had taken this walk and Kimball was fine.

George sighed. A short walk, breathing in the sea air, watching the surf softly touch the beach always made him wonder why he didn't find more time to come here. The island was such a pristine paradise. Since George and Ben started their land development business he had tried many times to convince Herbert to sell it to him, but he would just laugh him off. The developer part of him couldn't help but wonder what would happen to this island if Kimball were seriously ill? George was pretty sure the island belonged solely to Kimball. There had never been any family around Kimball all these years. And it is the last large track of land in the Chesapeake left undeveloped, except for the

small lots he had sold off to people like his parents. It was at least two hundred acres. He is obviously sick. How sick?

George took off his glasses and wiped the night mist. "Are you under doctors' care, Mr. Kimball?"

"Sure, sure, seeing Doctor Cavanaugh on the mainland. You know him? Dr. Cavanaugh, nice Irish fellow?"

"In Annapolis? No, I don't think I know him."

They arrived at the cottage and the old man turned abruptly, "Yes. Well, I'm home, good-bye Georgie. Enjoyable walk."

"Not even going to offer me a night cap?" Kimball eyed George as if making certain he was indeed old enough for a drink before welcoming him in.

"Where are my manners? Sure, come on in." Kimball opened the door and knocked something over. In the isolated silence the noise made them both jump.

"Sorry Georgie. Not much of a housekeeper lately." Kimball walked in and went directly to the back of the cottage leaving George in the middle of food cartons, trash, and newspapers, strewn everywhere.

After a few minutes George got worried, and started wandering around, "Mr. Kimball. Are you okay? Mr. Kimball?"

George found him lying on his bed, his breathing regular. He covered the old man and stared at his face. Kimball looked so old lying there. What a change since he saw him in the spring, when his parents opened the cottage for the year. George figured Kimball around fifty-eight, about his parent's age, but he had a youthful and athletic gait and a mischievous glint in his green eyes that always made him seem much younger. It was October and his entire appearance had changed drastically.

While Kimball softly snored, George began quietly rifling through Kimball's things. He found some medication bottles and wrote down the pharmacy name as well as the names of the medicines, Razadyn, and Araccept. He turned up the thermostat until the heat kicked on and left.

On the walk back George heard the foghorns baying from the mainland mingled with the water lapping against the docks. Off in the distance, bay lights were coming on. How removed and separate this place was from the rest of the world and yet it was a short boat ride to civilization. He felt grateful to get back to his parents brightly lit chintz and crowded cottage, a warm and welcome contrast to Kimball's.

"Georgie, just in time for dinner, sit." His petite mother, Julie pattered around her galley kitchen packing food into cartons while George took his place at the kitchen table and dug in.

"Mom, I just ran into Kimball on the beach. Have you seen him lately?"

"Not for a few weeks."

"Did you notice anything wrong with him?" His parents exchanged glances before answering, each waiting for the other to respond to George's questions.

"Come on, tell me. What's going on?"

"Well," his father responded carefully, "We don't really know but we think he may have Alzheimers."

"Alzheimer's! He's not old enough for that, is he? God he hardly remembered me. Is that why?"

His mother nodded and turned away. "We're not sure though, George."

Mr. Bates continued for her, "What a terrible illness. One day we found him on the beach very early. Looked like he had been there all night. He was wet. He didn't know who we were. When we asked if we could help him he cried. Told us he was lost. Couldn't find his cottage. Can you imagine? He was born in that cottage!"

Mrs. Bates added, "We didn't know what to do, so we took him back home. Your father put him to bed. I made him some chicken soup and straightened up a little. What else could we do?"

"The next morning we saw him on the beach again and he was fine. He knew us. He looked better. At first we even thought maybe he was drinking."

"We understand it's progressive. Some good times and bad times, lucid and then lost. Awful illness." Mr. Bates shivered.

Mrs. Bates shook her head, "We tried to check on him all summer, but in the past few weeks he hasn't been answering the door or letting us in."

"Once we went there and he kept saying the electric was off. We said, should we check the generator? He said, no you don't understand the electric is off. So we went out to the generator to check it and he kept screaming, 'no you don't understand.' We still don't know what he was trying to tell us. There was nothing wrong with his electricity."

"How long do these people live?"

"George! My god! What a question."

"Well, Mom, he should not be here all alone. He could harm himself."

His change of tone relieved Mrs. Bates, "Do you think it's our place to do something George?"

"No, Mom. I'll take care of it. You and Dad go to Florida as you planned. He must have someone handling his affairs. Have any ideas? Did he ever mention anyone to you?" His parents both shook their heads, no. "Don't worry. I will make certain he is taken care of."

Julie Bates brightened, mollified to leave Kimball's fate in her son's hands. "Georgie, you always did like Herbert, and he was so fond of you and Ben. It has been worrying me while we've been closing the place. Thank you, dear."

The next day George finished boarding his parent's cottage, packed his boat with their things and took them to the mainland. "Now, Georgie, you will let us know about Herbert, won't you? We'll be waiting to hear." They hugged him and he promised he would be in touch.

Back in Annapolis, George took Kimball's pill bottles to his pharmacist who confirmed they were treatments for Alzheimer's. "Not that there are any real drugs that help for the long haul, but some doctors are recommending these. They certainly will not do him any harm, the problem is, they probably will not really help him either," the pharmacist said.

"There's no treatment, then?"

"No, not yet. Talk to his physician and you can call the National Alzheimer Society. They can give you the whole prognosis on the illness."

George left there and went to his office. "Get a Dr. Cavanaugh, Annapolis, on the phone, will you Kate? Not his receptionist, either. I want to talk directly to him. Tell him it's about one of his patients, Herbert Kimball."

Kate buzzed and George picked up the phone, "Dr. Cavanaugh, George Bates. Hello, yes, well, I am Herbert Kimball's nephew. I saw him over the weekend, and frankly I am very concerned about him on the island all alone through the winter."

"Didn't know Herbert had a nephew?"

"He and my mother haven't spoken for many years. It's only recently we've reconciled. I thought I would go out to the island and visit. His condition surprised me. Can you tell me anything I can do to help?"

"Oh, well, I guess there is no harm in talking to you about it, especially because he could use some family assistance right now. He is very ill, you know. Alzheimer's. I have been treating him for almost a year now, sometimes under duress. He has a propensity for trying everything he reads about. He has been doing all sorts of strange treatments recommended by homeopaths, and holistic healers. He's concerned me and frankly I have put off getting more involved. He's a stubborn man and this can be a very messy business."

"Very understandable, Dr. Cavanaugh. It is a family matter. Look, I will be in touch with you, my mother must get involved. It would help if I knew who was currently handling his affairs."

"I am certain we have that information in his file. I cannot tell you how glad I am you contacted me. My administrator will get that information for you, can you hold?"

"Sure." George smiled to himself.

"Hello, Mr. Bates, this is Sharon Armstrong, the administrator, I have Mr. Kimball's account in front of me, what can I help you with?"

"Is he handling his financial obligations?"

"Yes, everything is in order. He doesn't have any medical coverage so we send the bills directly to his attorney, Wilson and Tyler, in D.C. and they pay them promptly."

"Wilson and Tyler, heh?"

"Why yes, do you know them?"

"Ah, no not personally, just their reputation. A fine firm. Thank you very much Ms. Armstrong, good bye."

George hung up the phone and laughed aloud. "Son of a bitch! My old pal Roscoe is handling Mr. Kimball's affairs."

He buzzed his assistant, "Kate, get me Roscoe Wilson on the phone right away. Tell him it is very important I speak to him today. Don't take no for an answer, Kate, pressure them. He's not going to want to talk to me."

George unrolled the plot plans he had Kate pick up that morning on her way into work. Here it is, he thought to himself, my ticket out of this recession. Kent Island, three hundred acres of paradise.

"Roscoe, how you doing buddy?"

Roscoe drawled back, "Hey, Georgie boy how are you? Haven't heard from you since Kenneth Square?"

"Great, everything's going well. I have something much better cooking right now and you're just the man that can make this deal go."

"Me, Georgie, what can I do? Got somebody suing you?"

"Oddly, not right now. It's something else. I hear your firm is handling Herbert Kimball's affairs."

"How'd you know that Georgie?"

"You remember my parent's summer cottage?"

"No."

"Yes, you do, Roscoe, in the Chesapeake? It's on Kimball's island in the Chesapeake!"

"I don't ever remember you mentioning that to me, Georgie. I'd have made the connection immediately, if you had. My family's been handling' the Kimball estate for years. Centuries, maybe."

He was right, of course. George and Roscoe were in the same fraternity, but they were not that close in school. Roscoe was always sort of eccentric. George had never invited him to the island

like he had some of the other brothers. "I'm certain I invited you down there that Memorial Day end of junior year. You must remember."

"I'm sure not, George, but that was the year we left early for Italy. Anyway, if you're thinking I'll help you get to him to buy that island, you're crazy. He won't budge on selling it or developing it. Many have tried, believe me. I've had countless proposals come across my desk in the last year since I took over as his attorney."

"Roscoe, are you handling him personally?"

"Yes. The Judge handled it for years, but he's winding down his practice and passing on all the easy stuff to me."

"Kimball's affairs are easy then?"

"Sure, George. He has some very limited funds, his mother left him in trust that help with taxes and incidentals. Not much money, but she didn't want him to have it all when she died so we've been managing it for a long time now. He barely makes it, and he has had some very tough times, but he won't even think of giving up that island."

"Yes, I know, I've talked to him about it since I got into the business and he just laughed me off. But I think he's going to become enlightened, very soon."

Roscoe perked up, "Really? Just why do you think that?"

"He is very sick, you know, Roscoe."

"I just saw him and he was perfectly fine."

"No Roscoe, he is sick. Possibly fatal."

"You're kidding. He could've fooled me. We've been paying his doctor bills but they never mentioned anything to us about it? How'd you find out?"

"I was just up there closing my parents' place and we had a little talk, and he told me everything, confided in me about the land and all. I have known him since I was a boy."

"Well, so have I, but he never confides in me and I'm his attorney, George. This doesn't sound right."

"What can I say, Roscoe, he obviously trusts me. And he's worried about what's going to happen. It's normal in a time like this. He says he's ready to let it go and since he knows me so well, he's going to let me have it all."

"This is mighty suspicious."

"I would agree with you, but if you saw the condition he's in, Roscoe, the man is in real trouble and the least we can do is help him out."

"Help him right out of his island, you mean George?"

"I'm telling you, Roscoe, there is a sweet deal here for us. I just need a little help from you. I need to know if he has any other family floating around that could get in the way?"

"This is not something I am at liberty to discuss with you, Georgie, it would violate the client/attorney relationship."

"Come on Roscoe, we're talking millions here and I am your old frat buddy. They would have to tear out my eyes before I'd let anyone know I got this from you."

"Oh, I'll just bet. I guess I can tell you this much. It's not really a big secret or anything. There's no family that we know of, but in his will he does have someone he leaves the island to. Although my family's been handling the Kimball affairs forever, we don't know who she is to him or even where she is."

"A woman, huh? What else can you tell me Roscoe?"

"Maybe a lot, maybe nothing, but how do I figure into all this?"

George smiled to himself, Roscoe always was a greedy little bastard, "How's twenty-five percent sound to you?"

"Sounds downright peachy, but I been hearing some rumors about you and your business dealings lately. Are you sure you can pull this off?"

"It's like money in the bank. You could say the Capital Bank."

"Towney's in on this? Well, why didn't you say so to begin with? Okay, George, but you gotta' swear you didn't get any of this from me. Hold on. I'll get my secretary to pull the file."

While George was on hold he began to chuckle to himself, "This is going to be almost too easy."

"George, you still there? He left everything to a Margaret S. Delaney. That's it. At his death we retrieve two letters from his depository. One is our instructions for his burial and one is addressed to her. I can't open them without a death certificate or his written consent, so don't even ask."

"Thanks partner. That's enough for now. I'll be in touch." He hung up the phone grinning.

George opened the top drawer of his desk and took out some monopoly looking houses and hotels and one by one began lining them up on the plot plan.

"Kate, call the marina. Tell them not to pull my boat out of the water, yet. Then call that detective agency we used on the Carlson theft and set up an appointment for tomorrow. Oh, and Kate get Towney Thorndike on the phone, too."

A few minute later Kate buzzed him, "George, Thorndike on line one."

"Towney? How you doing, buddy?"

"Oh, buddy, is it? I didn't think you would have the balls to call me after that last fiasco."

"Come on, Towney, that wasn't my fault. There was a recession for crissake. Know how many of my land deals went down the tubes in that blood bath? I was holding deep when the market died. Ben and my dad were in deep with me too. The whole family is still trying to regroup. It wasn't pretty for any of us."

"All right George, stop crying please. You did take me into some very good deals before Allentown, what's up your sleeve, now? I know you did not call just to chat."

"Remember that beautiful island we used to sail around when we were in college?"

"Where your parent's cottage is, in the Chesapeake? "

"Yeah, that one."

"The one you have been trying to get that old man to sell since you went into the housing business?"

"The very same. Guess who's got that whole damn island in his top pocket? .....That's right buddy boy. Me. Want in?"

"Keep talking George. I'm listening."

## Chapter II

"Good evening Ms. Shaw."

Delaney looked up at the concierge of her building and smiled, "Hi Max, how's it going? How's your son feeling? Is he over the measles?"

"Yes, and he's aching to get outdoors again. Thank you for asking. I have a parcel for you here. I've been watching it all day, it looks like it's from Russia."

"Oh, thank God, it must be from my mother." She looks at the return address, "Yes it is. I haven't heard from her in over a month! Thanks so much, Max."

The door man watched her walk over to the elevator, obviously enchanted by her long dark bobbing ponytail, her statuesque beauty. She pushed the button for the elevator and ripped open the heavy envelope. It was her mother's manuscript with a note attached.

9-22-95

Dearest Delly,

Please hold onto this with dear life. In fact get a bank deposit drawer and put it in there for me. I am not in any danger but have reason to believe there are people out there who don't want this book to ever be read. Will call in a few weeks. Don't worry.

Mother

Gad! Don't worry. How can I not worry? Why couldn't I have a normal mother like everyone else? It could be all in her head. She does see conspiracy everywhere since she has been involved in this whole Mollusk Alliance stuff. Oh, well, better make a note to myself to take this to the bank tomorrow.

Delaney unlocked the door of her condo and headed straight for the kitchen. Without removing the wrapper, she shoved the corkscrew through the top of the bottle and twisted hard.

This is a well-deserved glass of wine, she mused to herself, the prelude to the joint safely tucked away in her jewelry box. Her friend and co-worker, Carol Papero gave it to her months ago, "For a very rainy day, Del. Take it."

So she had, never thinking she would use it. She had not smoked pot since college, but why not save it. If memory served, she always needed to drink first, if not, she became anxious and wondered if it were worth it. It was like a ritual, a glass of wine first, then the joint. Savored and saved for the right moment, the needed moment, when trying to be the Broker of Record filled her up to the brim; when saying please do this and thank you for being so understanding, over loaded her circuits. When knocking herself out for one more closing, which has been postponed repeatedly, took her to the edge.

On nights like these she came home to her small and sparsely furnished high rise condo on Washington Square and crawled out of her business skin; scraped off her thigh high stockings and heels; squirmed out of her business skirt and jacket and squiggled into her tee shirt and sweats. Her professional image in a pile on the floor she slithered into the living room and sipped the wine.

"Ahhhhh." She speaks aloud, to the walls and holds up her glass to salute the view of Philadelphia. She has been waiting for this moment all day long.

Pushing herself to be successful in the world of real estate wheeling and dealing requires Delaney to Dan the mantle of success that has eluded her; to live higher than she can really afford; dress better than she can afford. So she can play in the right circles.

It is a tight little club that she wants to join. One she encircled her entire childhood, waiting for her mother to get off work, sitting in the conference room, doing her homework, watching deals made, million's change hands and the skyline of the city changed forever.

Men in expensive suits patted her on the head and gave her dollar bills, when she asked a bright question.

"I thought you couldn't build here because of the easement"

"Easement? Delly knows about easements. A budding developer, here Sydney?"

Her mother would laugh and shoo her away. Nevertheless, Delaney knew what she wanted and worked very hard to become one of them, to be knowledgeable enough to be taken seriously in this world.

She majored in finance and Real Estate and worked her way through Penn, studied very hard and when she got out, expected that world to be hers. It was not.

The doors to the larger firms were closed to her. Prove yourself, then come back, they told her. She started in a small residential office and worked seven days a week, twelve hour days. At twenty-seven she earned her broker's license and finally opened her own small firm. Years of climbing this ladder and she still could not get into the real game. Until today.

She fished through her jewelry box and found her treasure. Once lit, she took a deep drag and smiled to herself going over the events of the day.

The very same man who used to pat her on the head smiled at her today and shook her hand, "Delly, finally we get to do a deal together."

"I know, Mr. Blumefeld it has taken me a long time to put something together that would interest you."

"You have done a fine job with this, a fine job. Just keep your ducks in a row."

"With my own money in on this strip center you can believe I will make sure it stays together."

"You have a good eye. It is a good location, a good anchor tenant. You can be proud of yourself, Delly, and your mother as well. How is her extended vacation going?"

"She is spending it in Europe."

"Don't tell me. She's still working on that book about nuclear power plants?"

"I didn't realize the world knew about that," Delaney grimaced, "Yes, she is. She has even gotten permission to go to Chernobyl. I'm a little concerned, I cannot get through to her by phone."

"Your Mom's a tough old bird. I'm sure she'll be fine. How does she feel about you getting into the biz, being so anti-ownership of land and all?"

Delaney laughed, "She perseveres, but she is my mother. I don't know how you put up with her all those years! It is her fault anyway. If she hadn't been the conveyancer for your company for twenty-two years, I would never have been exposed to the business to begin with."

"She managed to feed and clothe you on Real Estate, it was not all bad. Those few investments she made are paying off now. Anyway, give her my regards, and thanks, Delly. You are going to make a lot of money on this one."

"Not as much as you, Mr. Blumefeld!" She watched the well dressed, white haired gentleman leave her office laughing. 'All the way to the bank,' her mother would have said. But she at least had a piece of the deal. It was the thing she had been working for, where the real money was, and it finally happened.

Delaney leaned back on the chaise, inhaled deeply and sighed out, waiting for the heaviness to overtake her. Finally, I have a piece of the action. It's a small one, but a piece after all.

Her mind floated to the day she overheard another Realtor talking about this land at the Chamber of Commerce luncheon. She jumped right on it without so much as a thought, thrilled to find out no one had an actual listing on it. It was the area the BPS drug store chain had been looking for a site in. Exactly one month later she had all the parties together and to cut herself in as well. Delaney was feeling very proud of herself and suddenly Townsend Thorndike's jaunty face floated into her mind.

Thorndike had been the speaker at that fortunate luncheon and it had drawn all the Real Estate members out for the day. Since he ascended to the throne of his family's Bank, he was definitely the man everyone wanted to know, The bank is a grand old Philadelphia institution since the revolutionary war. Thorndike was young, handsome in a sort of off beat way, and still single.

Her friend Carol laughed when they entered the Bellevue that day, "Jesus! Have you ever seen smelled so much Obsession in your life? Better watch out Delaney, claws are out today." It was true. Everyone was decked out to impress this man. Everyone except Delaney.

She ran her hand back over her pulled back hair and wondered, not for the first time recently, if she should have primped a little herself.

Carol had tried to cajole her in the car. "Hey Delaney, try this eye shadow on, it's the exact color of your eyes."

Delaney glanced over at the compact. "That green goo is not for me, Carol. Can't I just be neat and clean?"

"Not today. Today you've got to be hot. I know a granola crunching, mantra chanting, earth-shoe wearing mother, raised you, but your love life's been sort of dullsville lately. Maybe a little flash will do the trick," Carol chided.

"God, Carol. I beginning to think the mascara is going to your brain. And my mother would just love to hear her described like that. I'll include it in my next letter to her. Will lipstick do?" So she had reluctantly put on some lipstick, but Carol was right. She hadn't been dating much since she opened her office. Had she just gotten too busy or was she just sending out the wrong signals these days.

The ballroom of the Bellevue was already quite crowded when they walked in. Delaney and Carol waved at some people they knew but were stuck in the doorway looking for a seat when the master of ceremony introduced Townsend Thorndike III. Much to their surprise he came from behind them and moved slowly through the throng, shaking hands with people on either side of them, smiling, and waving.

"Very charming, Delaney! And tall, over six feet isn't he? Such intense brown eyes, and did you see those dimples? I love a rich man with dimples, don't you?" Carol gushed.

Delaney laughed, "Absolutely. Dimples are a definite requirement."

"I'm serious, Delaney. You have to admit, he is really adorable."

"Who wouldn't be with all the advantages he's had in life?"

Carol made a face, "I could make a cheap Chablis with those sour grapes."

"All right, he's cute, but his hair's a little too long, don't you think for a banker . . . and what's with his clothes? He looks like he got dressed at Armani's in the dark."

"I don't know. I sort of like it, it's intriguing. Do you think it's calculated? Think he's trying to redefine what east coast bankers are supposed to look like. Kind of hip banker chic. He could start a new fad. Like in LA, bankers in shorts and sandals."

Just then he got to the podium. At the same time, Delaney saw Daniel Shafer waving them over. Finally, a table. They ran over and got seated as Thorndike the group.

"Thank you all for this warm reception." Delaney looked up quickly and thought to herself, this man has presence. His voice resonated with a trained baritone's modulation, very deep and mellow. Not a trace of the Philadelphia twang, no flattened a's, no hard edged r's. It sounded like chocolate tastes.

"As I look over this wonderful crowd, I see many Real Estate people. I'm certain you are all members in good standing." The room chuckled in unison. Realtors and Brokers were notorious for putting off paying their dues to organizations like these. These are rough times and coming up with the annual \$2000.00 fee has been hard for Delaney. Alas, it is the price of moving in these arenas, in some cases the only way to rub elbows with the right people.

Thorndike went on to talk about his family and their history in banking. The entire room appeared entranced. His voice while rich and melodious, also had the tight edge of authority to it. When he paused, the crowd seemed to join him and held its breath.

Delaney was amused, she was certain she heard the women in the front table swoon, but she diffidently found herself being drawn in by the Thorndike charm as well. A telephone rang loudly and it took a minute or so before Delaney figured out it was hers.

Meanwhile, half the ball room reached to find their phones causing a minor stir that caught the room's attention.

She was embarrassed until she realized it was the Russian Embassy. When she looked up from the phone, everyone was staring at her. She had to return this call so shrugged, got up very quickly and left the ballroom. Thorndike returned to his family tale of immigration from Spain and how they got into the banking business. She actually regretted having to leave just then.

While in the hallway using her phone, she could hear the applause, mingled with laughter. They put her on hold as she got transferred from one uninformative official to another. This was when she overheard two men talking about the Chadds Ford piece of land. Delaney eavesdropped until she found out what she needed to know, pacing the whole time and then went back into the ballroom just as the crowd was getting to its feet to send Thorndike off the stage to thundering applause.

"Where the hell did you go, Delaney?"

"You know my mother's in Russia. I've been trying to reach someone in the Russian embassy for weeks now to see if they can help me contact her. They called me back. I had to call. And while I was out there I overheard a juicy bit of information, too."

"Look, Delaney, I hate to say this, but your mother's a nut. Nothing bad ever happens to people like her. I just hope that tip was worth it. I think he definitely noticed you leaving and he's not the sort of man you want to antagonize.

"Oh, I am certain in this crowd, the great and powerful Oz did not even know I existed. Let's go, we'll never get out of the parking lot and I want to check out this tip."

But Townsend Thorndike did notice. He noticed the cool, tall, raven-haired beauty in the Forest green suit get up and leave just as he started his speech and return when he was finished. He had to wonder why.

### Chapter III

At six a.m. the fog horns woke George with a start. The Kimball cottage was still warm and he suddenly remembered where he was and what he was doing on the island. He ran into Herbert's room and the old man was still cozily asleep. George made some coffee and found some oatmeal flakes.

When he had some food together, he went in to awaken the old man. "Come on, Herbert, wake up. Time for breakfast."

Kimball slowly roused and rubbed his eyes. George helped him sit up, put some pillows behind him, then began feeding him spoons of oatmeal, and sips of dark hot coffee. Kimball looked at the man feeding him with grateful eyes, but did not say a word. George scraped the plate and Kimball ate every bite.

"More?" The old man shook his head, yes.

After the second bowl, Kimball felt renewed enough to speak. "Who are you?"

"Don't you remember, I was here last night?" Kimball shook his head, no. "I turned on your heat. You don't know who I am? Are you sure?"

"Doctor?"

"That's right, Mr. Kimball. I'm Dr. Cavanaugh. You know me, right?"

The old man knew he knew the man's face, but just could not place it. When George left the room, Kimball reached for his spectacles and found a pill bottle on the night stand. The doctor's name on the bottle was Cavanaugh.

"Don't even know my own doctor," Kimball thought aloud, "Can't remember a damn thing."

George came back into the room with the last two pages of the contract in his hand. "Mr. Kimball you can't stay here all alone. I've got to have someone come to care for you. These papers give me permission to hire a nurse."

"No nurse! I just caught a little cold is all."

"It's not a little cold. You could have died. And you need some care. You cannot stay here alone. You can either come back with me to the hospital or let me hire a nurse. What's it going to be?"

The old man growled and grumped, mumbling to himself and finally answered, "Guess I don't have any choice, do I?"

"No. Now sign these insurance papers and let me do my job, Mr. Kimball."

"Let me see them." George reluctantly handed the papers to the agitated old man, who looked at them with great care, seemingly reading every line. George fidgeted while Kimball read, waiting to be found out.

"Got to be done, heh, Doctor?" Kimball whispered and looked at George, who nodded and looked quickly away. "Then give me a damn pen," he said and chuckled.

George assured Kimball he would send a nurse back directly. He made a few trips back and forth to his parent's cottage, moving pillows, blankets, food, and propane. Then he left for the mainland. When he got back to the marina, he used his phone to get Kimball set up. "That's right, get me a live-in nurse, today . . . I'll pay for it." Then George went into the marina office to set up a weekly supply run. "Just add it to my tab, anything he wants or needs, repairs, anything."

It would take about a month to clear title and get to settlement. He could not chance people asking questions if he took him to a hospital so he would give him the best care he could on the island. "Just hang in there old man . . . I'm going to save both our asses." George muttered to himself.

Roscoe Tyree Wilson left the house late that morning for work. On his way out he overheard Penelope on the phone with what he was certain was the bank.

"How can I possibly be overdrawn? I made a \$2000.00 deposit three days ago. Yes, I am the only one listed on this account. Yes, I will hold on." She tapped her fingers on the desk and then caught sight of Roscoe trying to quietly leave the house. "Oh, no you don't! Roscoe you come back here!"

But he dashed out the door and got into the car counting on the fact she wouldn't leave the phone unattended. Polite, properly raised Penelope. He screeched out of the driveway and down the

street heading not for work, but for Al's Place, the local hang out for folks like him. Roscoe checked the rear view mirror every few minutes to make certain Penelope hadn't followed him. She had before and it took him months after that to find another place where he could place his bets. This was a place she knew nothing about. There was a lot Penelope knew nothing about, but Roscoe was afraid it was all about to fall apart for him, again. Again. Roscoe never wanted to be here again.

He had sworn to the his father and to Penelope that he was cured. He almost went to jail that time. Using clients funds to bail himself out. Fortunately his father was on the state supreme court and it was all hushed up and fixed for him. Every penny was put back. Roscoe went off to a rehabilitation center for two months. Oh, that therapy. Weeks and weeks of drug addicts and alcoholics screaming in his face. He hated it, but he felt cured when he left. He felt fine. He hadn't placed a bet in over five years. Until six months ago. It was only one little bet on a horse and it came in. One little outing to Harve de grace with clients. He knew he shouldn't go but what was he to do? Tell them he was an addicted gambler?

"Certainly not," his father said, "You just go and have fun and don't bet. You can do that, can't ya' boy?"

Roscoe just smiled in response. The Judge really did seem to forgive him, have renewed faith in him. He had actually handed over some estates to manage in the past three years. Roscoe knew how important it was for him to live up to the Judge's confidence. And he tried. He didn't bet for the first ten races. His clients ragged him the whole time about being a puritan all and prude, but he didn't budge. Then he saw a jockey he knew in the old days was riding the long shot. Sudden Leap was the horse's name. He didn't even know how he got to the \$100.00, but there he was, shelling out \$500.00 on a 20 to 1 shot.

He stood at the rail calmly watching the horses round the curve. His clients were yelling for their horses. Roscoe's heart was pumping but outwardly he was silent and still. The crowd thundered in his ears and his heart beat faster and faster, but he didn't flex a muscle. Sudden Leap pulled in front seconds before the race was over and won. He laughed out loud and his clients beat his back congratulating him.

Roscoe hadn't felt this alive and this awake in a very long time. He said to himself, "I can handle this. I can bet here and there and be happy. It can be like a hobby, like golf or boating." And it was for a few months until he began losing. Then he would double up his bets to get even. More losing, more doubling up. The debts got bigger, the bets got bigger. He began to borrow money from a loan shark to pay back the gambling debts, then began using the household money to make more bets to get even. Penelope had taken his name off of her accounts after the first problem, so yesterday he took a check from her book and forged her signature.

He walked into Al's and asked the bartender to see Joe, then kept going into the back of the bar. Joe was not glad to see him. "I hope you're here to pay me Roscoe."

"No. Listen. I need some more time."

"No more time. You're in to me very big right now and it's getting bigger everyday."

"I know. I know. Look just until the end of the week. I have a big case settling and I'm going to be able to at least pay the grease."

"The grease, you say? And what about the rest, Roscoe? You don't want me to go to your father about this, do you?"

"No! No, please. Just a few more days. I'll handle it. I promise."

"Okay, Roscoe. You've always come through before. I'll give you until Friday."

"Thanks Joe."

Roscoe hurried out of the bar and into the sunlight. The moment he got there his car phone was ringing. He picked it up without thinking. It was Penelope.

"Roscoe, you forged my signature, didn't you? Goddamn it Roscoe! I bounced a check to the girls' school. Their tuition, Roscoe. Don't you care that you're ruining us? How are you going to feel when your seven year old daughters are kicked out of their school for non-payment? You bastard!"

Roscoe hung the phone up in her ear. Penelope and her \$2000.00 tragedy was the least of his problems this morning. He owed Joe almost a quarter million dollars and at this point he had no idea where he was going to get the money. When he got to his office he had the secretary hold all his calls. He reached into his desk and pulled out the antique Luger his father had given him for

graduation. It was a big prize. There was an antique cleaning kit and bullets that went with it all wrapped up in a tan leather case. It was the first decent present his father ever gave him. A family heirloom passed on for three generations. Roscoe treasured it. He cleaned the barrel and loaded it very carefully. This was second time in a week he had done this same ritual.

"Mr. Wilson," his secretary knocked on the door, "I am very sorry to bother you, but this George Bates' assistant is on the phone and she says she has got to speak to you right now. I told her you were not to be bothered but . . ."

Roscoe sighed, "Okay, Ruth, put him through."

"Roscoe? ...George. I've got it! The Agreement of Sale on Kent island."

Roscoe took a deep breath, "George, is this on the up and up?"

"It's all legal. My attorneys drew them up so you're just on the receiving side. I'll bring the contacts over later today. You give them the once over and your okay and we'll get the title cleared."

"I don't know how you pulled this off, George, but you better tell me the deal here. What are you paying for this land?"

"I'm not exactly buying the land, Roscoe. Let's just say Kimball and I are becoming partners."

"Partners! Nothing for the island? That will never pass the muster if my father hears of it!"

"Yeah, it will. Hear me out. 500k will go from my company to a limited partnership called Mid-Lantic Marine."

"Who is Mid-Lantic Marine, George?"

"Our banking friend, Towney, and Kimball, myself, of course, and oh, there is another person. Oh, yeah, right, you. All very secretly tied up. You handle the funds Roscoe. Can you live with that?"

Roscoe removed the bullets, put the Luger back into its leather case, unlocked the drawer and put the case back in its rightful place, "Messenger them over. I want to see them right now."

George grinned, leaned back in his desk chair and crossed his feet on his desk. "Okay, partner, see you later." He reached into his thermador and took out a fine Cuban cigar. There haven't been many occasions lately where he felt he deserved one of these. He ran the cigar under his nose inhaling all of its bouquet, then buzzed his assistant.

"Kate, get Thorndike on the phone. Tell him I want to meet with him ASAP . . . and Kate . . . do you have my cigar lighter, I need it."

Kate got Thorndike's assistant on the phone and made the appointment. Before going in to light her boss's cigar she pulled a mirror out of her desk to check her makeup. A Cuban cigar was definitely a good sign. Six months ago she was getting her checks late and things were looking quite grim. She started working for him right out of junior business college and always felt in on everything he did. She stuck by him through the terrible recession and his nasty divorce with the hope someday he'd see her value to him and make all the sacrifices worth it.

Something was different with this deal, though. She did not know anything about it and the file was kept locked in his private safe. The more he hid it, the more curious she became. She was determined to find out why her boss was smoking expensive cigars again. If he did not tell her, she would find out her own way. She went into his office with the lighter and seductively leaned across the desk, "Hey, boss . . . let me light that for you."

## Chapter IV

The aroma of simmering chicken soup slowly aroused Kimball from his nap, "Sydney, are you cooking something. Sure smells good in here."

A young red-haired woman in a white uniform came in. Kimball searched his memory, "You're not . . . Sydney."

"No, Mr. Kimball, I'm Jane Hardy, your nurse."

Kimball got up from his bed and shook his finger at the young woman. "Nurse! What are you doing here? Who told you to come here? You leave right this instant. What am I some cripple or something? I don't need a nurse. You get out right now." He backed Jane out of the bedroom and into the living room, but she was not deterred.

"Mr. Kimball, calm down. Even if I wanted to leave, there is no way off this island until tomorrow. Get right back into your bed and I will bring you your dinner."

The old man slumped onto the bed. "Go on, now, get back into it. I will be right back." The nurse went to the kitchen to get Kimball's tray while he struggled to get over to the window. The sun was setting on the bay.

"Usually, I take a walk this time of day . . . looks kind of cold out."

Jane came back with his dinner. "It is. Would you rather sit at the table by the window and eat?"

"Yes, yes I would. Could you get me that robe?" Kimball and the nurse went into the living room and sat by the window eating slowly and watching the sun set on the water.

"What a beautiful place you have Mr. Kimball. I have loved being here."

"How long have you been here? Jane, is it?"

"Yes, it's Jane. Three weeks."

"Three weeks!" Kimball stared at the young woman. I have lost three weeks of my life. Was I unconscious? I have no idea what happened to me. Do you?"

"Yes, I know. Do you want me to tell you?" she patted his hand, "Hearing it will be hard."

"Go on, believe me, I have been through my share of trouble, I can handle it."

Jane told him about his Alzheimer's. What the disease did to people, how he almost died on the island all alone and how George Bates found him and hired her to take care of him. She told Kimball that George comes by every few days with food and newspapers for him and what he could expect to happen as the disease progresses.

"No cure, no real treatment then? I will just lose my mind and my memories? God!" Kimball had stopped eating and covered his face with his hands, then looked up with a smile, "Well, it isn't all bad, at least when I cannot remember, I cannot remember, that I cannot remember, right?"

Jane burst out laughing, "Right!"

Kimball chuckled with her, then grew silent again. "Sorry I gave you a hard time before."

She smiled and patted his hand, "It's fine. I've tamed a few gorillas in my time."

"If what you say is true, then this may be a short episode. I may not have much time. There is a lot to do before my mind slips away again. I have a daughter. I want to see her. It is time for me to see her. I guess I thought someday she would come and knock on my door, but there is not time for her to come around now. Now, I have to find her. I don't even know where she is. I have to write it all down. My life. What happened. It's important she understand everything." He stood up and started looking for pen and paper. "Will you help me Jane?"

"Yes. I will help you. Let's get started right now." She found a blank tablet and pencils and began taking down everything the old man told her about his life. At times he cried, at times he made her laugh and joined her. There was an old chest full of mementoes. They went through old pictures, newspaper clippings, the family bible.

"Herbert, you've led quite a life. Once she's heard your explanation, I'm certain she'll understand. Don't you think this is enough for now?"

"No!" he screeched. "No. Sorry Jane. I am afraid it will all slip away if I go to sleep. And there is more, much more. In the attic. More family history. We've got to try to do this all while I still can."

Jane was exhausted but understood his compulsion and they pushed through for eighteen hours straight before he collapsed again into a deep sleep. George arrived to find both of them passed out, papers and pictures strewn everywhere. He began to read through them.

Kimball's life had always been a secret and the detective he hired hadn't discovered very much. He poured over the papers and found out he been married and had a daughter.

Just then, Jane awoke. "Oh, Mr. Bates, I'm sorry. Herbert and I have been up for hours. He was wonderful. Coherent, remembering his whole life. Want some coffee?"

"Okay. Sure. What is all this stuff, here?"

"Well, he told me he has a daughter and he wants to find her. He wants her to know all about him . . . what happened . . . why he left her and her mother. It's all pretty much there. We have spent hours compiling it all for Margaret. It's so important to him to get through to her now. He has had one extraordinary life. Look through the clippings on the table. It's quite surprising."

She came in with the coffee. "He awoke two days ago and knew everything. Knew you. Oh, Mr. Bates, he was so grateful you are taking care of Him. Here are some pictures of you and your brother playing on the island. You two replaced his own child for a time. He's very fond of you, did you know that?"

"No, I didn't." George flinched, "I guess I better gather this together."

"Will you find his daughter for him? It's very important to him to see her while he can still remember her."

"Absolutely. I will go right back to the mainland and start the search. Any information about where I should search?"

"Well, the last place he remembered was somewhere in Pennsylvania . . . You are so wonderful to do this for him. You know he's quite a guy. When I told him about his illness, he actually made a joke about it."

"You told him!"

"You never told me he didn't know. I assumed he knew and had forgotten. Anyway, it's done." Jane picked up her cup and sipped her coffee. "Aren't you going to see him before you leave?"

George tiptoed into Kimball's bedroom hoping the old man wouldn't awaken, but he did. "George? George, is that you my boy? Come here, let me see you. Georgie porgy. Quite a man now, taking care of me." Kimball took George's hand and his eyes misted over. "Remember when you

would come here and we would work on your sunfish together? I remember. I remembered many things, today . . . "

George's face twisted into a smile. "I'm so glad, Herbert."

"Thank you George. I cannot even find words to thank you enough."

"It's okay, really, it's okay. You rest now, you have been up for hours, I hear."

"Find her, Georgie, find Margaret for me before it's too late."

"I'll try, Herbert. I promise I'll try." George patted the old man's hand and pulled the covers up around his chin and gently left.

Jane noticed the look of terror on George's face when he left the room and misunderstood, "This is hard for you, isn't it Mr. Bates?"

George looked up at this young energetic nurse. Overzealous would be how he would describe her. Nursing him back to perfect health was not what he had in mind when he hired her. "Yes, it's very hard for me. Listen, I am going to go back to the mainland to see about finding his daughter and then I'll be back to stay the night if you'd like some time off, I'm sure he'll be okay until I get back."

"That's very thoughtful. I am exhausted. Thanks."

George took Jane Hardy to the mainland and called the service for which she worked. "Herbert Kimball won't be needing her services anymore. That's right. No, Ms. Hardy was wonderful, it's just that he's much better and my wife and I have decided to take him home to our house. I'll send her two weeks' severance pay. Thank you very much."

George then called Kate and had her call the detective, Dan Silver, he had hired to find Kimball's heir. He wanted to give him all the information the very competent Ms. Hardy had gathered on Kimball's daughter. With Herbert coherent, it was very important George found her first.

## Chapter V

Delaney and Carol were the first to arrive at Downey's happy hour. "Dinner." Delaney said with her plate full of Hors d'oeuvres. "I love happy hour. One glass of wine and free dinner."

Carol chuckled, "Me, too. If that settlement gets postponed again I may be here every night having dinner."

Delaney leaned over the bar, "Could I have a white wine spritzer, please. Oh, oh, here comes the corporate crowd, Carol, you better get a drink quick."

"Delaney, that's not the corporate crowd, that's the banking crowd and don't look now, but I believe it's the main man himself."

Delaney looked over and sure enough it was Townsend Thorndike. "Working the crowd as usual."

"Too bad you're so hard on him because it looks like you're going to get worked as well, he's heading this way."

Delaney turned back to her drink and felt a tap on the shoulder, "Excuse me, I don't think we've met." She waited until she swallowed her drink and slowly looked over her shoulder. She knew who it was before she turned, it was that same mellow voice she heard at the luncheon.

"Are you running for election?" she smiled slyly.

Towney smiled and shyly looked at his feet. Oh, my God, she thought, he's going to say shucks, mam.

"I just thought I saw you at the chamber luncheon and I was curious."

His eyes were only on her. Delaney returned the gaze. "About what?"

He moved in closer to the stool and wedged between her and Carol, "Why didn't you stay?"

She smirked, "The other 999 people that heard you speak weren't enough?"

Towney smiled again, his dimples showing, his voice even more seductive at this range. Delaney was feeling very drawn to him. He spoke very softly. His face close enough to hers to kiss her. "Oh, they were quite enough. I just thought I saw something was worrying you."

"From the podium? Amazing. I was in the back of the room and you picked that up? No, I think you just couldn't imagine why I wasn't swept away like the rest of the room."

Towney laughed. "Don't hold back now, really let me have it."

She returned his smile. This is a very charming man, she thought to herself, and he knows exactly how charming.

"You know, you have quite a beautiful smile, don't save it just for me . . . Ms . . . ?"

"Shaw. Delaney Shaw . . . and your name was again?" In an instant Delaney had her business card in her hand. She squeezed it into Towney's and shook it, her green eyes flashing with amusement.

"Ah hmm. Townsend Thorndike."

"So nice to meet you, Mr. Thorndike. I'm in Real Estate. If you ever need a broker, give me a call."

She hopped off the bar stool and said, "Carol, I have to go. See you tomorrow," and headed for the door leaving a stunned Townsend Thorndike and an even more bewildered Carol.

Towney watched her go out the front door and then turn onto South Street and walk by the full set of windows. After a few moments Towney spoke to Carol. "Is she always like that? Don't tell me. That wouldn't be fair. Besides, I think I would like to enjoy finding out myself." He smiled sweetly at Carol. "Captivating woman. You are her friend, right?"

She laughed, "I'm not sure. She just left me with the bar tab."

He reached into his pocket and took out a gold card holder, and a twenty-dollar bill that he lay on the bar. "Here's my card. This is my private number. Could you ask her to call me tomorrow?" He then went back to his friends leaving Carol with his embossed private card.

The next day Carol took Delaney the message. "Call him! He wants me to call him. He's got my card. I'm not calling him, Carol. Forget it."

"Are you nuts? This charming, wealthy, SINGLE man asks you to give him a call and you refuse. What's the problem, Delaney? I haven't noticed too many princes around lately."

Delaney flopped down into her desk chair. "That's true, but his arrogance is too overwhelming

for me. And you don't think for one minute he's looking for anything else other than to have a quick affair and gone. You know his reputation. What would I be, number twenty this year alone?"

"I didn't know you were tracking him."

"His name is everywhere, Carol, no one has to track him. It's disgusting."

"So it's disgusting, what's wrong with a quick hot passionate affair with a handsome millionaire? Tell me."

Delaney snickered and shook her head. "I don't know. Something though."

"Call him!"

"No way. If I am going to have a meaningless affair, and we both agree that's all this could be, then at least I want the illusion of romance. He'll just have to pursue me." Then she took his card, ripped it into little pieces and threw it in the trash can while Carol moaned and groaned, "If only he liked middle-aged Italian chicks."

"Did I get any calls on my personal line?" Towney asked his secretary when he got in.

"No," Aaron answered, "but it is early. Expecting someone special?"

Towney did not miss Aaron's sarcastic tone. "Not really."

"Ummm hummmm. Well, then, I will just let you know if anyone does call, okay?" Aaron sauntered out of his office and went back to his usual duties, humming to himself. Towney hated that Aaron always knew when he was on the prowl.

Aaron was a great assistant. Towney knew it and put up with his sarcasm and petty grievances, but was not oblivious to Aaron's affection for him. He had worked for him since he took over the bank. The two of them met in France on Towney's last summer abroad right before graduate school. They hit it off right away and spent nine weeks together traveling, womanizing, carouzing. Aaron was a finance major at Wharton. Towney was surprised to meet someone from Philadelphia, especially finance major. Aaron knew everything about the Thorndike Bank and his family. They were friends instantly. They even looked alike. Aaron was a little shorter and his hair was wavier, but they had the same dark coloring and flashy smile. In fact, when people said, "Oh, you two must be

brothers." They would laugh and agree they were. Aaron would always say, "Yes, but I'm the poor brother," in French.

Towney had no idea about Aaron and then one night they drank a little too much wine and Aaron told him how he felt about him. When Towney told him he was straight, Aaron seemed to understand, but Towney could tell he was crushed. Two days later they got on separate planes and flew home. It wasn't until the news hit the papers about Towney heading the bank that Aaron contacted him again. Their camaraderie returned immediately and Towney needed help so he hired him. He was in short supply of people he could trust. He had never regretted it, but he knew Aaron was more than capable of making mischief for him.

When Delaney had not called by three, he fished her card out of his wallet and dialed the number.

"Good afternoon, Shaw Realty, Carol speaking."

"Hello, Carol, this is Townsend Thorndike, how are you today?"

"Very well, thank you, and you, Mr. Thorndike?"

"No, Towney, please. I was wondering if you gave Ms. Shaw my message?"

"Yes, I gave her the message."

"And . . .?"

"Well, Ah . . . she's been in a settlement all day. I guess she didn't have a chance to call you."

"Is she there now?"

"No, sorry she had an appointment, but I will tell her you called."

"Better yet, Carol do you think she would have dinner with me tonight?"

"Let me check her calendar." Carol made paper-moving noises and got back on the line.

"Doesn't look like anything's booked. I'm sure she would love to."

"Great, tell her to meet me at the Living Room tonight. Upstairs, in the private club. Around nine. Okay?"

"You realize I can't make any promises for her."

"I made the call Carol, you made the date, now I am counting on you to get her to show up."

She giggled at the conspiracy, "I'll do whatever it takes," and hung up.

When Delaney got back to the office, Carol was beaming. "He called."

"Who?"

"Prince Charming." A blank face. "Banker man . . . Townsend Thorndike."

"Did he? What did he say?" Delaney was trying to sound disinterested.

"You have a date tonight at the Living room, at nine."

"No, I don't, either. You call him right back and tell him you are sorry but you made a mistake."

"Come on Delaney. What's the deal here? I know you don't have any plans tonight. I know everything about you. Go. "

Delaney sat on the couch in her office. "I am not up for his game, Carol. You know what happened with Ted."

"It's time to get over it. Come on, let's go and buy the sexiest dress in town." Delaney hesitated. "Come on, let's go."

Carol dragged Delaney to every posh shop in town, but finally they knew they had the dress. The earth shattering head turning, drop dead gorgeous dress. Delaney could not believe how great she felt in this dress. The material was silk velvet. It was very sleek and long with a slit up the right leg. The top was blousy, caught by a beaded sash and off the shoulders. The color a moss green, just like her eyes. "Are you certain I don't remind you of the jolly green giant? Can I really wear this out in public? It feels like a nightgown?"

The sales woman and Carol gushed in unison. "This dress was made for you."

Delaney had to admit she felt special in it. She pulled her long dark hair out of its usual band and let it fall to her shoulders.

Carol applauded. "That's a girl. Let your hair down tonight, really, Delaney. You look beautiful. Now let's run, you're going to be late."

It was already eight and they were in Bryn Mawr. Delaney decided late was fine. She took a bath and dressed very slowly and carefully. She blew her hair out until it was full and cascading around her shoulders in curls. Then put on some blush and mascara and lipstick. When she was done, she eyed herself in the mirror and liked what she saw.

So did the entire club. She arrived at ten, checked her shawl and when she turned around to look for Towney everyone was staring. She did not move, she held her ground and waited. Finally, after what felt like an hour, she saw him approaching from across the room.

He saw her the minute she entered the room and for a moment did not recognize this beautiful woman to be the smart-alecky all business Delaney Shaw he had invited out. This change enchanted him. He stopped a foot away from her and inhaled her perfume.

They looked at each other and didn't speak for a full minute. Then he said, "You're late."

"I'm here."

"So you are." He took her hands and stood back. "New dress?"

"Found it in the back of my closet."

He finally smiled. "Right."

Delaney smiled back.

"You are ravishing. If we don't get to our table no one will be able to finish their meal." He took her arm and led her to what was obviously, the best table in the club. Chilled champagne and Beluga caviar awaited her. She felt like the queen of the ball. All this attention, all this luxury. She told herself over and over, don't get used to this girl, it ain't for keeps.

Towney signaled the waiter and they brought a specially prepared meal to the table. "I hope you don't mind. I eat here often and took the liberty of ordering for both of us." Delaney looked down at the beautifully decorated plate of Oyster's Rockefeller and smiled. "You like them? Good."

"How did you know? Called my friends, my mother in Russia?"

"Your mother's in Russia?"

"Don't change the subject." Delaney picked up the fluted crystal glass of champagne and took a sip. "These are all my favorite foods."

Towney laughed. "Good guess."

"Now I see why you're so popular with all the ladies. What do you have some special computer program that keeps track of these things?"

"It's kismet. Don't fight it, Delaney. Just enjoy."

The oyster shells were whisked away and the maitre'd began to debone the Dover sole at the table. "With champagne sauce and truffles?"

"Flew in hours ago, just for you."

Delaney laughed. She couldn't help but enjoy this. She was getting what Carol would call the treatment, the Thorndike special. No wonder the women he dated put up with his shenanigans. The music came up behind them.

Towney stood up and came over to her. "Tango?"

"Tango? You tango. This is too much, really Towney. No honestly. You don't have to tango. I'm impressed enough that you asked."

"You won't dance with me?" He feigned a hurt look.

"You're serious?" He shook his head yes.

"This should be interesting. I am not much of a dancer, Towney."

"No ballet, dancing school, for you, then?"

When she stood up, he pulled her into his arms and held her so tight she almost could not breathe. "No . . . No lessons. This is all very romantic and all, but do you think you could loosen your grasp, here, I'm going to pass out."

Suddenly he grabbed her hand and flung her out and spun her, catching her back again. She squealed in surprise. "This is going to be a long evening, isn't it?" Towney laughed and spun her out again.

Later he took her into the bank building, used his key to his private elevator and took her to the top floor. The elevator doors opened right into the corporate suite. "It's not much," he joked, "but it's home."

Delaney stood on the threshold for a moment and then with studied nonchalance, stepped inside trailing her cloth shawl as if it were mink. Towney picked up a remote and pressed a few buttons. The lights went on. The foyer was all cool white marble and gleaming glass, and everywhere she turned her own image was reflected back at her. She couldn't suppress a smile. Yes, her too red lipstick was smeared, the sleek green dress recklessly bare, and the cascade of dark curls framing her face was now a perfect mess. Who cared? Her mother would have called the look tarty, but even her mother couldn't quarrel with the results. If just for tonight, Delaney had stepped through the looking glass.

"Oh, lord. I'm disheveled," she said tossing her head before a gilded mirror. "Try to say that after two bottles of Dom, Thorndike. Disheveled."

He shrugged out of his jacket, tossed his cuff links into an ashtray and rolled up his shirt sleeves revealing strong and still tan forearms. "You are every inch the lady, Ms. Shaw." He stood behind her, very close and pressed his lips to her ear. "And if you are a bit disheveled, I take at least half the responsibility." Delaney watched in the mirror as he nibbled softly at her earlobe. "As I took half the pleasure."

She visibly shuddered as his forefinger traced a wayward path from her throat to her bare shoulder to the slope of her breast. He looked at her reflection in the mirror, "Frankly, Delaney, I am a little embarrassed. I haven't acted like that since I was seventeen--and in the back seat of the car, no less. I am sure we scandalized Alfred." He nudged her right nipple with his thumb, so softly that she could barely discern his touch. Her breath left her body in a rush.

She stood motionless for moments as Thorndike nuzzled the hollow place at the base of her shoulder, his fingertips continuing their lazy exploration of her breast. Then, shaking her head as if to clear it, she slipped out of the circle of his arms. "You obviously took me up here to impress me, so show me around and impress me."

He smiled, "Impress you? Don't be silly." Then he moved into the hall and pressed a few more buttons. "This is simply where I work, and stay if I'm in town working late. But let's not talk about work, it will put me to sleep." He said and moved to take her into his arms again.

"Really? How strange, I would have thought a man in your position would be extremely turned on by his work?"

"Well, then there is one thing you didn't already know about me."

She pulled away again and looked at him, "Tell me more."

"About what, me? No, of course, it's my work that you are curious about."

"Your work interests me. After all I am in Real Estate and you pretty much run things along those lines in this town, wouldn't you say?"

"Run things?" he chuckled, "No I wouldn't say that at all. Things pretty much run me."

"Oh, yes, I can see by your surroundings how 'run' you are."

"This is just the official corporate suite, quite ostentatious for my tastes. I thought you would enjoy taking a look."

"I see," she replied, "Then, you're not trying to impress me? Good."

She strode around the large room, trying to appear nonchalant. Pleasant! The living area alone is the size of my entire condo. Three thousand square feet she figured. All done in champagne and deep blue, distinctly modern, yet opulent. The walls, covered in raw silk shot through with threads of muted copper and gold soared to ceilings twenty feet high. Obviously one of those buttons he pressed lit the white marble fireplace. Yes. It was some kind of nice. Kicking off her heels, she strolled across the deep ivory carpet, hands behind her back. If Carol were here, she would die.

"Nice." She said, pausing before an oil painting of flowers in a cracked blue cup. "Is this?"

"Van Gogh's a favorite of mine," Towner said dryly. He depressed another button summoning a wet bar from behind the recesses of the far wall. "More champagne?"

She giggled, "Only at my peril. So--how's the view from here?"

"Now that's my favorite part of these digs." Another button swept aside heavy silken draperies revealing a floor to ceiling glass wall. Delaney's eyes widened. The whole of Philadelphia winked and glittered around them. Dominating the skylines were the sculptured tiers of Liberty Place.

"Too bad you're not trying to impress me." Delaney murmured. "It's a different city from this vantage point."

"I know, " Towner said, beside her again with two filled champagne glasses in his hand, "It reminds me of an opened jewel case. Just reach out, Delaney. Take anything you want."

She reached out and took a glass from Towner's hand. "Oh, that's easy. I'll take the bridge," she said gesturing toward the illuminated span of the Ben Franklin. "Don't they always say that bridges are like necklaces?"

"You should have them. All the bridges and necklaces you want."

"Really? Are you going to give them to me Towner?" She turned to face him and silence hung in the air. "No?" she smiled, "I didn't think so." She turned back to the view. "It's been clear to me always that whatever I wanted I would have to get for myself."

"No one read Cinderella or Sleeping Beauty, to you as a child?"

"No. And I'm glad."

"A practical woman."

"That's right. Given my choice, I would take bricks and mortar over fantasies any day."

"I actually believe you would." He took her head in his hands twining his fingers through her hair. "There is not a bit of the romantic in you is there?"

"Oh, that's where you're wrong Thorndike. I find romance everywhere I turn. In dilapidated shells that turn into gingerbread houses and sell at ten times the investment. In old waterfront warehouses that are transformed into upscale condos. In crumbling neighborhoods that suddenly attain some funky cachet and soon, all the gentry are flocking in like lemmings. Give me a real project and I'm the most romantic girl you will ever meet."

Thorndike whistled softly, "At least you are openly ambitious." Delaney wondered for a split second if she revealed herself too much. Carol keeps telling her men don't like this type of aggressive behavior. Then without warning, he bent his head to hers and nipped almost fiercely at her lips, darting his tongue snakelike into her mouth, then released her abruptly.

"Are you really so up front, Delaney or are you just pretending you're an honest woman so you can seduce me into making love to you?"

"Pardon me, Thorndike," she said huskily, feeling her cheeks flame, "Who says we're making love?"

"Then what are we making, Delaney? Deals?"

"Maybe. It doesn't hurt a woman to know a man in your position."

"And what position is that?" Thorndike linked his hands behind her and pressed into the small of her back, pulling her so close that she could feel his frank arousal prodding her belly. She gasped into his mouth as his tongue flicked the tip of hers, sparring with it, spearing it gently, then withdrawing to trace the lushness of her upper lip.

"Delaney," he muttered against her lips. "Don't you think it's getting past your bedtime?"

With a start, she felt his hands covering her buttocks, gripping them, insinuating her even more urgently against his hard body. She had to stop this and now. Not because she didn't want him as desperately as he seemed to want her, but because she had lost control of the situation and she had no intention of letting Townsend Thorndike lead this dance. Carol's parting jibe, "Now you're one of the chosen," still rankled. Tonight, the tables would turn. Tonight, Delaney Shaw would do the choosing.

With both hands she pushed against his broad chest. She stared at him, breathless. "Know what your problem is, Thorndike?"

"Only what the immediate problem is."

"Has any woman ever refused you? Not fallen for the Thorndike treatment? Did you think that bringing me up here was a guilt-edged guarantee of surrender?" She walked away from him, feeling his eyes on her back, choreographing every languid step to taunt him. "I don't know if I should give you the satisfaction. Hell!" She reclined on a brocade boudoir chair and gestured extravagantly at the suite. "Look at this playhouse. Seems like you're one man who's had too damned much satisfaction his life."

"In fact, and you probably will not believe it, but I have known precious little true satisfaction in my life. He sat next to her and ran his fingers over her bare arm watching with fascination the

goose flesh rising. "I'm beginning to suspect that you are one woman who is starving for satisfaction, too. Genuine satisfaction, Delaney," he whispered.

"Look, Thorndike . . . Towney." He was too damned close. A brief moan escaped her as he captured her hand and kissed her palm. His tongue dancing over the skin of her wrist.

"Your pulse is racing," he murmured working his way, nibble by nibble, up her arm to her mouth. "I think it's time you just shut up." He kissed her hard, taking her breath away. It took all the resolve she had to push him away, but she did.

"Towney, Towney, stop. Please stop. I've got to go," she whispered realizing she didn't sound too convincing.

He pulled back away from her quickly and held her now at arms' length, "No means no, then Delaney?"

She stared into those black eyes and caught the haughtiness of his words. They were more of a challenge than a question. She could tell she was right about this man being used to getting what he wanted, and this time he was not getting her. Delaney stood up, straightened her clothes, put her shoes back on and walked over to the mirror. "Obviously a word you're not accustomed to hearing much. How do I get out of this gilded cage anyway?"

Towney looked at her very closely and could see the determination in her face. He stood up abruptly and walked over to the bar and took a swig of champagne. He turned curtly, "I'll get my coat."

"No, that okay, Towney, I'll get myself a cab," Delaney pulled a brush from her purse and untangled her hair. "I'll be fine, really." She walked towards the elevator. All she wanted to do was get out of there. She could see the tightness in his jaw, sense his displeasure with her. She found herself caught in that old place of wanting to please and being angry because she felt she had to.

Towney moved toward Delaney, "Please, at least let me walk you out and put you into a cab."

"No!" she backed away and turned towards the elevator, "No, thank you. I can find my way out, thank you. Good-bye."

Towney followed her to the foyer doorway and watched her get onto the elevator. She bewildered him. A few moments ago she was draped all over him in the car. Delaney hit the button and the doors opened. She got on, turned to face him and hit the lobby button. Towney stood in front of the doors blocking them from closing, "Good night, Delaney."

"Good night, Towney. Thanks for a lovely evening."

Her lipstick was gone, her hair still a mess of curls around her shoulders, her cheeks a mottled red. Their eyes locked for an instant and then Towney stepped back. The doors closed.

He stood there for a moment trying to decide if he should go after her, but did nothing. He knew he was being boorish but he could not seem to move. It was true he did hate not getting what he wanted, but it was also true that he hated showing up that way. He prided himself on being somewhat of a regular guy and here he was acting like the spoiled rich brat he was. He paced in the foyer inhaling the last of her perfume, then shut the lights and went inside murmuring to himself that he needed a cold shower.

He turned on the water, folded his clothes neatly on the bedside chair, then poured himself a glass of Napoleon brandy from the bottle he kept on his bedside chair. "This is not exactly how the night was supposed to go." He mused to himself as he got into the shower and the hot water moved down his neck and back.

Delaney was in the elevator for quite a few moments before she realized it had not moved. She had been too busy tapping her foot and fuming. She hit the down button again but nothing happened. "Damn it, now I have to go back inside and face him again."

When she tapped the lobby button again, the elevator opened right back up to where she got on, Towney's foyer, only it was very dark. "Great, this is just great, I wonder where the stairs are." She rummaged around the foyer, fumbling for the light switch but saw no evidence of a switch or exit doors. "Probably paid off Licenses and Inspections so he didn't have to mess up his marble entry with a legal exit!" She realized she was talking to herself but was more than a little agitated with the evening's turn of events. She could still hear music coming in from the living room and she headed through the apartment.

"Towney? Towney. Are you here? The elevator is stuck." She called into the darkness. The living room lights were off but she could hear water running.

"He must be in the shower." She said aloud to herself and walked back toward the open bedroom door. Only one small light was on in the bedroom and from the open door she could see straight into where Towney was taking a shower. The beautifully etched glass shower doors did not leave anything to the imagination and she found herself stepping back just a little so she could take it all in. His body was athletic and taut and mildly hairy from his tanned legs to his waist with a firm round butt. Had someone asked her she would have said, perfect. The perfect male body.

He reached up, poured shampoo into his hand, began to suds his hair, then turned slightly, and stood under the water rinsing, his eyes closed. From this angle she could see every bit of him she moved in a little closer. Towney shook the water out of his eyes, reached up again and got a palm full of liquid soap and began to lather his body. Delaney found herself getting mildly aroused and grinned to herself, peeping Thomasina indeed! But stayed nevertheless, carefully watching Towney run the lather under his arms and down his hairy chest to his belly. This time he took more soap and turned his body facing her fully and moved his hands between his legs and lingered, rubbing the shaft of his penis with his right hand until it stood to full attention. She could see him enjoying the touch of his soft foreskin.

Delaney began to squirm, aroused and captivated. He continued to massage himself varying the pace, drawing it out, tarrying over his testicles and then up and over the head. Mesmerized by the rhythmic spell of this self-pleasure Delaney was lured further and further into the room. As Towney got more excited, he leaned back on the shower ledge. By this time she had slipped into the room near the shower and sat down on the floor by the bed. As his passion mounted and his body tensed, so did Delaney's. She watched the deftness of his hands moving over himself pulling more suds as needed from his pubic hair onto the shaft. She watched the muscles of his chest stretch and tighten, and finally being taken away with him, and probably the champagne, she moved her own hands under the slit in her dress and pushed against herself. His wantonness reached out and drew her in.

As she matched his pace with her own hand, at first tenuously, then harder and faster, she began to think, this is too bizarre. She was too young for bizarre and yet she knew her passion was being fed by the delicious depravity of the situation. When he came, in what surely only seemed like torrents, all over the glass shower doors, she gasped. Suddenly, as if he heard her, Towney opened his eyes and looked directly at her.

"Oh, my god!" she whispered and looked toward the door, "I have to get out of here," but it was too late. By the time she was on her feet Towney was already out of the shower crossing the room to her, still naked, still wet and still hard.

I am going to die of embarrassment right now, she thought to herself. Flushed and scared she faced him, her heart pounding between arousal and fear, but Towney did not say a word. He stopped in front of her, looked directly into her eyes, moved in closer and untied the sash of her dress. The green silk dropped to a heap on the floor revealing twisted panties and lacy thigh high stockings. He took her right hand in his and put it on his very clean wet cock. She hungrily took hold of it while he wrapped his arms around her and kissed her ardently.

Delaney knew, the moment his wet naked body enveloped hers, she was in trouble. Their bodies dissolved into each other and her legs went wobbly beneath her. With one deft grab he reached down and ripped her new green briefs away. Picking her up off the floor, Towney gently guided his penis inside her already very wet and welcoming heat.

Delaney fell into his arms and wrapped her legs around him tightly as he eased her onto the bed, pushing herself into him hard. Nevertheless, he slowed her pace and moved his head slightly to view her. With dark eyes dancing and dimples showing he took her hands and held them captively over her head, not allowing her to move. "You know how bad you are, don't you?"

Delaney laughed and squirmed under his weight feeling the hardness inside her growing more demanding, "Oh, yes yes I know. I've been very bad."

Towney became serious, " And do you know what happens to bad little voyeurs?"

"No, what?" She said regarding his face very carefully, knowing that the uncomfortable ness of this moment was somehow adding to her excitement.

Towney reached down and bit her erect nipples making her wince, "They get punished."

He pulled abruptly out of her and moved down and bit her left hip. She flinched again. He turned her over and began gnawing on her bottom. Little bites, little moments of pain. She gracefully acquiesced. What else was there to do after her outlandish behavior, but surrender? So she laid back on the bed and let him have his way with her already yielding flesh, flourishes of pleasure awakening her skin to tingles with every kiss, every sharp nip. She knew these sensations of longing were mixed with fear. She did not know what to expect.

Towney rolled her on top of him and put her hand on his cock and rubbed it against her until she placed it roughly inside. He sighed and she nestled in on top of him breathing in the fragrance that lingered on his chest hairs. She kissed the softness of his neck working her way around to his strong face to his lips, which she gathered between her teeth and bit. She sat up threw her head back and laughed. Obviously, it was his turn to watch her. From that angle Towney could see Delaney clearly in the large dresser mirror. Perfectly placed she noticed. He looked at her reflection in the mirror, smiled slyly and put his hands on her hips guiding her into him.

Delaney flushed crimson, knowing, even with her eyes closed he was watching her every movement, the chills rising on her skin, her nipples becoming erect, her passion mounting. She rose and lowered her body, pushing him inside her, then pulling out, the quickened intense push pull, push pull, cadence of deliberate fucking. After a few minutes she no longer minded his gaze. She looked into the mirror and returned it, enjoying it, performing now for him. Reaching up and squeezing her breasts to tantalize him; pinching her nipples to full erection; gyrating her hips and reaching her hands down to feel him moving inside her; rubbing where her soft folds met his hardness while he watched.

It seemed only fair he get the same pleasure she had, but this was new to Delaney. She had never felt this liberated in lovemaking; this free to use her own body and his with such abandon. She arched her back and moved her body up and down the shaft of his penis, slick and slippery with her juices and about to explode, getting lost inside the rhythm of their bodies; getting lost inside the sensations erupting inside her; getting lost in the sheer oblivion of the moment. No thoughts, just

colors and tastes and shapes and scents. Her body pleasing itself miraculously, moving on its own, dancing to the heartbeat. She kept on, the beat kept on, the pounding kept on. Her body shuddered in anticipation of the wave about to overtake her. Towney watched Delaney move into her own world and he held fast while she freed herself further and further. He enjoyed witnessing the unleashing of her passion, loved being the instrument. Then finally, feeling her pace change and the soft quivers beginning, he sat up and held her tightly around her waist burying his head in her breasts and his cock deep inside her. When they came together, it was surges and bursts that went on and on, one crashing against the other, connecting the fibers of their beings, their orgasms entwining. They held onto each other, taking deep breaths while their heart beats slowed, feeling the strong throbs ebbing into pulses, sighing, inhaling the fragrance of their lovemaking, both of them waiting to come back down, more than a little stunned and a little embarrassed by the intensity.

Delaney eventually moved off Towney and fell backward on the bed, "Oh, my!"

He kissed her nose and laughed, "I know." He found the goose down comforter at the bottom of the bed, pulled it up and over both of them and cupped her body from behind with his own. Some day they would talk about this evening, perhaps even tease each other about it, but not now. Now, they simply wanted to remain within the magical exhaustion and sleep; a deep, satisfied sleep. Delaney, recovering a hint of consciousness remembered to set her internal alarm clock to five a.m., enough time to escape from the building hopefully unnoticed.

By the time she got to the office the next morning the very thought of the night before had turned into torment. She was hung over and feeling very stupid. "I cannot believe I slept with him, Carol, on the first date. I'll never see him again."

"Oh, you're such a slut! Hang that head in shame."

Delaney shuddered, "You're kidding, but that is exactly how I feel."

"Get over it! Did you have a great night? Don't answer that, I already know. So, let it go. Chalk it off as an adventure. A night with the king."

Delaney wrung her hands. "I am so stupid. I could kick myself. And, AND," she yelled, "And, in his suite in town that I left at six this morning in front of the entire city in a green gown slit to here.

"She gestured to her hip. "And, and . . . oh, never mind, I don't think I can even articulate what else I did."

Carol raised an eyebrow, "Really? That bad? Well, then tell me the other parts. Did you go dancing first? I hear he is an amazing dancer."

"You are not listening to me. I am suffering here. I am mortified and all you're interested in is did we dance."

"Well?"

"Yes. Yes damn him. We danced. You won't believe this. This man does the tango." Carol squealed. "Honestly. He taught me. It was the most seductive thing a man has ever done - teach me to tango. Well, perhaps not THE most seductive thing. " She blushed remembering her peeping, "I felt like Ginger Rogers, No, Cyd Charese. It was the most magical night. Everyone stared at us, followed us around asking me if I wanted anything. Goddess forgive me. I loved it."

"You loved him."

"It would be hard not to. He truly is Prince charming. Damn!" she pounded her fist on the desk. "And I was convinced he was never coming."

Carol chuckled. "Look. It'll be okay. Relax. It was safe sex, wasn't it?"

Delaney chortled and threw herself face first on the sofa. A deliveryman came in with a long white box. "Wake up Delly, looks like the prince sent you, oh let me think, I'll bet red roses, two dozen."

She sat straight up. "Give me the card."

It read,

Delaney,

Be out of town on biz for a few days.

Think of me while you shower.

Towney.

She groaned and threw herself face down on the sofa again.

"What? What? Give me the card." Carol grabbed it out of her hand and read it. "Oh, stop. Stop! It says 'Think of me while you shower.' You want to tell me . . . no, no I can see you don't. But look, three dozen red roses!"

## Chapter VI

"This is some property George." Towney and George were standing on the high point of the island looking down on the pond, "How much am I in for, again?"

George chuckled, knowing Towney was toying with him, "Ah, Twenty-five percent, Towney."

"I heard it was more like thirty."

"No, no you don't. Don't go pulling that."

"I am the banker stiff and my end is worth more like you did on Oxford."

George took off his glasses and began wiping them with his handkerchief, "You're in for 25% just like the rest of us. All of us are on the line, here Towney, all of us."

"Did you know George, you always call me Towney when you're nervous?" Towney laughed and patted his old friend on the back. "Relax, buddy. What time is settlement, tomorrow?"

"Two. Two o'clock at my office. It will all be ours by three." George put his glasses on and straightened up. He was feeling very pleased with himself. He had finally impressed Townsend Thorndike. His millionaire college chum was dazzled with something George did. They walked slowly back to the boat that was tied up at his parent's dock.

"How's the water?"

"Towney, the engineers say there is a fresh water supply and it's good. I've got my architects working on the plot plan so we can best utilize the land. Want to see what they've come up with so far? It's at my office."

Towney stopped and inhaled deeply, "This is so beautiful, George. I hope you're not going for a high density."

"Look at the plans. If you want to change them, we will. It is after all, mostly your money."

Towney laughed, "You know you're right, how could I forget that."

They went over the plans. George's concept worked for Towney at this juncture. The island was big enough for a major marina for approximately 300 slips, up to 75 feet, all high end, with a pool and services. Combination residences using cluster housing, some exclusive singles and two mid rise condo buildings. There was even room for a wildlife preserve and a small nine hole golf course. This

was going to be a private exclusive paradise close to DC and New York. They were going to make a killing.

"How are the people on Tangier handling all this in their back yard?"

"It's not that close and I think they welcome it. It'll bring more tourists to their island as well. Right now it has just that ferry boat and private boaters."

"Yeah, they are very quaint over there. They will attract business from this, and we plan to employ as many islanders as well. Good will stuff, you know."

"Good idea, George. It sounds like we are all set."

Three of the four partners went home that evening dreaming of the wealth their island paradise was going to bring them. The fourth was in a small private sanitarium waiting to see his daughter.

Earlier that day George had been out to visit Kimball. He was lucid for just a few moments before he lost who he was and what he was talking about.

"Herbert, it's George." The old man nodded, recognizing him.

"My daughter, have you found her?" Kimball's eyes searched George's face for a clue. "Find her?"

"Yes, we found her, Herbert. She'll be at my office tomorrow at two. Can you hang on 'till then?"

"Yes, yes, I will be fine. Have you met her? Is she beautiful? Her mother was a beautiful young woman. Did you tell her about me? Don't tell her too much, George, I want to tell her. I have to tell her. Okay? Okay George?"

"Fine. I won't tell her. I haven't spoken to her. Your lawyers handled everything for me. We will both meet her tomorrow. You get some rest, now."

This meeting agitated and excited Kimball. His mind raced, "Have I got. Where's my blue suit? I need my blue suit . . . striped tie. It's in the drawer . . . in my room. No, closet. Have the maid lay it out . . . iron it."

"The maid? Hmm. The maid, Herbert?"

"Yes, what is her name?"

"You mean Jane Hardy? The nurse that was with you on the island?"

"No, damn it. Jocelyn. The maid!" Kimball was sitting up shaking his finger at George.

"All right, calm down. I'll have the maid iron everything for you. Sit back and rest now."

"I am so sorry, Daniel. I guess I am just not myself."

"Oh, I'm Daniel now, okay, what the hell. It'll be fine, Herbert. Now you go to sleep and I'll pick you up tomorrow."

George shook his head and backed out of the room, very happy Roscoe was handling this settlement tomorrow. When he got back to his condo that evening, he found the box of papers Jane Hardy had gathered for Kimball. He poured himself a beer and began to rifle through the stuff again. George looked through the papers to see if there was any information he could give to his detective earlier, but had never read what Kimball had dictated to Hardy. He wasn't sure he wanted to know but suddenly he was drawn to it. What harm could it do now? He began to read Jane Hardy's nurse's scrawl. It was barely legible.

'This island was part of the charter from King James to the original colonists. There were twelve left alive when the ships finally came back to America. One of the twelve was Elijah Kimball. As a reward for staying alive King James included in the charter the island of the Duke of Kent to the Kimball family. Our family settled on the land, farmed it, built the Grande house in the center of the island on the highest point, fished and crabbed, then used it as their home for the past three hundred and ninety years. We have fought many a battle to keep it. We have fought over it, relative to relative and mortgaged it and worked hard to pay it back.'

"Shit!" George said aloud to himself and continued to read.

'You are the next in the line of proud Kimball's to own this island paradise, and land, the earth, have meant a lot to our family's heritage and most recently to mine which I hope you will understand . . . '

George put down the tablet, took off his glasses and cleaned them, speaking aloud to himself, "If the heir ever gets a load of this stuff, she'll never let go of it."

He put some newspaper into his fireplace and struck a match, then one by one he put each page from the tablet, each piece of old parchment, each page of history, each photograph, each drawing, each hand drawn map, into the flames. One by one, he burnt them, then added some kindling and a log and warmed himself by their fire. When he was finished, he poured himself a full snifter of Napoleon and toasted, "To three hundred and ninety years coming to an end."

The next day was settlement. George drove out to Green Acres at noon the next day. "I'm here to take my uncle for his weekly visit, Herbert Bates."

The two people at the main desk looked at each other before answering and one of them picked up the phone, "Doctor, Mr. Bates is here . . . okay, I'll ask him to wait. Please wait here, Mr. Bates, the doctor will be right down."

George paced and tapped his watch, "What is the hold up here gentlemen. I have people waiting for us."

A few minutes later a young physician walked up behind him and tapped him on the shoulder, "Mr. Bates? I'm the doctor on duty this morning. Mr. Bates, I am sorry to tell you this, but your uncle passed away about an hour ago." The young physician tentatively showed him the death certificate he had just signed.

"What! Why didn't someone call me?"

"We tried, but we got your service, they said you were on your way here." George snatched the paper from his hand and shoved it into his coat pocket.

"Let me see him!" George pushed the doctor aside and ran down the hallway to Kimball's room. He lifted the sheet that was covering his face. The old man lay still and cold. He touched his

hand and then returned the sheet. "Damn it!" he pounded on the bed, "God fucking damn it! What the hell am I going to do now?"

## Chapter VII

George left the hospital and drove back to his office alone. He drove slowly. He needed time to think. The men waiting for him were not going to be easy to deal with. They had money invested, plans were drawn up, contracts signed and they were counting on him to deliver. He could not. Kimball was dead. Dead! It crossed his mind that if he believed god existed somewhere that maybe this was his punishment. Karma, Kate, his assistant, would call it. After all he had tricked the old man into signing the contract. Was this his payback?

In all the months since the recession had nearly ruined his business, he had never felt this frightened. This whole deal was his idea from the beginning. If it didn't go, not only was he ruined but his father and his brother, Ben would be ruined as well. Some hotshot he was. It had taken him and his brother three years to dig out of the last mess he got them into, and Ben stood by him through it, not blaming him for it. Still, he knew.

When his father took both boys into the business it was just a small contracting firm. They led an advantaged life, went to good schools, but George glimpsed what real wealth looked like in college. His roommates, like Townsend Thorndike and Roscoe Wilson, had the proverbial silver spoons. After college, George went into the family business, but he had bigger aspirations. He and Ben talked their father into expanding and building for themselves.

They bought some land along the route one corridor near Princeton and put up their first shopping center. It was a major score. They bought more land, put up more strip centers and built six garden-style apartment complexes scattered around southern New Jersey. Once they were rented up, they went into housing development. George was the scout. He was out all day looking at land, taking options, wheeling and dealing. This was his element. With the business going so well, his father and mother felt comfortable enough to retire to Florida. They did not even know when the market fell and the business was in trouble, George and Ben kept on carrying them, sending them their share.

It was a very difficult time for George. The bank foreclosed on three of their rental communities and one strip center in Ardmore, and worse yet, they had to walk away from a few large

deposits on land they had optioned in Oxford Township. Their entire business had to be restructured and the bank who held most of their mortgages was watching very closely.

In the midst of it, George's wife decided she wanted a divorce and a large settlement. Thanks to the detective Ben hired for him, he was able to work it all out, but he felt it was solely his duty to put his family back on top again. Now, his father, who had no idea most of his investments were gone, was talking about buying into a tour boat business in Boca Raton. George and Ben had been able so far to put him off by telling him they had to look into this type of business and talk to accountants. However, the old man was getting anxious and very soon, unless something broke, he would have to tell him the truth. "It will kill him!" Ben kept reminding George.

He shook his head. He could not think about all that right now. What was called for was damage control. There must be a way out of this thing. He scanned the contract in his mind. His attorneys must have put something in that covered this sort of thing. He'd just go in there and find out from them where can to go from here. After all, it is their job to take care of all the contingencies. The contract must state that in case of death it is still binding to its heirs. Maybe it's not as bad as he thought. Maybe it was better. He had not looked forward to taking Kimball to the settlement table today. What if in the middle of it he started calling him by another name, or worse yet, began remembering and refused to settle.

The old man had been muttering to himself a lot about his daughter and the island, how it was her legacy. He parked outside the bank and took his glasses off to clean them, stealing himself for breaking the news.

"Where's Kimball?" Roscoe asked the moment George hit the door.

"Dead."

"Dead! Kimball's dead?" Roscoe dropped defeatedly into a chair.

Towney stood up. "What happens now?" He turned to his attorneys. "Get out the contracts. What can we do to close this deal, today? Anything?" The attorneys pulled out the contracts and huddled together. "Suggestions, gentlemen!" Towney demanded.

His attorney looked up from the papers. "We could go to settlement today. However, the money that was supposed to go from you and back into the partnership now has to go into the estate, the money will go to the heirs, will be tied up in probate. It changes the entire face of this deal."

Towney was pacing up and down snapping a rubber-band between his fingers. This settlement was important to him. So far the money invested was his money, not the bank's. He needed this deal, but to have that much of his cash tied up for an unlimited period could be a problem. "Anything else, gentlemen? Come on, at, what, a hundred dollars a minute? I expect better than this."

"We could go on as we planned and hope the heir's don't contest it. It depends on George and Roscoe. Are there any grounds to contest either this contract or the partnership agreement?" Towney's attorney, Drew Williams, addressed the group. Everyone looked at George waiting for an answer.

He hesitated then asked, "What would constitute grounds?"

"Well, for one, was Kimball in his right mind when he signed the agreement?" Williams explained.

"Roscoe, you're his attorney. You witnessed the signing, right?" Towney probed.

"Er . . . yes."

"And?" Towney was getting impatient, his voice rising.

"Kimball seemed fine to me, you know but I'm an attorney, you know, I am not a doctor, I'm not really qualified to. . . ."

Towney interrupted him, "We've heard your disclaimer, Roscoe. Let's move on. Do you know who inherits, do you know them?"

"No. It is only a name at this point. There is a letter I am to open at time of death that should let me know something more about it. It's kept in a vault in my office. I can't get to it without the Death Certificate. George, you didn't happen to get one did you?"

George was in a daze and didn't hear Roscoe.

"Bates!" Towney screamed.

"What? Sorry. What?"

"Did you get a Death Certificate while you were there?"

George fished into his pocket and pulled out the crumpled paper the doctor had given him and handed it to Roscoe.

"Good. I can have a messenger bring it over."

George woke up and whispered to Roscoe, "Won't the Judge know about this?"

"No. The vault is on the first floor and monitored by an administrator. All they want to see is this certificate and a note from me. It'll be fine."

"Do it, then Roscoe. Move." Towney was calling the shots here and everyone knew it. Roscoe scurried off to find a phone. "Any other surprises here gentlemen?"

Towney's attorney looked up from the papers. "There is one other problem here, Towner. It looks like the nine pieces he sold off have a right of first refusal back to him. Those papers were to be signed today exercising that option."

"What does that mean?"

George responded, "That's the land on the south side of the island. Remember, the engineer's report said it was the only feasible place for a marina. You know the spot where my parents have their cottage? We were going to pay \$5000.00 more than what they paid for it as an incentive. Kimball was to sign off his right today."

"So we don't have the whole island tied up without those pieces?"

Williams agreed, "Right. So before they can sell them to you they have to offer them to the heir at the same price you offer. If the heir cannot afford to pay them our asking price we can proceed as planned."

Towner looked puzzled, "George, are these the first offers these people have received for their lots?"

"No. It's just that most of them were hand picked by Kimball. He knew them all very well and knew how he felt about the land. They all agreed they would never sell it to anyone while he was still alive."

"You think they will sell it now?"

"Yes I do, but probably only to someone they know."

"Like you?"

George grinned, "Exactly. And I feel pretty confident they will all accept what we offer, but I'd like to suggest we up the price at this point, make certain the heir has to come up with a large sum."

"By how much?"

"Another ten at least, Towney. I don't want to take any chances on these pieces."

Towney paced back and forth, frowning, "Okay, George. I can see your point."

The messenger came in with the envelope. Roscoe tore it open. It was empty. "There's nothing here. Did my secretary, Rose, give you this envelope?" Roscoe demanded of the boy.

"She said to bring this to you at this address. That's all I know."

"Great. Old man probably forgot to put the letter in there. Look, Roscoe, we can't afford any more loose ends, here. Get your office in order and hire a detective agency to find the heirs. I say under the circumstances we have no choice but to close and wait for the chips to fall. We're scheduled to break ground on this in March and this is MY money, gentlemen." Towney's voice went up on the my.

"I'm already out 200k myself." George added.

George's attorney agreed, "This heir could tie us up and not settle for a very long time if given the opportunity to get attached to this land. On the other hand, it's going to cost them a bundle to take us to court to dissolve this agreement and partnership. I would be willing to bet Kimball's heir will not have that kind of money."

Towney spoke up, "I say we go, and we make good on the offers to those nine people. George, you handle that. Don't screw it up. Make certain they understand what's involved. We can pay them for the land or give them a condominium. Work it out. Shall we proceed?"

They went through the settlement. Roscoe used his power of attorney to sign for Kimball. Every time he signed an affidavit, a little shiver went up the back of his neck.

When it was over, they shook hands all around.

"Then everyone knows what to do here. Let's move ahead on everything. George, let me know about those offers. Roscoe, find those heirs." Towney left and got into his limousine. He had other things on his mind, one of them, a raven-haired woman with long legs and green eyes.

The night he spent with her rolled around in his mind. He was more than enchanted by her and it surprised him. He smiled. She bewildered him. Finding her like that after he thought she left. After his usual seduction date, dinner and dancing, she had resisted him at first, taunted him, and then out of nowhere there she was, watching him. It excited him to think about it. This was no usual conquest for Towney. Delaney was definitely not like anyone he had ever been with and he could not wait to see her again.

He asked Aaron to sit in the front seat and closed the partition window so he could have some quiet to go over the contracts again. However, he couldn't concentrate. This deal was supposed to be his way out. The way out he had planned for all these years of careful investing and saving. This banking stuff was definitely not his style, but his father had his way, as he usually did, no matter how Towney fought him. All the years of arguing with his father, of doing double time, of trying to prove he had the right to do what he wanted. The discussions were still fresh in his mind:

"But Dad, I don't want to major in finance, I want to be an architect. I have already declared my major," Towney had informed Thorndike Senior while in his sophomore year at Princeton.

"Sorry, son. I know architecture looks good now, but banking is where the money is and it's your heritage. If I'm footing the bill for college, you will major in what I say."

Towney rebelled in the only way he could, by carrying two majors. It took him five years to finish, but he did in the top 2 percent of his class. He was bright, all right, but just not ready to take on college tuition on his own. He was accustomed to the privileged life. He had gotten a taste of what it was like to be poor during summer vacations and in graduate school.

Every summer he'd intern in one of the banks half the summer, and spent his free time traveling around Europe, studying the architecture. Those trips, his father told him, were strictly on his own budget. He'd save his money and stay at youth hostels and eat inexpensive local fare. It was fun as a vacation, but definitely not what he was accustomed to.

In many ways Towney had it very easy, but there were drawbacks. A lot was expected of Townsend Thorndike Junior. Between his mother trying to control his social life and his father forcing him to be a banker, he led a relatively controlled existence.

He tried to get out of going into banking when his undergraduate work was completed, but was blocked at every turn and had to take out loans and do construction work to put himself through graduate school in architecture. Thorndike Senior wouldn't give him a nickel and of course, with his father's money there were no grants or scholarships available to him. It wasn't easy, but after he finished he got an offer from a very prestigious Chicago architectural firm. It was a small company but highly successful and doing the type of cutting edge work he loved.

When he told his father he was leaving, Thorndike Senior didn't take it well at all. "You'll starve. The world is full of starving architects. You are not using good common sense, here, Towney, but it is your life as you keep reminding me over and over. And if it is, then be on your own, make it on your own, and pay your own way completely. I would think by now you'd be tired of eating from lunch trucks. I guess not."

Towney went to Chicago anyway, and got a small apartment and began the work he loved. He was struggling a little financially, repaying his graduate school loans and driving an older car. His mother snuck some money to him whenever she could, but generally he was surviving. After six months he got an emergency call from his mother. His father had prostate cancer. It didn't look good, could he come home.

Towney put his career on hold and rushed to be with his father. They made up instantly and he stayed by his side throughout the recovery after surgery and the ensuing chemotherapy treatments. The whole time Thorndike Senior was ill he was still in touch with the bank and Towney had to fill in for him at many meetings and lunches. Towney knew it made his father very happy for

him to take his place and went along with it. Thorndike Sr. would chuckle as he told him who was at the meetings and how he handled the problems that came up.

"Heard you really gave it to old Bellows at the meeting about Fidler Square."

"You've got some network Dad. I just left them."

"That's right. I do. And they're keeping a close eye on you, boy."

"I hope they told you. We won that one. They wanted to structure the financing just like you said they would, but I stood my ground."

"So I understand, Toney. Everyone is very impressed with your banking prowess," he smiled, "But I told them, what do you expect, he is a Thorndike, after all."

"It's nice to have you be proud of me, Dad, and I hate to say this, but this is only temporary. You'll be back in the chair in a few weeks."

When those weeks passed, and his father was well enough to return to work, Toney had to tell him he was leaving, "Dad, it's time for me to go back to Chicago. My job is still waiting for me."

Surprisingly, Thorndike Sr. took it very well. Obviously, his illness created a different outlook. He wished him well, and even gave him a generous monthly allowance. "Those lunch trucks can kill you. Sorry I was so narrow minded about all this, son. Can you forgive me for being so stubborn?"

His mother chimed in, "You know dear, one day you could have a grandchild who will want the bank. That's if our children ever decide to have them. In the meantime, there's always me."

Toney chuckled, "Oh, right Mother, and give up your Garden Club?" But he saw his father and mother exchange a explicit glance.

Toney settled into his work again, feeling like he had his family's good will and a new bond with his father. He bought himself a new car, bought real furniture for his apartment and for the next few months led the life he'd dreamed of. He and his father spoke almost every day. Thorndike Senior kept Toney informed on the banking business he helped him with when he was ill and Toney, in turn, gave his father the news on life in a small architectural firm. They were closer then they had ever been in their lives.

Towney was shocked when his sister called him late one evening. His father was dead, had a heart attack at his desk at work. Towney flew home immediately, totally devastated over the loss. He lingered at home for a few weeks going through his father's office. His mother encouraged him to return to the life he had in Chicago. She didn't feel he had to stay for the reading of the will, but he felt he had to. In the end he couldn't bear to be there, especially because it was being handled by his father's best friend, Harold Katz. The two of them were inseparable. Their families vacationed together, they played golf, invested in the same companies. They were friends since they were boys. Being around Harold was more than Towney felt he could bear.

The old codger had gotten his way in the end. His father had drawn up a new will. It stipulated that Towney had to take his rightful place at the bank until he was thirty-five years old or be cut off without a penny. He sat in his father's study that cold winter morning, listening to his mother explain the will, shocked and angry. Creaking back in Dad's mahogany leather desk chair he cursed the act his Dad put on for him over the last few months of his life.

"What was it all about Mother? Was he pretending to be excited about my work? What were all the calls about? We talked every day! He asked me pertinent questions about what I was working on. He appeared totally resolved about my career."

His mother simply shrugged her shoulders also stymied by the news. Towney had mistakenly thought he had won him over.

"Towney, darling, I am sorry. I had no idea he was doing this. He apparently changed his will only a few months ago, after his cancer. I was never informed. I am just as mad as you he did this behind my back. I had other plans myself." His mother went over and patted him, "We'll just make the best of it. You'll see. It will all work out well. I was behind your father every inch of his career and I will be there for you as well. You're not alone in this, Towney, as your father knew well. I am certain he had a reason for this."

But underneath this calm exterior, Eleanor Thorndike was seething. The old man did what he wanted and cut her out, after all, leaving everything she had worked for all of her life in the hands of

someone else. It didn't matter that someone was her own son. She was furious. He had broken his promise and the deal they made when they were wed. She had kept her end of the agreement.

Townsend Thorndike was twenty-five years older than her, but he pursued her with a vengeance and succeeded in winning her love. She brought to the marriage her family's integrous financial reputation and social status, but most importantly, the shares Thorndike needed to take over the bank his family had almost bankrupted. It was her father's present to her on her marriage. She had given them willingly, even lovingly at first, excited over the prospect of rebuilding a dynasty with someone she loved. Unfortunately their relationship became more of a merger than a marriage, and even that was bearable because she worked right next to him bringing the bank back to it's original status. Once it was booming, however, Towner Senior became enamored of the idea of a family to leave their fortune to and eventually Eleanor acquiesced. Years of child rearing and entertaining business associates took their toll and she demanded she be returned to some position at the bank. Thorndike blocked her every effort to regain some measure of control.

He told her, "I need a wife now, not a business partner. I tell you everything, ask your advice. Why isn't that enough for you?"

"Would it be for you? Could you stand to be in the bleachers instead of on the playing field? I think not!" She threatened to leave him so he reluctantly agreed to give her some responsibility at the bank and then agreed, upon his retirement or his death, it would be all hers.

"I'm not young, Eleanor, nor am I healthy. Surely, you can wait a little longer. This is not such a terrible life, is it?"

Eleanor admitted it wasn't and stayed. That was ten years ago. She was still young enough, vibrant enough to run the bank herself. She had been waiting for thirty years and in one fell swoop it had all been taken away from her. "Not without a good goddamn fight you old bastard. If you think, I am walking away from running what is rightfully mine, you're crazy!" She thought to herself and then knocked the framed photo of Thorndike off his desk. It fell to the floor in a crash and the glass broke to pieces.

"Mother! Are you okay? Don't worry, Mother. I'll stay. But you have to move into the bank with me. Maybe he thought I was ready for this, but I am telling you, I'm not! I'm going to need your help." Eleanor looked up at her handsome son and wondered if she was doing the right thing, but she saw no alternative for the moment. She patted him on the hand again, turned away, and retired to her room.

So, four years later and here he was. Unbelievably he had a knack for this work. "No wonder, dear," his mother reminded him, "You cut your teeth on this business. It was fed to you with your pabulum."

Everyone seemed happy with him at the helm. The bank was doing very well and had expanded its market. Eleanor was very involved in the day to day business. She had her own office next to his and a place on the board. She counseled him daily, keeping a watch on areas he had no expertise in. She could read people and know who was involved with whom, and she also knew the banking industry in depth. He often chided her about taking his place.

"You know Mother. The old man should have left the bank to you. You certainly know as much about this business as he did, easily."

And she would smile her careful Cheshire cat smile over her glasses and say, "Have some more tea, dear."

She was an invaluable asset. He was beginning to see why his father kept her completely informed of his every business move. She was brilliant and could draw confidential information from people who had reputations for clenching their jaws tenaciously.

Only Towney was restless. He wanted to design skyscrapers, not finance them. He wanted out. And this deal could just about put him over the top. It meant having choices; it meant freedom.

## Chapter VIII

"I don't think I should see him again, Carol." Delaney had thought a lot about the night she had spent with Towney and knew this was the right decision. "He's trouble. I'm just going to tell him it was a great night, but that's it."

"Oh, I see, you just wanted sex and now you've had him, you're no longer interested. Right!"

"Hey, men do it all the time." Delaney laughed to herself. Truth is, she tried not to sleep around because if the sex was even half good, she seemed to fall in love. Quite a dilemma for a woman who considered herself a feminist. She had discovered through therapy that this all had to do with her father not being around when she grew up. She fell for the wrong guys all the time, misunderstanding sex for intimacy and caring. And they were usually unattainable, or even sometimes married. This was the first available man she had been with since college. The last affair with her attorney sent her into a tailspin and right into months of therapy.

She didn't feel cured, or secure enough to take on someone like Townsend Thorndike. He is a difficult, and very desirable man. Even though he was single, and obviously taken with her, he was way out of her league. She would definitely turn him down if he called. She had to. It felt like the same pattern. Carol answered the phone in the background interrupting her thoughts, "It's for you. Prince Charming."

Delaney shook her head, "Tell him I'm not here."

"I'm not playing this game with you. Get on the phone."

Delaney rolled her eyes and picked up the phone, "This is Delaney Shaw," she said crisply.

"Hello, mystery woman. Sneaking out in the middle of the night."

She had almost forgotten that mellow voice, "I didn't sneak out. I just left."

"I missed you when I got up. I see you got the elevator to work that time."

Delaney blushed and Carol noticed, "Ah, yes I did, actually, I realized I had to turn the key. You could have told me that when I left the first time."

"Yes, but if I had, we wouldn't have had that wonderful time together."

Delaney cleared her throat, "Are you telling me that was deliberate...."

"NO, no! I thought you watched me on the way up. It never occurred to me, really." Towney was laughing, now.

"What's so funny? You tricked me. Towney, stop laughing. You did, you brat, you tricked me!"

"Now Delaney, come on. How could I possibly know what would happen. I didn't. Honest. You do believe me, don't you?"

But Delaney had gone icily cold on the other end of the phone.

"Delaney, come on, I'm just teasing you. Can we get together this evening?"

"I don't think so, Towney."

A long pause, then, "Other plans?"

"Not exactly, look, please understand this. I had a great time. And you've been very nice, it's just that..."

Towney stopped listening. She was letting him down!

He interrupted her, "Wait a minute. I didn't trick you, if that's what this is all about."

This was not easy for Delaney, "It's not about that, it's not about you, really. It's about me..."

Towney interrupted her again, "I can't believe this. You're not what I thought you were at all."

Suddenly her cheeks flamed. This is the way the great and powerful Townsend Thorndike who gets everything he wants acts. "Oh, really? What did you think I was? Never mind. I don't want to know. You're not so special either. I fuck everyone I date," and she banged the phone down hard, stood up and kicked her chair against the wall.

"He obviously thinks he can have whatever he wants, whenever he wants. He wasn't even listening to me. I was going to tell him about what was going on with me, explain myself. Ha! All he heard was, no, and obviously he's never heard the word before. I don't know why I even bothered."

Carol was dismayed Delaney was this upset over a man she saw one night. When she encouraged her to go out with Towney, she thought it was time for her to venture out again. It had been over a year since Delaney and Ted parted. The break up was tough on Delaney, even though it was her idea. She suffered greatly, neglected clients, missed meetings. Her business was heading for

disaster when Carol suggested Delaney see her psychologist. And Carol stood by her and did her best to keep the business afloat while Delaney looked long and hard at why she had such a problem with men. She knew that being raised without a father had its effects on her but she never imagined it crept into every relationship she had, choosing, almost deliberately, men that she could never keep.

Ted was married with children and had never made any bones about it. He was never going to leave his wife. Oddly, Delaney accepted it, rationalizing married men left her free to be the person she was meant to be; commitment wasn't what she was looking for while she got her career started, anyway. Then too many birthdays and Christmas spent alone caught up with her and the misery of life without him began to look better than the misery of life with him. But, extracting herself was harder than she ever thought possible.

Ted didn't take it very well, which was surprising, considering he wasn't free and Delaney found she had grown quite used to Ted's lifestyle. She had gotten used to the BMW 525 he leased for her, the expensive dinners and theater tickets, the hideaway weekends at the Four Seasons; the pieces of jewelry; the designer suits. She wasn't simply walking away from a man, she was walking away from the life she wanted. And she had lived in the illusion of his life for so long, she could no longer divide it from reality.

Now Toney looked to her like just one more wealthy man she could never have. "Carol, I have to question, is it my same pattern all over? "

Carol quipped, "At least he's single."

Delaney grunted back, "That's not saying much. It feels the same to me. Obviously, I still have a thing for men I can't have, single or not. I don't know. He scares me. When did you say this therapy would begin working?"

Carol chuckled, "Don't ask me, I'm still a work in progress, myself."

Toney was in the back seat of his limousine, the receiver still in his hand. She didn't want to see him. A female hadn't rejected him since he was twelve years old, and then he had braces on his

teeth. He knew she felt something for him. His assistant Aaron saw his bewilderment, "Someone impervious to the Thorndike charm?" He snickered.

Towney shot him an angry look that didn't require words, but Aaron wasn't easily deterred, he was enjoying this too much, "Well, well now. I've got to meet this one. Is she beautiful? And smart? Long legs, too? Oh, my my."

But Towney was already lost in his own thoughts. She was trying to tell him something, maybe that wasn't what she was saying at all. He knew he hadn't heard her. He went off into his own thoughts and handled it badly. He had not handled a woman badly in a very long time. He was usually very smart with women. It was all strategy, but he was off his usual game here. "Aaron, when is the next Philadelphia Real Estate Board function?"

Aaron opened his book, "Next Wednesday. Planning on lunching with the masses?"

"Yes, reserve a space for me." Towney felt certain if he could see her again he would handle it better. She had simply caught him off guard that time. He sat back in the car and began to look over the clippings Aaron cut out for him, reassured everything was in its proper place.

George got back to his office in real mood. "Kate, get Alan Gaines on the phone."

"Sure, George, what's up? You have been very secretive lately."

George took off his jacket and slumped onto the couch. "Kate I'm in the middle of a deal and the guy dies. Dies! Can you believe it?"

"Usually these contracts are bound by the heirs. What's the problem with this one?"

"It's a long, ugly story I don't want to go in to. We've just got to find the heir, or rather find out about the heir before she finds out about the deal."

Kate moved around behind George and started to rub his shoulders, "And why is that?"

"Oh, that feels good, Kate, a little lower on the right. Ah. I'll tell you later. Get Alan on the phone." Kate went back to her office and rang the detective then buzzed George, he was on the line.

"Alan, any news on this Margaret Delaney woman?"

"No, nothing on her yet, but I have a lot of information on this Kimball guy. Did you know he was in prison? Federal prison!"

"You're joking. For what?"

"Seems he was involved in all that demonstrating stuff in the sixties. He was a real radical."

"Kimball, a radical? I cannot believe that. This guy was a saint."

"Was?"

"Yeah, he died today. That's why it is so important for you to find this heir."

"Okay, George. I'll put some more people on it. I'll go to the prison and see if I can find out who wrote to him while he was in there. They keep track of that sort of thing and I know one of the guards pretty well. I'll be in touch."

Kate came back into his office with his appointment book, "Your father called again. He is getting very impatient about this deal he's doing down there. I don't know how much longer you're going to be able to put him off."

George took off his glasses and started wiping them with his handkerchief, "I know, I know. Have Ben call him."

Kate grimaced and went on, "I'm assuming you're going to want to attend the funeral services for the man you were doing business with. Do you know when it's scheduled for? Your week is getting very filled up."

"Funeral! God!" For the first time that day George realized that someone he was responsible for, died. A chill ran through him from head to toe. "Kate, something is happening to me. Have I gotten so callous, so money mad? I haven't even thought about the fact that someone I knew very well died today."

"You got caught up in the business side of things. You're under a lot of pressure. It happens to all of us. Tell me who is making the arrangements so we can send flowers."

"I'm certain his attorney would . . ." George stopped mid-sentence. "On the other hand maybe I should take care of it."

"Doesn't he have anybody else, you said he has an heir?"

"No, no, we can't find the heir. I've been looking after him. I should be the one to take care of everything, call the funeral home and all."

"You seem very upset, would you like me to make the arrangements?"

George looked up at this compassionate woman, "Would you? I can't deal with it all now. He's at Green Acres. I'm sure they're wondering what happened to me. I left there in such an awful snit." He whirled around in his chair and looked out the window. "All I cared about was the deal, Kate, just the damned deal, " he put his glasses back on and adjusted them.

"You were flustered. Now you've recovered. I'll handle it. Probably his attorney has some instructions. You will want to be there, won't you?"

"Sure, sure. Ah, Kate. Don't call his attorney. It's my friend Roscoe, he said nothing was really planned for him. That's why I feel like I should do it. Pay for it, you know. Just call the sanatorium and McCarthy's Funeral Home. Have it all done very early tomorrow morning. Tell them to pick out a single plot at Shady Hill Cemetery. Tell them it has to be tomorrow morning. If it can't be done by then call around until you find someone willing. Oh, and Kate. Kimball's registered at the home under the name Herbert Bates. I had to tell them he was a relative to get him in."

"So the hospital bills I've been paying weren't for a relative?" George shook his head, no. "You're the kindest man I know." Kate smiled sweetly, her eyes filling up.

George looked away.

## Chapter IX

Roscoe got back to his office in a cold sweat. It was almost five. The staff was leaving for the day. He sat in his desk chair without taking off his coat.

Mary came by on her way out, "Mr. Wilson, the Judge has been waiting for you to return."

"He's still here?"

"Yes, sir. And he wants to see you immediately, were my instructions."

Roscoe put one foot in front of the other until he found himself outside his father's door, big gold letters, JUDGE WILSON inches from his eyes. Even though Roscoe senior was more than eighty, no one was certain how much over, he still was a force to be dealt with. Thirty years on the bench had made him an even tougher bird than he was in private practice. He knocked softly and the voice bellowed, "Come on in, Roscoe, and close the door behind you."

Roscoe moved gently into the room and stood in front of the desk. "I'm very tired, sir, can we talk tomorrow?"

The judge sat up and became larger in his chair. "No we'll do it now. Sit down, Roscoe."

He slumped into the closest chair.

"You sent a messenger over to retrieve letters that were only to be opened upon Kimball's death. What's going on here, boy?"

"How did you....."

"You still don't get it, do ya' boy? You still don't get I know everything that goes on in my own goddamned firm! Now answer the question."

"Kimball died this morning."

"Herbert's dead? What happened?"

"He was in the hospital and his heart gave way. I found out at early this afternoon."

The Judge sat back for a moment, reflecting. "Damn, Herbert dead. He was much younger than I, ya' know. It was his mother's affairs I started handling years ago. Herbert dead. I can't believe it." Roscoe sat waiting for his father to recover.

The Judge sat forward again, "Why did you need his letters so urgently?"

"I was at a settlement . . . "

"Settlement! On what?"

Roscoe hesitated and the room got quiet, the two of them stared at each other. He took a deep breath and sputtered, "Kent Island."

"Rubbish!" The Judge pounded on the desk and Roscoe jumped, "Herbert would never sell that island. It cost him too much to hold onto it all these years, cost his mother too much. It's been in his family for generations. Let me see those contracts right now. Everything better be in order here Roscoe."

Roscoe got up from the chair, then turned back, "Do you have the letters, then, you know who the heir is?" Roscoe waited for an answer. He stared over the huge expanse of mahogany desk into his father's cold blue and watery eyes and thought, he knows. He knows me all too well. "I'll get the contracts. They're in my briefcase."

Still in his tan raincoat, Roscoe sat and watched his father jotting notes on a yellow pad as he read through the paperwork from the settlement. It took two hours to get through every line, every page. Roscoe just sat there, sweating, speaking only when spoken to. Finally, Judge Wilson threw the pad down on the desk and took off his wire rim bifocals. "Messy business, this, Junior. How'd you think you'd get it by me?"

Roscoe thought he heard a hint of admiration in his father's voice. "By you, sir?"

"Yes, confound it, by me? How'd you think you'd get away with this? And junior, before you speak, you better level with me, cause you're way out there on the proverbial limb."

"Right." Roscoe fidgeted then stood. "Mind if I take off my coat?" The judge stared in response and Roscoe got up and took off both his coat and jacket and loosened his tie, vying for some time. "Well, father. You haven't been involved in Kimball's business for years, now. If he'd lived though the settlement there wouldn't be any problem."

"Thought you'd take a calculated risk? You like those don't ya?"

Roscoe frowned, "Yeah. I had it all figured out. And once he settled there were, still is, millions to be made here."

"Millions, huh? Millions you say? How you going to spend those millions in jail, Junior?"

Roscoe got up and began pacing the room, his thin whiny voice high pitched and feverish, "I'm not going to jail. I have contracts he signed. If he'd settled, everything would be fine."

The judge watched Roscoe walk back and forth, "Maybe. But he didn't settle. He died. And you settled for him. What'd you think you'd do about all this now?"

"I don't know. Contact the heirs and hope for the best. What else can we do?" Roscoe was wringing his hands, almost in tears, "I didn't want to go forward, today, but Dad, these are powerful men involved. They won't walk away from this without a fight . . ." Roscoe suddenly brightened, "You know I am actually relieved you know. I can count on you to find a way out. You will help me, sir? Dad, please."

Judge Wilson stopped and weighed the options carefully before responding, "Don't look like I have much of a choice. If this doesn't go well, the whole firm is implicated. But you make no moves without me knowing about it. Ya' hear me, Junior. No moves without me, or you'll be hung out there to dry all on your own. And you know I can fix it so it's so, don't you?"

Roscoe voice sounded like a child's, "Sure, Dad, sure."

"You're into it again, aren't ya' boy?"

"No. No. This has nothing to do with that?"

"It doesn't? Then why did Penelope call me today about tuition for the girls?"

"That was a mistake. Her account is overdrawn is all. I have the funds to cover it."

The Judge looked at Roscoe very sternly, "Okay, Roscoe, I'll handle notifying the heir and the rest of Kimball's end of it. This has to go by the book from this point forward."

Roscoe got up to leave, "Just hold up. Here are the burial instructions, Kimball left. His heir will want to be there. When you get it all arranged, let me know and I'll notify her when and where. You think you could handle this without a screw up? And Roscoe, keep yawl fraternity brothers in tow, ya here me, boy?"

"I hear you," Roscoe looked over the paper, "He's to be buried on the island?"

"Yes. There's an old family plot in the center of the island, on the highest ground. Got a problem with that, boy?"

"No, no, sir. I'll take care of everything, first thing tomorrow morning. And you'll notify his heir?"

"That's right. I'll do that. I will need to deal with her. We can't afford any more problems here."

"Fine. Fine. Thanks Dad." Roscoe left his father's office secure in the fact he would somehow be taken care of. How many times had his old man used his position to save him from some useless scheme? Countless times. But nothing ever this big, conflict of interest, falsifying records, breaking a client's confidence. This was more than a little out of integrity. Now he had a funeral service to plan, but first he was going to get snookered on very old sour mash bourbon, dead snookered drunk.

After his son left the office, Judge Wilson opened his top drawer and took out two envelopes. He read the one addressed to the firm:

To whom It May Concern:

The heir to the island is listed in my will as Margaret S. Delaney, my daughter. She and her mother left me in 1976 and moved to Pennsylvania to start a new life. It is imperative my daughter understands this land has been in the Kimball family for more than three hundred years and respects those who came before her and keep it in the family. Do not divulge to her who has left her the island until she reads the letter I have written to her. It explains everything. Please make certain she gets it. Attached you will find my daughter's name and most recent address and how to reach her.

Sincerely,

Herbert W. Kimball.

## Chapter X

The board of Realtors' luncheon was a buzz over the fact Townsend Thorndike was attending. This was just an ordinary luncheon meeting.

Towney sat in the corner across from the door trying to be as unobtrusive as possible, which was difficult in this crowd. He wanted to observe her entrance. He wanted her to know he was there. He had Aaron check the roster of who was attending this meeting and her name was on it. Where was she? Was she always late?

The meeting started and was a half hour into before she arrived, out of breath and giggling as she excused herself to get to a seat. "Sorry, sorry, everyone."

And she wasn't alone. With her was the same blonde man he saw her with at the chamber luncheon. Towney knew his face, had seen him around town. An architect, he thought. That's right. He's Daniel Shafer. His father is a Real Estate tycoon in Minneapolis. Shafer came to Philadelphia about ten years ago. He'd seen his name around town, he guessed he was doing all right for himself, now. Towney noted how similar their situations seemed. He wondered if he was making it all on his own. He felt a flush rise to his face as he watched Delaney and Shafer huddled in their seats passing notes throughout the rest of the meeting.

Towney squirmed. Is he why she didn't want to see him? She was already involved with someone? Why didn't she simply tell him that? Why did she go out with him in the first place? She did say a banker is good to know in this business. He fidgeted and looked for the exit. He desperately wanted to get out of this place but was trapped in the corner, and she never even noticed he was there!

When the meeting broke up he was rushed by a group of Realtors and couldn't get to the door fast enough. Delaney turned and caught his eye as she was leaving. He could tell she was surprised to see him there, but couldn't get to her before she and Shafer were out the door.

When they stopped at the elevator, Daniel said, "Is it my imagination or was Townsend Thorndike trying to get your attention back there?"

"Oh, didn't you know, we were an item for about five minutes."

"You and Thorndike. Whoa!" Dan laughed.

"I know, it is weird, isn't it?"

"Not weird for most people, just you. Isn't he single?"

"Yes, but definitely unattainable, so he still counts. Let's get out of here before I have to talk to him."

"Ended badly did it? Word has it, he's a real player. Are you okay?"

"I'm okay. I just don't want to talk to him right now."

Somehow Towney had found a back door and slipped through catching up with them just as the elevator doors opened.

"Delaney . . . come on, Delaney, stop."

She turned and there he was, all boyish charm and dimples.

"Hello, Towney. Have you met Dan Shafer?"

Towney and Daniel shook hands and measured each other quickly. Pleasantries dispensed with, the three stood there for a moment in an awkward silence. Towney turned to Shafer, "Sorry, but could you give us a minute, alone?"

Dan looked at Delaney, "Okay?" She nodded. "Then, I'll wait for you downstairs, good bye Towney, nice to have met you."

She walked away from the elevator and he followed her, "You never come to these meetings."

He smiled, "I'm here to see you."

Delaney crossed her arms, "Oh, how nice."

They stood and looked at each other, the air charged with electricity. Towney took her hand.

"I was a little insensitive. You were trying to tell me something."

She pulled her hand back and crossed her arms again, "I was."

"And I wasn't listening."

"You weren't."

He grabbed her hand again, "I'm listening now."

A group of people came down the corridor and Delaney self-consciously looked down at his hand holding hers and pulled it away. "Not here, Towney. Not now."

"Can we go for a drive?"

"Another limousine on the curb?"

"Not exactly." He shook his head and smiled at her. "You are tough." She stood firm. "Come on, Delaney, give me a break here."

She caught a whiff of his cologne. He was looking into her eyes. Resolve dissolved. "Okay, but just for an hour. I have commitments this afternoon."

It was chilly out but the top was down on Towney's Porsche parked illegally out front in the tow away zone. When he approached, the cop on the beat, tapped his hat and walked away.

Delaney waited while Towney came around and opened the door for her. "Do you even have a driver's license?"

"Of course I have a license."

"Let me see it."

"You're kidding."

"No, no I'm not. Let me see it." Towney frowned and opened the glove box and fished out his license.

"See?"

"It's expired."

He snatched it back from her, "Let me see that."

She giggled and hopped into the driver's seat. "Coming?"

Towney went around and got into the passenger seat and turned on the heater, "Cold?"

"No, I'm fine. Thank you."

They drove in silence until she stopped the car at the Tyler Arboretum. She turned to face him, "Well? What do you want?"

"You have my full attention, now that you've taken me to the middle of nowhere. Tell me what's going on with you."

"Other than that I'm freezing to death?"

"I have a blanket and a thermos of coffee, want some?"

"Just like a boy scout, always prepared."

She took a sip of coffee, watched and waited for him to speak. "Okay Towney. This is not all your fault," she hesitated wondering how much she should tell him. "We jumped into this quickly. I didn't think about it."

"Then you don't fuck everyone you date?" He smiled.

"Well, actually I do, that part is true. I'm in therapy for nymphomania, but my shrink won't cure me, he's having too much fun." He kept smiling. She went on, "Okay, I deserve that...no, no I don't. What I do is get into relationships with the wrong men. The last one was quite grim."

"You're not over him, are you?" Towney said, thinking he was right about Daniel Shafer.

Delaney looked into his dark eyes. "You're so intense, so serious."

"Well? Is that it? You're not over him are you?"

"I'm not sure. I'm not still in love with him, if that's what you mean. It was just a very bad time for me and on many levels you seem just like him."

"In what way?"

"Unattainable." Towney flinched, Delaney continued. "You have a reputation, you know."

"I know. But you mustn't believe everything you hear."

"Towney, you're over thirty and have had, how many relationships in the last five years? Twenty, thirty? More?"

"Let's just say. I haven't found the right one yet."

"Right. And are you actually trying to tell me I'm the right one?" She looked into his big brown eyes and he turned away.

"I don't know, yet." He said softly, "I'm not even sure how I'll know the right one."

"Exactly my point, Towney. You're dangerous. You're hit and run. You see a woman for a few weeks and then she's not the one. I don't want to be just another Thorndike statistic, in therapy to get over you." They fell into their own thoughts.

Then he took her hand. "We do have chemistry, though."

"It is just infatuation. It makes people crazy." She was amazed that even when he frowned his dimples showed.

"At some point, Delaney you just have to go on your own instincts. You'll have to trust yourself. Look at me, what do your instincts tell you about me?"

"Run!" they chuckled together. Towney moved closer putting his arms around her and he kissed her, softly at first, then passionately.

When they broke apart, she breathlessly asked, "Do you have a fetish for making love in cars or is it public places?"

He laughed. "Both."

"Sorry, this sure isn't the back seat of the limousine, darling. Get the blanket." Delaney hopped out of the car and walked into the woods. Towney trailed closely behind her, blanket in tow, and stopped in a clearing. "Public enough for you?"

"Here?" Delaney's answer was to kick off her shoes and spread the blanket out on the ground.

"Yes, right here, in front of god and everybody."

"That's from a very old movie, isn't it?"

"A Summer Place. Sandra Dee, Troy Donahue. No? I saw it on the late show when I was a kid. It left an impression."

Towney laid beside her on the blanket, "What was it about?"

"Lust in the fifties, when it was forbidden and exciting."

He leaned over her, "Sort of like making love in an arbor?"

"They made love in an old lifeguard's shack on the beach, in the winter, it was cold." Delaney reached down, unbuttoned Towney's pants and felt his warmth. "This will keep my hands nicely warm."

Towney smiled and reached his hands under her dress pulling it high over her waist and unclipped her bra. Delaney squirmed anxiously beneath his touch. The leaves rustled around them as

the wind came up. Towney pulled at her. She tugged at his pants until they came down, revealing his bare ass to the trees and the squirrels. The thought made her stop what she was doing and giggle. "We're scandalizing the critters."

Towney stopped what he was doing and pulled her on top of him and entered her quickly. Delaney gasped with each stroke. He held her tighter and tighter until she thought she would faint, and instead felt the swells of orgasm from deep inside of her mounting, she surrendered and let them take her to the shore moments before Towney came hard with a loud grunt, then burst into laughter.

"What? What?" She asked him breathlessly, but he couldn't stop laughing. He just held her and convulsed with laughter until she joined him as well.

Delaney got back to the office as Carol was about to leave. "Where have you been? You look a little flushed and Daniel said you left him in the lobby of the board building."

"I ran into Towney and . . . one thing led to another."

"No wonder you're flushed. Delaney, tell me all."

"He groveled, not too much, just the right amount. And you know how I value the ability to grovel in a man?"

"Ah, yes groveling, an under used skill."

"We kissed and made up, and kissed some more. I agreed to see him, Carol. Am I making a mistake?"

"Men do not come with guarantees. Too bad, too. At least this relationship has possibilities. I say go for it. I think it's great. Gotta' run, your messages and mail are on your desk."

Delaney locked the door behind Carol and pulled the shade. Her afternoon of lovemaking with Towney on the ground made her body sore in places she didn't even know could get sore. She grimaced as she sat down and then smiled remembering why she was hurting there.

Love in the afternoon. That's an old movie, too, she smiled to herself.

Usually Towney didn't have dinner at the old family home. Marandell had lost its appeal since his father passed away. Visiting reminded him too much of the afternoon he found out he was chained to the bank. But when the grand dame of the banking world, beckoned, he had no choice but to attend.

Eleanor Thorndike was resplendent in the sprawling family mansion on the main line. At fifty-six looking every bit forty-five with her chic blonde blunt cut and gardening togs. Towney found her puttering around in the greenhouse. "Mother. You shouldn't have dressed just for me." He pecked the air aside her cheek.

She giggled then held him back to study him carefully, brushing the hair off his forehead. "You're looking a little flushed, dear. Been out in the fresh air, have you?"

Towney snickered, "You don't miss much do you?"

"Not since you were two. I knew then. You merited very close attention."

"Maybe that's what's wrong with me. No woman can measure up to your devotion."

"Humph! Are you buttering me up? Here. Hold the tray while I cut some of these flowers."

He watched her move gracefully through the greenhouse, snipping here and there, choosing colors and variations that blended well together. Suddenly he imagined Delaney in this role and frowned. His mother noticed. "What bit you, Towney?"

"A woman."

She stopped her cutting and faced him, "I had a feeling something was troubling you. That's why I wanted to see you. It's a woman, is it? You sound surprised."

"I am . . . somewhat."

"Tell me about her. Your love life has always been much better than any romance novel on the market."

Towney winced. That was the second time today he was reminded of his history with women. She did enjoy his dalliances, though, perhaps more than he did. She relished every detail. What the woman wore, who her parents are, where they went, what they ate, the music they danced to. Sometimes he even brought pictures. Visual aides, she called them. But he rarely brought anyone

home to meet her. He knew that she liked the idea of his playing around much more than she liked the idea of something permanent.

"I'm not sure I can. I don't know much about her. I've only seen her twice . . . "

"Twice and you're in this tizzy?"

He looked up at her sharply. "I am not in a tizzy, Mother."

She stopped what she was doing and regarded him carefully, "Rather sensitive, aren't you dear?"

"No. I don't know. I guess you could say I'm intrigued. She's unusual. Ambitious, mysterious, and quite striking, of course."

"Of course." They laughed together.

"And bright. She owns her own business, a Real Estate Brokerage. In center city." He beamed and got lost in the tryst in the arbor.

"Now I'm intrigued, dear. Let's have some wine and tell me more about this woman that has you so . . . "

"Careful, Mother."

She smiled, "Shall we say, enchanted." She linked her arm through his and together they walked into the sitting area.

Alan Gaines caught up with George at home later that evening, "Hey, I've got some news for you."

"Finally. What is it?"

"It seems his wife changed their names when they left him. I'm not sure whether it was to avoid prosecution or what."

"Prosecution, for what?"

"This stuff was really big. He was involved with some very subversive groups in the sixties, you know, demonstrations, draft dodgers, people who blew things up. All three of them were on the road for a while before he finally got caught by the F.B.I."

"This is astonishing, Alan. Kimball, of all people. He was a salt of the earth type guy. And he was sort of old for that generation."

"He got involved at the university. He was a professor at Georgetown. Not that much older than the kids he taught. He got entangled and the next thing he knew he was on the run."

"That old anarchist! What else did you find out?"

"The last name is Shaw. Also, Kimball got mail from Philadelphia while he was in the can so that's where I'm headed tomorrow, first thing."

"Thanks a lot, Alan, keep me posted."

Kate came back into the bedroom just in time to see George hang the phone up, "Who was that?"

"No one important . . . come here, you're not leaving yet, I've waited a long time for you."

Kate dropped the robe from her shoulders and walked slowly to the bed. "You have?"

"Yes I have. Tell me Kate. What exactly was it finally that had you accept an invitation from me?"

She looked at George and her eyes clouded over, "I don't know. Okay, I do know, I guess. This is difficult. Are you sure you want to know this?" He nodded. "I think I always saw you as, well, sort of ruthless, like you didn't have a heart or something. Sorry. But today. . . today I saw you as this wonderful caring man. You know, how you took care of that old man and all and paid for his funeral. It just touched me. I never saw that side of you before." Kate nestled into George's beckoning arms. "Is that okay? You're not mad at me?"

He kissed the bridge of her nose, her chin, her collar bone, and her navel, stopping for just a second before continuing downward, "I could never be mad at anyone that tastes as good as you do." Then he buried his face in between her legs and she giggled.

## Chapter XI

Back in Annapolis:

"Hello. I am Herbert Kimball's attorney, Roscoe Wilson. We will be handling the funeral arrangements for Mr. Kimball. Can you direct me to the right person?" He wasn't taking any chances having his secretary handle this. He was doing it himself.

"Hold on, sir . . . I'm sorry, there is no one here under that name. Are you certain this is the right place?"

Roscoe hung up the phone and quickly dialed George. No answer. His service picked up. Where the hell is he? Not even was Kate in the office. He dialed his home number, no answer there either.

George and Kate were attending a very short and very private service for Herbert Kimball at Shady Hill Cemetery.

Roscoe called all over looking for George. Finally he beeped him and George called him back.

"What's up, Roscoe?"

"What's up? Where's Kimball, George, what have you done with him?"

"I'm storing him in my freezer, Roscoe. I buried him, what else would I do with him."

"You buried him! Without talking to me? Didn't you think we'd have instructions? I am his attorney! Isn't this something I should have handled, or at the very least been kept informed about?" Roscoe was screaming into the receiver.

"Chill the funk out, Roscoe. You never said a word about it yesterday and I sort of, well, felt an obligation to handle it myself."

"Bullshit! You've never felt an obligation in your life that didn't have something in it for you. Where is he George? We're going to have to have him interred, today."

"Why? He's just fine where he is."

"Because he's supposed to be buried on the island, in the family plot, with onlookers, and heirs standing by."

"No way. No fucking way are you going to dig him up and make some sad spectacle for the heir. She doesn't know who he is and I'm not taking a chance on her getting all sentimental about him at some funeral service. Family plots, just great Roscoe. Get hold of yourself. Think a minute."

"Look. It's not me, George. It's the judge. He waylaid those letters yesterday and I had to tell him everything. Well, not quite the whole thing, but most of it. He says we have to do it his way, now."

"Maybe you're afraid of the old geezer, but I'm not. You tell him I'll be down at five and then we'll talk about it."

"He's not going to be happy, George."

"That's your problem. See you at five."

Roscoe hesitated before going into the judge, then decided to do it later. "Mary, I have some business to handle out of the office. Tell the judge I need to see him at five today. It's important." Then Roscoe bolted out of the office and headed for the marina. He sat on his boat lamenting this turn of events and sipping sour mash bourbon. Half crocked, he decided to go and see if he could find the cemetery on the island. He untied the boat and slowly moved away from the dock. Once on the island he pulled the instructions his father gave him out of his briefcase and read the directions. Go up to the Kimball cottage then north inland to the big house. The cemetery is about 500 yards behind the old house on the top of the hill. He changed into Timberlands and began the hike. He didn't remember the big house, although he was told he was there when he was a small boy. The judge spoke fondly of the Kimball's and the good times he had there. Roscoe was getting tired of trudging through the sand when he caught sight of the dormers on the house. He cut through the thicket and moved closer. Wow. It must've been something in its day. He'd guess the walls were three feet thick. Built to withstand flooding, it was very run down, but very large, three full floors. Big oak doors and shutters all boarded up. A large rat ran across his path and made him jump.

I don't belong here, Roscoe thought, it's an omen, but felt compelled to find the cemetery. He saw the hill behind the house and climbed to the top. All he could see was the thicket and brambles so he went around the hill to the other side and caught a glimpse of a clearing. I'll never get through

this overgrown stuff. Even if I do get to bury him here we'll have to hire people to cut a path. He plopped himself down in the sand and pulled the bottle from his pocket. What a mess. God dammit. I'm going back down. I'm certain that George won't let me bury him here anyway.

When Roscoe got back to the office at four thirty, Mary flagged him on sight. "Your father's waiting."

"When's the service, Roscoe?"

"Well, Judge, there's been a little hitch."

"Hitch? What kind of hitch? This was a simple task boy."

Roscoe was more than a little inebriated. He chuckled, "Only if you have a body."

"Kimball's body is missing? Confound it boy, this is no laughing matter."

"Well, it's not exactly missing, it's been, ah sorry, he's been buried somewhere else."

"Who buried him?" The judge held up his hand, "No don't tell me. I'm not sure I want to know this."

"You'll probably have to. George Bates is on his way over. He wants to talk to you."

"He does, does he? Is he the one who buried Kimball?"

"I think so, Dad."

"I tell ya' junior. You're getting in deeper and deeper here."

Roscoe sat down on the couch, "I know, but I didn't do this one. I didn't even find out until this morning. It was over and done. We could hire a detective...."

"We'll wait until we hear what your little friend has to say first."

Mary buzzed the judge, "Mr. Bates here to see you, Judge."

The judge and Roscoe stayed seated while George was shown in. "You can call it a day Mary, and shut off the phones, I don't want to be disturbed."

George came in and went right over to the bar. "Anyone else want a drink? Judge?"

"Make yourself right at home Mr. Bates."

"Oh, thank you. George poured himself three fingers of brandy and took a chair right in front of the Judge."

"I hear you've gone and buried Herbert Kimball, is that right?"

"Why yes it is. I felt it my responsibility, after all he was in my care for the past three months."

"Your care!"

"Certainly, my care. He was my business partner. When he fell ill, who else was there to take care of him?"

"His attorneys, for one, his family, possibly."

"Well, as much as your heart might have been in the right place and all judge, I have known Herbert since I was a boy and there was never any family around."

"Really?" The old man leaned back in his creaky leather chair. "And you felt an obligation to take care of him, pay for his burial and all? I'm impressed with your loyalty, Mr. Bates."

"It was the least I could do." George smiled and downed his glass.

"Enough crap, here Bates. What do you really want?"

"I want this deal to go. I want to make certain it does. Meanwhile all you're concerned about is doing what Kimball wanted."

"That is our job as trustees of his estate."

"Yeah, well, his estate now belongs to us. And if we're not all very careful, we're all going to be in a lot of trouble and lose a lot of money."

"What do you want me to do, turn my back?"

George assessed Roscoe's condition before going on, "That's one idea. Another is to help us. Your baby boy, Roscoe, has done a lot of sort of illegal things here and he knew. I'm a poor builder, I don't know the law, I have to pay for legal advice. He is the legal advice in this case."

The judge grunted. "You hear him, boy, he's willing to let you hang alone for this. This is the type of man you do business with."

"We're all that type of man with our backs to the wall. Believe me. All you have to do is give the heir the deal. She inherits the money we bought the island for. At the moment he's no one to her."

She doesn't even know who he is, and the island is just some land. Give her the cash, explain it was sold and send her away."

"Just like that? What about the other letter? It's referenced in the will. She'll want to see it."

"Tell her it was misplaced. Some clerical error, and you'll find it later, leave no stone unturned, etc."

"And her mother? I'm certain she'll tell her who Kimball is to her and all about this land. You know Kimball considered it a sacred trust."

"She could be a problem. We haven't located her yet, or the heir, but we don't have to keep looking, now. You've got that information, don't you? And my sources tell me, her mother may be out of the country. Any help to keep her there way would be appreciated, by the way."

"My god, man, what are you asking me to do?"

"Nothing harmful, just keep her busy until we bring this heir in line is all. You must know some people, a visa problem maybe."

"There are phones, telegrams, letters. Even if I can keep her from getting back to the states she can still communicate with her daughter."

"Yes, but will she tell her the ghastly details of their lives over the phone? And the details pretty distressing. I'm counting on this being so big a secret that she'll want to wait until she sees her in person to lay it on her. Look, once we break ground nothing can stop us. You know I'm right, Judge. You know you have to go along with us."

The judge turned to Roscoe, who looked up momentarily from his stupor, "If you do one more thing without advising me, I'll put you in jail myself." He stood up and walked over and opened the door. "Boy, show Mr. Bates out." Roscoe struggled to his feet and walked out with George.

"Ta, Ta, Judge Wilson. I'll be in touch."

Once out into the hallway, Roscoe whispered to George, "Thanks for coming down."

"Hey Roscoe, old buddy, you know I'd never sell you out. I just had to say that to bring the Judge in line is all. You know that, right?"

"Sure, George. Sure. But you don't know him like I do. He's mean. He knows mean people. He can have things done. I'm telling you, you don't know what he's capable of."

George steadied Roscoe and led him into his own office. "Sleep it off buddy. I'll call you tomorrow. Everything's going to be fine. Take a good look at your father. He's a very old man, Roscoe. He's not the same man who made your life hell. The three of us can handle him. Don't worry."

"Thanks, George. Thanks a lot."

The next morning the judge called his friend in the State Department and had Sydney Shaw tracked down in Russia. When he finished up with that nasty little piece of business, he sent off a letter to the heir.

Dear Ms. Shaw,

I have in my possession a last will and testament from Herbert Kimball. He lists you as the heir to his estate. Please contact me immediately to go over the terms of his will.

Sincerely,

Judge Roscoe Wilson II

## Chapter XII

Delaney read the letter and checked her watch. Who the hell is Herbert Kimball and why would he leave me anything. She picked up the phone and called the last number she had for her mother in Russia. Since she didn't speak any Russian, it was very difficult to communicate with the woman who answered the phone. She had to get a message to her mother. She would keep trying today and then tomorrow she would call this attorney and also the Russian embassy. Maybe they could get her a message. She closed the lights and went home, a hot bath on her mind.

When she got to the office she threw the letter at Carol and dialed the attorney's number, "Hello, this is Delaney Shaw for Judge Wilson."

"Are you on hold? Wow, what do you think it is about?"

Delaney shrugged her shoulders. "Ms. Shaw, this is the Judge's assistant. He wants me to make an appointment with you to come down here to Annapolis. Could you perhaps come down today?"

"Today? Yes I guess so, but you're two hours away. I won't want to come back today, can you book me a hotel room close to your office?"

"Certainly, we'll see you around one then?"

"One it is. Goodbye."

Carol studied the letter, "What is this all about? Do you know who Herbert Kimball is?"

"Never heard of him. Truth is, I thought all of our relatives were dead and buried years ago. I don't know. Probably some old friend of the family's. I can't get through to anyone in Russia to find out where my mother is. I called the embassy from home to see if they can get a message to her. Anyway, I have to go down there today. Sounded quite important."

"Hope it's a million dollars. If it is, will you share?"

"Of course, want half?"

"Half's too much, I'll take a third."

"How considerate. Help me clear my calendar so I can get out of here. This is kind of like winning the lottery or something." Delaney left word for Towney that she had to go out of town, packed a few things and left for Maryland in her car.

Roscoe was curious who the cool brunette in the lobby was. "Who is she here to see?"

The receptionist answered, "The Judge." Roscoe raised his eyebrows. "What's her name?" the receptionist wrote, Delaney Shaw on a piece of paper and secretly handed it to Roscoe.

The phone buzzed to send her in. "Miss Shaw, you can go in now."

"Thank you." Delaney was led down the hall of this mahogany paneled mausoleum to what appeared to be the inner sanctum.

Mary knocked, then led her into the judge's office. He stood up and extended his hand, "So nice to meet your Ms. Shaw. Please have a seat."

The desk top between them was immense and the aging Southern drawl was difficult to understand. She leaned forward and put her hands on the desk to hear him. The sunlight coming in from the windows behind his chair lit Delaney's eyes and startled the Judge for a second. He was reminded of another woman. One with those same sparkling emerald eyes. For a moment, he was too stunned to speak, and she sat there quietly, waiting. He looked away to regain his composure, "Well, now, I guess you're wondering what the hurry is all about to get you here."

"Frankly, yes."

"Have you ever heard of Herbert Kimball?"

"No, I assume he's a distant relative or friend of my mother's, which is all too strange for me because in my entire life I've never known any relatives at all I thought they were all dead."

"I am not certain what his relationship to you is, if there is one. I have been hired by him to take care of his affairs. And he has listed you as the heir to his estate."

"Estate?"

"Yes. This is very complicated, though, Ms. Shaw, because Kimball was involved in a complex business arrangement when he died. I hope you understand."

"Understand what?"

"Kimball left you his only asset, which is Kent Island. He was in the middle of developing it when he passed."

"He left me an island? An island? Where is it?"

He took a pointer out of his desk and opened it out, pulling down a map beside his desk. "It's this little speck, here."

Delaney got up and went around to look closer. "That little speck? In the middle of the Chesapeake Bay? You're not serious!"

The judge leaned back in his chair, "It's not very large. Just a few old cottages and some eroded beaches. Your share of the island that is. He didn't own it all. There are nine lots which he sold off over the years."

"He left me an island?" Delaney was in shock. She sat down again. "Are you certain I am the right Delaney Shaw? I mean, why are you so sure it's me. How did you know where to find me?"

"Mr. Kimball supplied an old address and then we hired a detective to track you down. That's why it took as long as it did."

"An old address?"

"That's how I was able to contact you. You say you don't know the name at all?"

"No. And my mother . . . "

"Your mother?"

"Yes, my mother is in Russia and I haven't been able to get through to her to ask her about this."

"Is she on a vacation?"

"No, I wish she were simply on a vacation. No, she's off on one of her causes. Traipsing around the countryside looking for trouble. Anyway, that's another story, entirely."

"So you've tried to contact your mother and cannot get through to her?"

"No. It's been very frustrating. I haven't heard her voice in weeks. I'll try the embassy again when I get home. You don't have any contacts, being so close to D.C. and all, do you that might be able to help me?"

"Perhaps I could assist you with that. Where was she when you heard from her last?"

"In Chernobyl."

"Chernobyl!"

"Yes, I know how it must seem, but you don't know my mother."

But the judge did know her mother and her propensities in life. "I'll see what I can do about your mother, Ms. Shaw, but there are other more pressing matters. There are complications to your inheritance."

"What sort of complications?"

"He was under contract to sell this island when he died. It went to settlement and the funds, \$500,000 have been put into escrow for his heir."

"Wait a minute. How many acres are there?"

"I'm not certain. You'll have to research it at the Borough Office or have it surveyed."

"Is it under water most of the time? Was he desperate?"

"What do you mean?"

"Your honor, I beg your pardon, but unless it's under water for most of the year, I will bet you it's worth at least five million dollars."

"What did you say you did for a living, Ms. Shaw?"

"I didn't, but you'll be thrilled to know I'm in Real Estate, a broker, actually, judge. And I want to see this land. Can you arrange that for me today?"

Judge Wilson buzzed his secretary and arranged for a boat to take Delaney out to see the land.

"After I see the land, I want to go over this in detail with you, judge. Talk about my options, because unless something is very wrong with this island, it looks to me like someone took Kimball over big time."

After Delaney left Wilson called his son into his office. "Roscoe, you have a big problem, son. The heir is no dummy, she is in Real Estate herself! Without even seeing the island she questioned the sale price. If she contests this sale, she'll win. You know she'll win, for crissakes, boy, Kimball had

Alzheimer. Enough people know that! You got to talk to your people. They have to can this deal, now. Back out."

Roscoe could tell the old Judge was right. Convincing George and Towney was another matter. He put the calls into both of them and waited anxiously for them to call back. George was first.

"Your father spoke to her today. An old coot still trying to do it his way."

"Sure he is. He is pretty concerned about this deal, George. Sorry."

"Sorry won't cut it. Towney is going to be pissed. He's already sunk a lot of money in to architects, engineers, borings, zoning, the environmentalists. He's not going to walk away easily, and neither am I!"

"Towney doesn't know the whole story, George. You got to tell him what you did. How you closed the deal to begin with."

"I'm not going to tell him that, and neither are you. I'll think of something. Maybe the detective has come up with some more information on this woman we can use. Can you get me her name and address?"

"The judge won't let me near that file. "

"Don't panic Roscoe, my detective already has most of what we need. Stay calm. I'll talk to you later, and if Towney calls just tell him about the heir being in Real Estate and your father's recommendations we back off. Nothing else. Hold yourself together, Roscoe and stay away from the bourbon. See ya."

Delaney left and checked into her hotel, changed into jeans and sweater and headed for the marina. The bay was choppy and cold but the company friendly. The young man, James, took her out and seemed to know a lot about the area. Delaney quizzed him all the way over. "There it is, " he pointed, "Kent Island."

She looked off through the gray skies and saw a small patch of green rising up in the middle. She kept her eyes on it until it got bigger and bigger. She could see the soft sandy beaches, the dunes and the trees.

This is it. Her island. "Can we go all the way around it before docking?"

"No problem." He turned the boat and headed around the south end. "Is this land under water part of the year?"

"Oh, no. The old man who owned it lived on it all year around. And at the other end are nine other cottages, and docks. It's very nice. In the middle is a fresh water lake. small, but crystal clear. Old man Kimball used to let us fish there sometimes. Did you know him?"

"Kimball? No, did you know him well?"

"Nah, I'm not from around here and he kept to himself pretty much. Nice old guy though."

Delaney was bobbing up and down on her toes, stretching to see it all. It took over forty minutes to get around the island before he docked. Delaney got out of the boat and headed down the dock to the beach. "I'll wait here for you."

She walked about fifteen minutes on the beach and then went inland until she found the lake. It was so silent. She could hear the wind rustling through the trees, the gulls cawing to each other. The air a mixture of the sea and the pine needles underfoot. This is paradise. Even in this cold damp weather, it was beautiful. Untouched. She walked and walked until she was exhausted. It needed surveying, engineers, she began to tick off the list in her head. She needed Daniel Shafer to come down and help her. She ran all the way back to the boat. "I've seen enough, take me home, James."

Once at the hotel she put a call into Daniel and begged him to drive down that night. "You won't believe this property, Daniel, and I need you because aside from the whole unusual business of the inheritance from someone I don't even know, I suspect the deal the law firm did on this land isn't quite on the up and up. Lawyers doing something illegal. What a hoot."

"Okay, I'll head down shortly. Get me a room."

It occurred to her to call Towney and tell him about all this. He was after, very powerful. He could be a big help, but decided against it. She didn't want him to think of her as just one more woman looking for his financial help. It was too new between them and she so wanted it to work out. It was much too soon to run to him for help. No, Daniel was the right person. She got him a room and left him a message to call her in the morning and went to sleep dreaming of soft ocean breezes.

"Ready?"

"Well, aren't you perky this morning?"

"Not every day someone leaves me Utopia. Let's eat and go. The marina hand, James is expecting us around 9."

Shafer was as impressed as Delaney was when she first saw it. This morning was clear and sunny and there was more of the island visible from the water than before. "I've hired James and the boat until 1:00. Is that enough time?"

"It's enough time to get some general information, but engineers will have to come back and it'll take a week to survey it properly."

"Do what you can do. I need something to take back to Kimball's attorneys this afternoon."

They spent the day roaming the south side of the island and went into the middle near the lake.

The key here, Delaney is fresh water. If you have fresh water, this is very valuable land. The lake means you probably have fresh water.

"You think 500k was stealing it?"

"Unless there is something very wrong with it, like they used it as a trash site or dumped PCB's, here, I'd have to say, yes. Oh, and I hope you don't mind. I had Carol call some Realtors down here to get some land comparisons. The price for raw waterfront land is on the moon."

"Give me what you have. I think this may be enough to just let them know we're suspicious. Let's go talk to Wilson."

They went back to the mainland, changed and headed right for Judge Wilson's office.

"Your honor, this is Daniel Shafer, my friend and architect. He came down to confirm my suspicions."

The judge spoke into his speaker box, "Mary, could you get us some afternoon tea, please." Then turned his attention back to Delaney. "You yanks go lookin' for trouble, yawl always find it. Sit down and have some tea. I spent a lot of time in London in my youth. Got real used to those tea and crumpet afternoons. With the wind off the bay, it warms me up, quite nicely."

"Look, I don't want any tea and I'm sure all your adventures are great cocktail party conversation, but there is a problem here."

Mary brought in the tray with the tea and cakes. "Sure you won't have some? Best tea in the world."

"Stop changing the subject, I think this island was literally stolen from Kimball. I want some information from you. Who bought it? Where's the contract? I want to see it all."

"Well, of course, my dear. We have nothing to hide from you. I knew Mr. Kimball for years, feel like he's almost kin. Thought you'd like to get to know us a little better, as well."

"If you know Kimball so well, then maybe you can tell me how I figure into all this. Am I a relative?"

The judge took a sip of tea and studied Delaney's face before answering. Perhaps she doesn't know anything at all. "Ms. Shaw, you are as much a surprise to me as we are to you. The will was sealed and not to be opened until he died."

"So you have no idea if he and I are related?"

"No, no, as a matter of fact I was hoping you would tell me."

"I never heard of him and my mother, she might know, I told you before, is in Russia. I have been trying to find her, but I still can't get through."

"When you were here yesterday, you neglected to tell me your mother's name? Tough to find someone when I don't know who I am looking for."

"Sydney. Sydney Shaw. Is she familiar to you?"

The judge did not even blink when she said that, "No. I am sorry. I wish there was more to tell you." He silently wondered if his friend Ted Barnes, in the Justice Department, had done the favor he asked him.

"Just the contracts, then, please."

"Certainly. Have a seat in my study and I'll have the folder brought in."

Delaney and Dan sat in the judge's study and poured over the papers for hours with him in hovering distance. Finally Delaney asked for copies to take with them.

"Your Honor? Am I going to require an attorney to protect my interests in this matter. It appears your firm permitted this sale and that concerns me."

"Do as you feel is best, Ms. Shaw. I do, however, have to see the will through probate as the trustee of the Kimball estate. If legal action is where you're headed, I would like an opportunity to see if I can speak to the parties about the contract, myself. You understand this sort of thing is very expensive. I'm certain we can reach an agreement without all that, don't you worry yourself about this."

What an act, Delaney thought to herself, he's good, though, very good.

"I am not without means, judge, I just want to make certain the interests you're protecting are mine, but I will take your advice for now, and allow you some time. An amicable settlement is more appealing. And judge, any other information you can find for me would be appreciated. About Kimball, that is. And also, my mother. Any assistance to locate her would be greatly appreciated."

"I will let you know what I can find out. Thank you for coming down. Leave it in my hands, child."

In the judge's top drawer was the wax sealed letter to Delaney from Kimball. He hadn't dared open it yet, and under the circumstances it wouldn't be prudent to pass it onto her. He had carefully gone through the file and eliminated anything that would make her more suspicious than she already was before he gave it to her. nasty business, this. He opened the bottom drawer of his desk, took out his thirty-year-old bourbon, poured himself a shot, cursed Roscoe and downed it.

## Chapter XIII

George awoke feeling great. He looked over and Kate was gone, her perfume clung to the bedclothes. Odd, it was Kimball's death that brought them together. He and Kate worked together for a long time. He was always careful not to leer at her openly. He didn't want her to be uncomfortable working with him and leave. Truth is, he always wanted her. It didn't help his floundering marriage that he spent so much time with Kate. Those late nights at work.

She stuck by him through this last recession as well as the nastiness of the divorce, with Elaine trying to take a huge chunk of everything he owned, Kate was right there with him while he rebuilt. He let her know how he felt about her, but she never responded to him. He got up and went into the bathroom surveying himself in the mirror? You're no Townsend Thorndike. Balding with a pouch forming on his thirty-two-year-old body. George didn't care, he spent a great night with a woman he's been hot for. He turned on the hot water in the shower and the bathroom steamed. He jumped into the shower and mused, I'm in the middle of a deal that is falling apart and all I can think of is Kate, her long legs wrapped around me, her pointy breasts in my mouth.

When George got out of the shower there was a message on his service from Alan Gaines. He called him back. "What's up?"

"I found the girl. Her name is Delaney Shaw. She owns a small real estate firm in Philly doing okay, but no real money here. She owns a few properties, mortgaged to the hilt, a condominium at Washington square, a few thousand in the bank."

"That's great news, what about the mother."

"She's a loony tune. Off in Russia somewhere hunting down nuclear power plants or something." He chuckled, "She's actually been arrested a few times for demonstrating. Cop friends of mine pulled her record. I guess that's what she and Kimball had in common."

"Does she have any money?"

"Her house is paid for, it's a triplex, so it brings in a nice little income for her. She has some savings and some stocks, but nothing substantial. They don't have the means to fight you in court."

"That's great Alan, anything else I can use? "

"Well, I have all the clippings from Kimball's capture and trial. I send them over to you. You may find them very interesting."

George hung up and thought that this could work out after all. He could go to the other eight people on the island and tell them they were secure in their agreement to sell to him at the higher price, the owner couldn't possibly come up with the money. That land was the key to making his whole concept work. It was the most valuable piece. He jumped ahead of himself, feeling more

confident now. Even if the transfer was canceled, she didn't have the means to develop the island, or even hold onto it for very long. The taxes were very high. She'd have to come around sooner or later. If she defaulted on the taxes, they had probably had a legal claim to the island. He called Roscoe.

"It's time to squeeze the heir for those lots."

"I can't do it without telling the judge."

"My attorneys drew up the agreements of sale. All you have to do is get them to your father. He'll do the rest. Relax Roscoe. This woman doesn't have any money. She can't hurt us."

"She can make trouble, and I have a feeling she will. And what about Towney. I've been hedging his calls?"

"Just do what I said. I'll take care of Towney."

"But how George? You know Towney will be furious about losing this deal and I'm certain that's the direction the judge is going with this."

"Chill the fuck out, Roscoe. I can handle Towney. You get moving on the right of first refusals."

Delaney got back to her office, Kent Island files in hand. As she was explaining it all to Carol, she began to see she needed help. Carol agreed, "Delaney, you've got the best person in the world at your disposal."

"Towney?"

"Right, you need his advice and you're going to need money as well."

"I won't take any money from him. If I go to him with this, I want it to be a complete proposal, architectural, engineering, the works. Just like I would if I wasn't sleeping with him."

"Oh, you're too virtuous for me."

"No, I mean it, Carol. This is what I've worked for. This opportunity. I won't have some man telling me later how it was all his idea and how he made me. I've worked too hard. I want this deal."

That night Towney and Delaney met for dinner at Le Bec fin. Candles, wine, wonderful food in a charming atmosphere. It was all so exhilarating she momentarily forgot about the Judge and his deceitfulness. Somehow in this light, with all this wine and fuss, it slipped into the background. She

marveled over the attention he gets from strangers and the humble way he deals with it. They did not talk much through dinner. He was studying her as carefully as she was he. The line of her strong chin, the high cheekbones, those flashing emerald green eyes framed by dark expressive eyebrows. The classic beauty of her face so entertained him, he didn't care if they ever spoke. "You're very different tonight."

Delaney met his steady gaze, "Sorry, I have a deal happening."

"Does it involve your trip?"

"Yes, it does. I am in the middle of something very big."

"Want to share it with me?"

"Not just yet, but I will. I want to get a proposal together first. You know the old saying about mixing business with pleasure?"

"Well, then you must call my secretary for an appointment."

She smiled, grateful he let her off the hook so gracefully, "I will Mr. Thorndike, when the time is right."

They left the restaurant and went to Delaney's condominium on the square. Towney looked around the empty rooms, "Not big on furniture are you?"

Delaney pulled the tie from her hair. "What I like I can't afford, what I can afford I don't like." She shook her hair out and smiled sarcastically, "But you wouldn't know anything about that. What is it like to be able to afford everything?"

"I can't afford everything."

"Really? What can't you afford?"

"I'm not sure I can afford you."

Delaney smiled. "Are you saying I'm a high maintenance woman, Towney?" she opened the refrigerator, "I'm not, in fact all I have to drink is some cheap Chardonnay."

"Sure. That's what they all say at first. I want the simple things in life." Towney walked over and opened the sliders to the terrace. "You do have a great view."

Delaney grabbed the bottle, glasses and a corkscrew and went out onto the terrace with them, "That is all the furniture I need."

She sat on the lounge chair and slipped off her shoes while Towney opened the wine and poured. They sat and sipped and took in the sunset until the lights of the city came up, not speaking. Towney spoke first, "This is amazing. Sitting here, quietly, with you." He turned and held her hands and gazed into her eyes, "It's so cozy."

Delaney shrugged her shoulders, dismissing him. "I'm embarrassing you. You're blushing."

"I am not."

"Yes, you are. You are such a paradox." Towney stood up. He pulled Delaney to her feet and close to him, kissing her hard and passionate, his tongue probing her mouth, swallowing her lips. Delaney returned the passion feeling Towney's body growing tense against hers. Her knees felt weak and she realized Towney was actually holding her up. The city noises faded, it was just the two of them.

When they let go they were breathless. Towney kissed her neck and her shoulders, tearing at her white shirt until he found her bare nipple and sucked on it hard. He moved his hands up between her legs raising her skirt above her panties, then shoved his hands inside her panties grabbing her buttocks and squeezing them hard. She pulled back away from him and quipped, "Sex on the terrace, with banker Townsend Thorndike? News at eleven."

He dimpled and followed her into the apartment and then into the bedroom. "Have a seat," Delaney said, pointing to the bed, "I'll be right back. I did invest in a CD player."

A slow Latin beat filled the apartment. Towney leaned back on the pillows and kicked off his shoes. When she returned, she was moving her hips to the music and unbuttoning her wrinkled blouse very seductively. Knowing she had his full attention, she slowly turned and let the blouse fall to the floor behind her. Then facing him again in pink lace bra and skirt, she unzipped and slid the skirt down over her swaying hips revealing lace topped thigh high stockings and matching pink bikini panties. Towney smiled, watching her every move. She leaned over and put her foot on the bed, slowly rolling her stockings to her toes and kicking them off. She turned around again and unsnapped

her bra and lowered her panties to the floor. When she turned around, Towney held his arms out and she went to him. The roughness of his clothing against her bare skin made her feel vulnerable. She surrendered to his touch, his kiss, and moved on top of him. He kissed her neck and moved his hands all over her smooth skin, over her nakedness, down her legs and then gently and over her breasts, squeezing each nipple insistently, biting her neck, running his tongue up and into her ear.

Delaney flushed, her heart beat quickened, she reached up and kissed his chin, his cheeks, ran her hands through his dark hair. They kissed again, this time very hard, nipping at each other's tongues. Towney took the cue and moved down, licking and nibbling her neck, the valley between her breasts, down her flat stomach to between her legs. He breathed in deeply and moved his tongue against her, testing this spot, that stroke. When she pulled away, he grabbed her buttocks and held her to his searching mouth, tasting her sweetness. Delaney arched her back and squeezed her breasts, the orgasm overtaking her. She reached down and pulled at Towney, tearing open his shirt, breathing in the musky scent of his chest. "Fuck me, Towney, now, fuck me right now."

Towney kissed Delaney on the nose and moved off the bed to undress, his hardness leaping out of his silk boxers. "So demanding . . . but I'm not finished tasting you, yet."

Delaney pulled him on top of her, "Fuck me Towney, I want to feel you inside me." Nevertheless, Towney was already moving down to taste her sweetness, in the soft folds of her feverish mound, "God, Towney, stop, oh, my god." She whispered under her breath and she felt the orgasm build inside her again. Towney moved off her and onto his knees.

She opened her eyes just in time to see him lift her off the bed and turn her over. He grabbed her across the chest and bent her over, shoving his hardness into her from behind repeatedly. She screamed and came again, but he was not finished with her yet. He lifted her torso off the bed and held her back to his chest, slowly moving in and out massaging her breasts. He pushed his hand down roughly between her legs and inside her feeling his penis move, feeling the passion in her mounting again, he bit down hard on her neck and held her tighter.

She thought she would pass out, but instead he pulled out and murmured, "I want to see your face when you come. He let her go. She laid down on her back while he leaned down and began

kissing her calves, her thighs, her breasts, softly licking her neck and finally moving to her mouth. He held his penis and moved it against her clitoris, teasing her, putting it in just a little, taking it out, escalating her fire and his. She surrendered to his control, opening her legs farther, farther, reaching up and digging her nails into his back, and looking directly into his dark eyes, he plunged his length into her again, and again. Their body meeting at every height, he switched beats and pulled out ever more on every thrust, slamming his penis back into her, then gently, then hard again. He took great pleasure in watching her face, her nipples hard, her body lost in the passion. She could feel the muscles in his back get ever more tense. She could feel his orgasm mounting. He grabbed her buttocks with both of his hands and plunged deep into her and they convulsed into moaning spasms together. They lay there silently, electrified for a few moments.

"Don't move," Towney said softly, "I'm not ready to let you go yet." Still inside her he moved so they could lie side by side, Delaney's head laid dreamily against his shoulder, his penis still hard within her throbbing, wet vagina, they sweetly dozed off.

In the morning Delaney got up and jumped into the shower while Towney threw on some clothes. "I do not know if I could stand this every day." Delaney looked up quizzically, wet and wrapped in a terry robe. "All this sex. It might ruin me."

"You are already ruined. We all are. Coffee?"

Towney opened the refrigerator. "Empty. Don't you live here?"

"I'm not here very much."

"Nothing of Delaney Shaw is in this apartment. No photos, no memorabilia. It's like being in a motel room."

Delaney laughed and looked around. "See, this is why I liked your house so much." He responded by tweaking her nose, "Yes, I know it's very empty. It's because of the fire. Our house burnt down when I was four. Truth is, it exploded. I do not remember the details too well, but it absolutely left an impression. I have strange blurry images of the house. It was white, I think. I remember for a long time after the fire, reaching for things, little things, like a Barrett, or my hair

brush, and every time came the reminder. Everything is gone." She stopped for a moment, then realized Toney was staring, "Oh, stop looking at me like that or I will never tell you anything again."

He grabbed her and pulled her close to him, "I want to know everything there is about you, when you cut your first teeth and when they fell out, who your friends are, where you went to school. Everything." He kissed her, then abruptly let her go, "But not right now. I have a full day of appointments straight into nine this evening."

"Oh, had your fun, now off to slay the dragons?"

He kissed her on the nose, "That's right, and there are many out there. I'll call you tomorrow, then. Oh, and don't forget to make an appointment when you want to show me that proposal."

"Don't worry, love. You'll be the first person to know about it."

Delaney dressed and went to the Philly Deli to meet Daniel for breakfast. "How far did you get?"

"You're looking extremely glowy this morning. Toney on again?" Delaney looked sheepish, "Umhmmm. Well try to keep your wits about you. I have the preliminary studies done. Its 240.75 acres, Delaney, and it looks good. There were already borings taken on the island so the engineers had a much easier time then we expected. Still, the best news is water. There is definitely fresh water."

"Those bastards! 500k! That island is worth a fortune. I have to hire a local attorney."

"Delaney, I would wait until you speak to Wilson. He was right, you know about the cost. You do not have the money these people do."

"Okay, I'll give him a few more days. But I am going forward as if the island is mine already. If I can get a proposal together, I can present it to Thorndike Bank."

"Thorndike will definitely take an appointment with you then."

"Yes, and don't start. I have enough doubts of my own to contend with."

"All right, all right. Let's go to my office and hammer this proposal out so you can give it to him tomorrow. The sooner he comes in on this, the better. He does have the money, and the clout you need."

Delaney and Daniel broke for lunch confident they could pull a proposal together for Delaney to give to Towney the first of next week, so she called and made an appointment with his assistant. Towney informed Aaron Delaney would be calling and listened with fascination as she explained who she was and why she needed to see Towney. He really put her through the usual screening, too. "What firm is that, Ms. Shaw? ...And you have a proposal on what type of development? Ummhumm . . . is ten okay? It will be you and a Mr. Shafer . . . fine it's confirmed."

## Chapter XIV

Delaney woke up feeling anxious without knowing why.

Towney headed off to the beach around noon. He called ahead and had the caretakers open up the place, spruce it up and stock up on food. He was very specific about what he wanted, cold chicken, cracked crab, chilled shrimp, cheeses, crusty French breads and bottles of champagne bought up from the wine cellar and chilled.

Delaney packed everything, sweaters, bathing suit. "Do you think I'll need bowling shoes, too?" she had kidded Carol. "I mean I hear this beach cottage is anything but a cottage. It probably has an entire recreation center."

"I'd bring a tooth brush, period. You know you'll be naked all weekend. Who are you kidding? Not me, certainly."

Carol was right, Delaney mused to herself. They hadn't talked much. Just dancing, eating, and mostly so far it had been lovemaking. The chemistry between them was undeniable but she was very explicit when he invited her.

"Okay, Towney I will go with you but it would be lovely to actually speak for a change. Actually talk to each other. Perhaps take long walks on the beach."

"I thought we were going to talk next week. That's right, I see here an appointment in my schedule with your name on it. You are being very secretive about all this."

"I know, but you will be very impressed. It requires presentation, but that's business. I mean talk, get to know each other better talk.."

"Oh, I see. Sure. We can talk. You're not saying only talk, are you? Because I don't know if I can control myself."

Delaney snickered, "Well, how about we talk first, and if you say all the right things we'll move on from there."

"That's a lot of pressure, but if those are your terms, I'll agree. You don't want this in writing or anything?"

"Yes, I do." She laughed but after they hung up she was left with a sense of dread over this weekend. She wasn't actually sure she wanted to get to know him better. The more time she spent with him the more she felt pulled in by the Thorndike allure. Delaney was very glad she had decided to drive down and meet him there. She needed to be centered for yet another trip into Camelot.

It had taken Towney a long time to build this house, his house. He thought when he had to leave Chicago and take over the bank that he would never get to ever build anything ever again. Then this parcel came on the market and from the moment he surveyed it, he knew what the final product would be. He had even used his own money and of course, he had an enormous mortgage on it. Towney stared out at the sea and savored this moment. Beyond him was the tempestuous Atlantic Ocean, brackish foam from breaking waves against a field of blue surging water. The weather was perfect, an appropriately dramatic background to walk her through each room. Delaney would arrive in a few minutes and Towney would finally have the opportunity to share the results of his labors with her.

The entry from the main road was indirect leading to a view of the house that didn't quite reveal the total impact but held the promise of something really worth the effort. Much how he presented himself to Delaney when they first meet. Hoping she would want to see and know more. Something beyond what everyone else already seemed to know about him.

She pulled up to the driveway and a light came on warning of her approach. Towney punched in the code and the gate rolled smoothly away revealing an unexpected view. The house was actually completely modern and not at all the ostentatious structure she was expecting. It was almost all glass. Delaney knew just enough about architecture to be amazed, "My god," she muttered to herself, "What's holding it up?"

She got out of the car and Towney came out to greet her, brushed her cheek briefly, then stood next to her anxiously looking up at the house. "Well?"

She looked with him, "This is not at all what I was expecting."

"It's not?" he frowned a little.

"No, Towney, I was expecting Marandell."

"My mother's house? No, no." He looked at her for a moment then returned his gaze to the structure, "This is my home, Delaney."

She watched him closely and smiled at how proud he seemed to be. It was odd that while the local world certainly knew he was building it, there was very little press coverage and no one she knew had spoken of it as if they had been there.

"Is this house a secret, Towney?"

"I guess you could say that. It's sort of my private haven't. Come in please." He opened the beautiful hand carved doors and led her inside. "It's been designed in the style of the Italian architect, Paladio."

"Oh, of course, Paladia, I recognized it immediately." Delaney called over her shoulder as she ventured further inside. The entry to the house presented a view straight through to the main room and the endless watery panorama. The high white walls and blond wood floors appeared to end somewhere in the distant ocean. Only the colorful art on the walls, visible after you entered the room, revealed the space as separate from the land and sea. It truly seemed suspended in the air, above the water.

She moved through it quickly trying to take it all in at once. Every room opened to a view to the east and the water. Without the distinct style of furnishing the house might have been cold and barren of life. Instead, all the surfaces were soft stone colors. The older pieces were carefully placed on or around pieces of current designs. While Delaney didn't have much in the way of furniture herself, she knew exquisite pieces when she saw them.

She was awestruck. She felt immediately as if she could melt right into this room. There was no sense of separation between herself and the sand and the ocean and the setting sun. "Towney. This is stunning."

Towney beamed, "You like it?"

She looked up at him and he was looking around the room. "I am overwhelmed. I feel so comfortable here and yet it's very stark."

"You like the sparse look." Towney poured her a glass of wine and handed it to her.

She took it and walked over to the window. "I might simply like to be here and not talk for a while. "

"We could take a walk or I could build a fire."

"Do that and I'll wander around. Is that okay?"

He seemed very different here, almost shy. He was studying her carefully. Every time she touched something he began to explain, "That I picked up in Mexico."

"Hey Towney? I'd like to discover the treasures here myself. Do you mind?"

"No, no. Go right ahead. I'll just make us a nice cozy fire."

"You do that."

As he reluctantly trudged off to get some more wood, Delaney walked around and ran her fingers over the surfaces. The house drew her in tacitly like wonderful sculpture. She always tried to touch the forbidden marble and granite statues in the museums. It made them come alive for her. And this house was a cornucopia of textures and temperatures. Cold stone, warm woods, slippery copper, creamy leathers. Towney built a fire trying not to let her know he was watching her every move. She smiled to herself and mused at hard it obviously was for him to let her loose in this, his fortress, but he did it as she requested. And she meandered up the floating staircase and onto the loft areas, around the exterior deck. The house filled with the orange tones of firelight and crackling wood.

Delaney breathed in the salt air and breathed out all the tension in her body. He joined her on the upstairs deck, a bottle of wine in one hand and a blanket in the other. They sat down together on the lounge, bundled up closely and sipped in silence watching the purple dusk fuse into midnight blue.

The ocean fell into its calm night rhythm, the soft steady licking and lapping of the shoreline.

"I may never leave here, you know," she finally said.

"Tell me."

"This is the closest thing I have felt to coming home since our house burnt down. It's very strange. And I have always loved the beach. I don't know exactly what it is. The house took me in and put its arms around me. Does everyone feel this way when they come here?"

"I don't, ah . . . " he hesitated, then began again, "I don't really know. You are my very first guest."

Delaney sat up and turned to look at him. His lovely face so serious even when he frowned, as he was now, his dimples were still there, his dark eyes warm and sad, "Seriously Towney? What an honor. Thank you."

He looked away and out to the sunset, "I don't know if it's exactly an honor . . . "

She turned around again and snuggled in against his chest, "Why not? It's amazing. I would think you'd want to show the world. I would think it should be on the cover of ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST. I don't understand."

"Do you need to?"

Delaney smirked, "Probably."

Towney nodded in agreement. "Right."

"Tell me why I'm your first guest?"

"Later. I'll tell you all my secrets, later. You tell me. Tell me about the house."

"Okay. I'll try," she sat up a little. "Whoever designed this house was a very complicated person."

"Why do say that?"

"Because I see such diversity here. And yet there is a blending as well. The house is complex, and yet appears simple. Quite a feat of engineering, yet plain lines, and strong form. Striking in its contradictions. The architect probably possesses those same qualities."

Towney smiled and drew her in closer, "Tell me more about this person."

Delaney spoke into the soft skin of his neck, inhaling the sandalwood soap he used, "Everything is perfectly placed, the careful way the colors are muted against the soft woods. That shows me the person is very conscious of the impact of the interior on tone and mood."

"Really? A conscious individual? And what else?"

Delaney looked up at his profile in the moonlight, "I sense seriousness in the starkness and compassion in the soft woods and stone, but the person has a spirited side, a sense of humor as well. The artwork is colorful, bold and very abstract."

"This is fascinating. You can tell all this from the house. Suppose it was a team of architects and designers instead of one person?"

"No, I don't see that at all. It is all too congruent. Everything fits too perfectly. No designer battling architects here, or making do with spaces."

"Delaney, you're just too deep for me. It's just a house."

She laughed and wrapped her arms around him, "Wait, I'll get even deeper. I will bet you this person has a particular philosophical view inherent in this design on life."

"Why do you say that?"

"Isn't it obvious? Look at all the emphasis on the endless view. I'd say this is due to a belief that life is both limitless and limited and fluctuates like the tides," she said feeling rather smug and self satisfied.

Towney burst out laughing, "You read that somewhere."

She joined him, "In ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST. I couldn't possibly come here unarmed, now could I?"

He grinned and she could tell he was pleased. "No, I guess not."

Delaney jumped up from the lounge and grabbed his hand, "Okay, enough talking. I'm cold out here and starving. Let's eat!"

Towney had supper all set up in front of the fire. Large pillows on the floor, a linen table cloth and candles on the coffee table. Cold chicken, salad, and china plates. "How wonderful! A man who can cook for me."

They nibbled on everything with enthusiasm, finished the champagne and snuggled together on the floor, slightly tipsy and sleepy.

"You know what I wonder about you, Towney?"

"What?"

"If you're capable of complete surrender."

"To whom?"

"To anyone. Okay, not anyone. To a woman. Can you surrender to a woman?"

"What a question. Can you surrender to a man?"

"No. I haven't yet, anyway. Have you?"

"To a man. No. Absolutely not."

"I mean to a woman. I think we're supposed to. I think that's what love is about. Surrender."

Towney winced, "God, I hope not. I don't think I'm capable of it. What does it mean, anyway?"

Delaney became very solemn, "I think it means a willingness to be completely vulnerable, not hiding or withholding anything. Not emotionally, not physically, nothing. Complete capitulation."

Towney chuckled, "Wow. And that's what you want from a man?"

"That's what I demand." She rolled over and got on top of him holding his hands above his head. "So, Towney, are you going to surrender your body to me this evening, to do with as I please?"

"I don't know. You're pretty scary. You might want to tie me up and torture me."

"That's exactly what I want to do. How did you know?" She pulled his sweater over his head and wrapped it around his arms. "There. Now you have to do my bidding."

Towney giggled as Delaney swept down and began to bite his stomach. "You're tickling me. Stop!"

"Be with it, Towney. Simply let yourself be with the sensations. You have no idea what it's like to push beyond your boundaries of pain."

"Pain!"

"Yes, baby, pain."

He stopped laughing and looked at her stretched above him, holding him in place. His hesitation was met with a raspberry on his neck. "Lighten up, lover. I'm just playing with you."

"You had me going for a minute."

"I know. Wasn't it wonderful? You stepped into another reality for a minute." She chuckled and rolled next to him. "Exploration of oneself and others, is absolute necessity."

He pulled his sweater down, "We don't know each other at all, do we?"

"Towney, I only know the taste of your neck and the feel of your chest against my cheek. We have a lot left to explore about one another."

"There seems to be a lot there." He gestured towards Delaney.

"And there. What about you, Towney? And this house. Tell me who is the Townsend Thorndike that did this? I don't know him at all."

He laid his head back against the pillow and sighed. "What do you want to know?"

"Where did a banker's son get all this creativity for one thing?"

"I don't know." He sat up on his elbow looking her in the eye. "I always sketched and painted when I was a child. Then later sculpted. My father didn't understand my fascination with art. He discouraged it. Maybe that's what made it so attractive to me in my teens. My one rebellion, sculpting classes!"

"Sculpting to architecture?"

"We took a family vacation to Europe when I was fourteen. Italy. Rome. The museums began to seem to me to be more of the art than the artwork inside. I became fascinated and started sketching them."

Delaney pointed to the drawing of the Louvre over the fireplace. "That's one of yours?"

He appropriately blushed, "Yes. It's not very good."

"Oh, bullshit. You would never have hung it in such plain view if it weren't. Go on."

"After that it was my passion. Everywhere I went I sketched buildings. I went to college, then grad school. My father got sick and died and that's that."

"That's that? What's that?"

"I'm a banker now. I started out to something else and my father died."

"And you designed this house and everything in it? Right?"

"Yes."

"And no one has been here except me because?"

Towney stared at the ceiling, "I don't know. It's my haven. Am I not entitled to a private spot? Does everything I do have to be splashed all over the papers?"

"Sure, Towney. Everyone is entitled to that, but it makes no sense to me. If architecture is your dream, then this house is part of your dream. Why hide it from the world? You're not exactly what I would call publicity shy!"

"Well, I'm shy about this. Can we just leave it at that?"

"No, I don't think so. There's something going on here. What? Is it too revealing of who you are. Is that it?"

"I don't know."

"Is it, love me, love my work? You're afraid people won't like it. It is somehow not worthy of a Thorndike to be doing? No critical acclaim to your masterpiece?"

Towney ignored this comment and laid back on the pillow. Delaney went on. "Are you one of those people who can't do anything they don't do perfectly, Towney?"

"It's not like that. You know whatever I do has to live up to a certain standard. People expect things from me."

"Oh, I see, and so whatever you do has to be done brilliantly or you'll somehow fail, who? Who do you fail if you don't perform perfectly all the time?"

"This conversation is too heavy for me." He stood up and went into the kitchen. Delaney followed and watched him slam dishes around for a few minutes.

"I've obviously offended you. Would you like me to leave?"

"No!"

"Then, what's up here Towney? I'm sorry, I just don't get it and I want to know you. I can only guess you wanted to know me to if I'm the only person you've ever brought here. Am I wrong?"

"I'm sorry. It's just that I've always blamed my father for me not doing what I want."

"How convenient."

He looked up at her abruptly, "Who are you to speak to me this way? You don't know anything about me."

"Don't kid yourself, Towney. You're very transparent, to anyone who is really looking."

His voice rose, "How dare you say that to me?"

Delaney grabbed her hair and twisted it into usual ponytail, "Someone should have said that to you a long time ago, Towney. That and a lot of other things. I guess this is what it means to have lived a privileged life. Everyone is afraid to tell you the truth."

He banged the coffee pot hard on the counter. "Damn you, Delaney!"

They stood and glared at each other over the counter. Neither one of them wanted to say things they would regret later.

Towney threw up his hands, "Okay. Fine. Suppose you're right? Suppose all this time it hasn't been the whole inheritance business that keeps me at the bank and instead it's my own fear of failure?"

She untied her hair again and let it fall, "What inheritance business?"

He started making coffee, "Want some? I think this may be a long night." Delaney nodded. "When my father died, his will stipulated I go into the bank until I'm thirty-five or be disinherited completely."

"God, Towney, what a terrible thing to do to you."

He glanced at her over his shoulder, "Are you making fun of me?"

"No. I think it was very manipulative."

"Was it? Now I wonder. Maybe the old man's point was to see if what I really wanted was to be an architect. Enough to walk away from millions of dollars. Quite a test for me, wouldn't you say?"

"So, it worked. You went into the bank?"

"Yes, money won out over passion. He used to tell me that all the time. That the architecture would grow old, lose its appeal, if I weren't financially successful at it. Interestingly, he just assumed I had no talent, that I couldn't possibly make it. He could never understand why I didn't just take

what was handed to me. He believed in money. I guess I am more of his son than I thought." He stopped what he was doing and leaned on the counter looking shaken. "You're right, you know."

Delaney tied her hair up again, "Oh, good. I love to be right. About what?"

"No one speaks to me this way. No one is ever this honest with me. Not friends, not family. No one."

His face was very close to hers. She could see, he was wounded by her candor. She reached up and brushed his hair back from those riveting eyes. "Oh, you're not so scary, once you've been tied up."

Towney took her hands and kissed them. "I'm not sure I should thank you. You've given me a lot to think about. Transparent? Did you really say that to me?"

She nodded and laughed, "Yes, I think I did." Delaney stood up and took off her sweater, and let her hair loose again, "Now, what exactly does a girl have to do to get laid around here, anyway?"

Delaney awakened to the orange sky as the sun came up, wrapped herself in the blanket and went outside to watch the sun come up. Their lovemaking the night before lingered on her skin, the scent of his soap was in her hair. Every time with Towney was different and each time it became less carnal, more loving, always intensely passionate. Their bodies mingled and vanished inside of incredible sensations. Her bravado of the night before vanished in the light. She was frightened of these feelings; of the man who was beginning to possess her every thought. He couldn't even commit himself to the work he loved, the work he trained for. Every cell in her body was screaming, get out now, while you're still intact, but she was transfixed, by the sunrise, by the memory of his body in hers. Transfixed by the possibility that this man could love her.

Work is what she needed. The island. Her island. Finally, a real project. She'd become immersed and it would center her. Work always centered her. She was convinced it was the distraction she needed to hold onto herself.

Towney joined her. "You're up very early."

She smiled up at him and patted the chair, "Come sit. The light beckoned me. In a glass house, the sun rules."

"You know what they say about people, who live in glass houses, don't you?"

She tousled his hair and snuggled in. "Yes, I know. They're transparent."

## Chapter XV

Delaney and Daniel worked day and night for the next week and when they were done felt they had a professional enough outline proposal for Thorndike Bank to look over. Towney was not happy about Delaney working instead of spending time with him. She hung up the phone with him and Carol asked, "What's up with him, he's called three times today?"

"Oh, Carol, it's good for him to want me, pursue me. I think he likes it. I don't think too many women have said no to this man. And I need the space. I can see how easy it could be to wrap myself up again. That's the one thing I don't want to happen."

"I hope it goes well for you Delaney. If not, your evening at the Ritz-Carlton isn't going to be any fun."

"It will go well. It has to." She promised Towney that after the proposal was presented she would spend the rest of the day with him and he made elaborate plans.

The next morning, Delaney dressed carefully in her most conservative suit, pulled her hair back into its usual ponytail and dotted on some lipstick. She was visibly nervous which she would have been even if it wasn't her lover to which she was making this proposal. That fact only added to the tension she felt. This was meeting Towney on his turf, however, and it was a big turf. She wanted him to see her as competent, capable, as an equal. She and Daniel paced in the waiting room. Aaron announced them, "Towney, a Ms. Shaw and a Mr. Shafer to see you."

"Mr. Shafer?"

"Oh, you were not expecting him?" Aaron smirked. "Shall I send him away? Open the hideabed?"

"No thank you," Towney glared, "Just send them in."

"Fine, fine. Ms. Shaw, Mr. Shafer, Mr. Thorndike will see you now."

Daniel was visibly impressed. "This office is the size of the lobby in my building. Quite a view. How are you Towney?" Dan extended his hand.

"Good, good. I didn't realize you two worked together."

"Daniel and I have done some rehabs together. We own the fire house on second street in old city."

"I've seen that. Wonderful restoration. You really created a lot of space in there. "

"It wasn't easy, those support columns, oh that's right, I did read you studied to be an architect . . . well, thanks. It was a great project and we're completely leased up now."

Towney smiled his most charming smile for Delaney, "I see you have some plans. Let's sit at the conference table. Tell me what you have for me."

Towney and Daniel took a seat and Delaney handed him the written specifications and the narrative while Daniel unrolled the plans on the table. "The trip I went on, a few weeks ago, was to Maryland. I have inherited an island in the Chesapeake."

Towney sat straight up in his chair and said sharply, "An island in the Chesapeake! There are only a few habitable islands there. What island?"

Delaney was a little taken aback by his tone, but went on, "It's called Kent Island. Do you know it?" No response, "It's almost in the middle of the bay, two hundred and forty acres of paradise dumped out of nowhere, into my lap."

The blood drained from Towney's face. "Kent island? Are you certain?"

His behavior took Delaney aback, "Of course. I'm certain. Are you all right?"

Towney steeled himself and sat back in his chair. "I'm fine. Go on." He sat stoically through architectural drawings, engineer studies, cost projections, without listening. He picked up a rubber band and began snapping it through his fingers. Bates had taken him again. He had his 750k plus another hundred or so in plans. In addition, he gave money to the environmental groups, there were

attorney fees. Delaney couldn't read what was going on for Towney. He sat there very quietly, moving that terrible rubber band through his fingers. Not asking any questions.

"...and that's it. Except the nine lots at the south end of the island and I have a right of first refusal if they try to sell them off. I feel quite confident they won't want to sell them. Most of them have been there for many years, so we think they will elect to stay. It's our plan to trade those lots for other locations on the island."

Shafer chimed in, "What do you think Towney?"

"I think I have to look over it again. Could you leave all this here until tomorrow?"

Delaney and Daniel looked at each other for a moment and then Delaney recovered and answered, "Certainly, take your time. Thank you for taking the meeting." She extended her hand and he shook it, coldly then shook Daniel's.

"Thank you for coming, now if you will excuse me, I have something to which I need to attend." He abruptly left the room.

"Warm fellow."

Delaney felt as if he slapped her eyes were stinging with tears she did not want. "Let's get out of here. I need a drink."

Aaron looked up as they moved quickly through his office and out into the hallway. Oh, oh, something is not right, he thought. Was she crying? Mean Towney, toying with people like that.

Towney was in his private study furiously trying to locate George bates. "Listen Kate, you tell that son of a bitch I want to talk to him, now! You find him and tell him to get his ass in my office before the end of the day!"

Kate had never heard Thorndike so angry. What had George done? It had to be this deal on which he was working. She knew it was big. George came through the door whistling, "hello, gorgeous."

"I am about to ruin your mood. Thorndike called. He wants you in his office today. He sounded furious. He was cursing."

"Shit. Did he give you any indication what was up?"

"No. but I would not call him, George. He wants to see you, in person. Get in your car and get up there."

He could only imagine Towney found out he tricked Kimball into signing those contracts. Roscoe was too much of a pussy to tell him, though. How did he find out?

Aaron announced him and led him into Towney's private office. It was after seven.

"You wanted to see me?"

"Oh, yes, George I did. Come in."

"Look, before you go on, the detective found that woman. You know the heir?"

"You mean Delaney Shaw?"

George was dumbfounded, "How did you find her?"

"Oh, I didn't find her, she found me. Look on the table there."

George went over and saw the plans for Kent Island. "Whose are these?"

"Hers. Seems you have a lot of explaining to do George. So sit and do it."

George told him everything from the beginning, from finding Kimball on the beach to tricking him into signing the contracts. Towney just let him talk. When he was finished, he said, "George, we have no choice but to give the island back to her."

"She cannot afford to contest it. And I don't think Wilson, Judge Wilson, that is, about to admit his son broke the law and just hand it back to her. It is not just our choice here, you know. They are in it deep as well. So are you."

Towney had wrestled with this dilemma all day. He couldn't deny he had a real attraction for Delaney, but this was business. He needed this project. The entire industry watched everything he did. His family watched him. He did not need a scandal right now. Maybe if he went to Delaney and explained the situation to her, she would become his partner. But then he would have to tell her how her other partner, George, defrauded Kimball, kept her from knowing about him. She would never trust him after he told her the whole story. She barely trusted him as it was. He remembered her words, "... whatever you do has to be done brilliantly or you'll somehow fail, who? Who do you fail if you don't perform perfectly all the time?" Delaney would say it was bullshit. She would tell him the

truth. That he doesn't need the project at all; that he wants the money and he wants to design it as well. Another choice between passion and money.

"What are you going to do Towney?"

"I don't know yet. Just tell me, George do I have everything. Have you told me everything?"

"Everything. Towney. I will leave the detective's file with you. There is a lot in there."

"Fine, now George, get out. I can't stand looking at your shyster face another minute, but stay in town."

"Okay, Towney. I'm leaving." George headed for the door, feeling better. It was all out in the open now, and Towney had to help him work this through. He'd call Roscoe from the hotel and let him know Towney was in on the whole thing. They needed to all meet, including Judge Wilson and figure out what to do next.

## Chapter XVI

The next morning Delaney received a certified letter. In it she found the first right of refusal for the nine lots on the island. They were going to sell, all of them at once! If she wanted those lots, she had to come up with \$180,000, 20k each. How could she come up with the money? She certainly could not go to Towney, or even his bank after yesterday's humiliation. No, she would have to try to raise the money on some of her properties. Delaney decided she would go to the bank she did most of her deals with, Liberties.

"Everything looks in order, you know we have to do appraisals on these."

"Look, I only have ten days to come up with this cash. Can we expedite this in any way?"

"Let me see what I can do. You are going to be a little thin paying this back"

"I know, I know, just do it. I will inherit an island in the Chesapeake when the will is through probate. Here's the name and phone number of the attorney handling the estate in Annapolis. Call him. He'll tell you about the land. We know each other, right? Work with me. Help me out here."

Delaney seemed frantic to the loan officer. However, he had been doing business with her and before that her mother so he assured her he would push it through as quickly as possible.

Delaney left feeling much better. She looked at the letters and decided to try to contact these people to find out why they were selling out now, and to see if she could talk them into something else instead.

One of them, a Daphne Israel, lived in Berwyn. She thought she would try dropping by her house. In person always works better.

"Hello, Mrs. Israel, I'm sorry to bother you. I'm Delaney Shaw. I am the heir to Kent Island. I just received a right of first refusal letter on your lot. Could we talk about it?"

The old woman who answered the door reluctantly let her in. "Come in. How are you related to Kimball?"

"I don't know. I never even knew he existed until he died."

"Poor thing. All alone, we thought . . . anyway what can I do for you?"

"Mrs. Israel, why are you selling your cottage?"

"Don't want to, have to. My husband liked to play in the stock market. When he died, our finances were left a mess. Except this house that has a sizable mortgage on it, I have nothing else to live on. When Georgie came to me to buy the land I felt bad, but I need the money."

"Georgie?"

"Yes, George Bates. His parents own one of the cottages on the island. We are all selling it to him. Sort of keeps it in the family so to speak."

"May I ask how much he's paying you for your lot?"

"I probably should not say, but I can tell you, it's a lot more than he told us originally. I guess he wants it pretty badly. He needs it."

"How do you know I won't exercise my right?"

"Georgie told us you don't have any money. Told us there was no way you could possibly buy us all out if we stuck together."

"He did, huh?"

"Don't think badly of him. He knows most of us are older and need this money. We would never have sold out while Mr. Kimball was alive. He let us know how important these lots were to him."

And he hand picked us. So many people wanted to buy those lots, but he made certain he chose people who respected the land the way he did. Georgie is simply taking care of us for Mr. Kimball."

"Well, thank you, Mrs. Israel. I'll be in touch."

It was the same story with everyone she contacted. George was a wonderful boy just looking out for their welfare. They knew him. They didn't know her. Delaney's only hope was to get that loan and she was running out of time. Worse yet, she hadn't heard from Towney since that meeting. She felt foolish and stupid. "Which is not a new feeling for me, by the way," she told Carol.

"I just cannot figure it out, Delaney. He left you infatuated after the weekend and by Friday it was over. What happened at that meeting?"

"I don't know. It started fine. He was warm and friendly. Then after we began talking he just sat there. Stony faced, almost rude. And then practically threw us out. He humiliated me!"

"Maybe he is one of those men who can't stand aggressive women. How's the loan coming?"

"I cannot get through to the loan officer, Charlie Baxter, you know him. He won't return my calls. I'm running out of time. You don't have any money, do you?"

"Ha. Yeah a few thousand. You could have it if it will help . . . Delaney, why don't you call Towney. Or better yet make up some excuse to see him. Didn't you say you left your proposal there? Make an appointment to go over and get them back."

"Yes, I could call Aaron and arrange to pick the plans up. He never returned them. I guess it couldn't hurt anything, maybe something else happened. I'll do it now before I have time to analyze it. This might be groveling."

Aaron was delighted to hear form Delaney Shaw. More Thorndike intrigue. He arranged for her to come when he knew Towney would be there waiting for another meeting. Instead of wrapping up the plans to wait for her by his desk he left them in Towney's office. He couldn't wait for the fireworks to begin.

Delaney began her day by stopping off to see Baxter at the bank. He would have to see her if she sat outside her door. "Um, Delaney."

"Yeah, um Delaney. What's going on here Charlie? You have been hedging my calls for days and I'm running out of time if I have to go to another bank."

"Come in. I'm sorry. The underwriters turned down your mortgage."

"Why, Charlie, you said, the numbers worked. "

"I am sorry, Delaney. Money is getting very tight right now, especially investment money. The numbers that worked yesterday won't work tomorrow. And I have tell you, if you cannot get the money here, with all the strings I pulled, I don't think you'll get it anywhere."

"Nothing creative we can do?"

"I'm sorry, Delaney. You know if I could do anything for you I would."

"Oh, well. Thanks for trying Charlie."

Delaney left and headed for Thorndike Bank. Towney's office. If he were interested in the project, it could not happen now, anyway. Those nine lots were an important key. If she cannot raise money on her properties, she cannot even take Midlantic Marine to court to contest the sale. She would probably lose the island, as well.

She took a deep breath and opened the front door to the building. What was she going to say to him? Sorry, forget everything I proposed. It was just a joke. She got onto the elevator and pressed 30, where you got off to go onto his private elevator. She hoped she did not have to see him right now. She felt like crying. More people got onto the elevator at each floor. It was lunchtime and quite crowded. On the fifteenth floor a young man got on, Delaney recognized as one of Towney's hanger-ons from the chamber luncheon. She slinked to the back. She did not want him to see her right now. "Hey, you're George. George Bates, right?"

Unbelievably, he held out his hand to the man in front of her. "Yes, oh, hi, you are Evan, is it?"

"Yes, you and I and Towney played golf last summer at Whitemarsh, remember?"

"Yeah, quite a day. Must've been 102. Awful."

"The heat never affects Towney's game, though. Are you here to see him?"

"Yes, we're working on a building project together."

"Something in the city? I thought you were strictly building in Maryland now."

"Yes, we're still concentrated there. This is a Chesapeake Bay project. A real winner."

"Anything I can get in on?"

"Sorry, Evan. This deck is already stacked. Next time."

"Well, I get off here. Good luck."

Delaney backed away from George Bates. A friend of Townsend Thorndike. My Townsend Thorndike. Suddenly the picture got crystal clear. The problem with the loan, Towner's reaction to the proposal. They were in it together. Her stomach wretched. She was going to throw up. She held her hand in front of her mouth with one hand and leaned across and pressed the button for the next floor pushing Bates out of the way.

"Hey, watch it! You stepped on my shoes."

But Delaney was already off the elevator and puking into the corridor ashtray.

## Chapter XVII

Carol got back from lunch and found Delaney at her desk, pale and weak. "Are you okay? Delaney, you look terrible. What happened?"

"He's in on it Carol. Towner's in on the deal to steal my island."

"What! What happened, how do you know?"

"The man who made the deal on the nine lots. Bates. I ran into him on the elevator. Heard him talking with that Evan person, you know him from the chamber meetings, about Towner and some project. In the Chesapeake Bay! How could it be anything other than the island?"

"Oh my god! No wonder Towner's not calling you. You don't think he knew before . . ."

"I think he knew. I think it's possible the whole romance thing was a big ploy. Maybe he knew about me long before he even met me at Downey's. It was a little strange, don't you think, the way he sought me out?" she sniffed into her tissue.

"I don't want to cry. The bank turned me down, too. Another funny coincidence, don't you think? Tight money. Bullshit!"

"What are you going to do?"

"I do not have the money to hire an attorney to contest the sale. I cannot buy the lots. I can take my \$500,000 and consider myself lucky."

"I think there is something else you can do. You can be as slimy as they are."

"How? They seem to know more about me than I know about myself."

"Exactly. Maybe it's time to do a little research ourselves. Between us we can come up with a little money. Let's hire someone to find out about the company that bought the island. Who the principals are. You've suspected from the beginning that this deal was down and dirty. Maybe, they will not want the world to know just how dirty."

"Blackmail? You're talking about blackmail. I'm a nice middle class kid from northeast Philly. I cannot blackmail anyone."

"No, I'm not. I'm talking about the wheeling and dealing of the world of high finance. And we are about to enter it. What's the name of the company that bought the island? Midlantic Marine? I'm going to call a private detective. My god, I have been waiting my whole life to say that. How exciting."

A week later and George was still in Philadelphia, always available. He was beginning to feel like a regular gofer. He sat and waited for Towney to get off the phone. The judge and Roscoe will be here at Friday at four o'clock. What did you find out?"

"She signed off on the right of first refusals on all nine pieces. We go to settlement on them Wednesday. Nothing can screw this up. The judge has been working on it himself. I don't think she is going to contest the sale of the island, either, Roscoe said he hasn't heard one word from her."

"Well, then when the will is through probate we can move forward." Towney spoke in a drone.

"What's wrong? It is all working out. Why the long face?"

"You wouldn't understand George. Come back tomorrow, I've got some work to do." He left and Towney turned and gazed out at the winter skyline of the city. He had to make a choice and he made it. He told himself there was too much at stake here, his future, his bank's future, George and

Roscoe were on the line as well. And money, lots of money. He couldn't very well call himself a Thorndike if money was not his god. All for an attraction that would probably burn itself out in a few months anyway. His affairs never lasted. Nevertheless, it bothered him that he never spoke to her after the day he heard her proposal. He couldn't bring himself to pick up the phone and call her. What could he possibly say to her? I don't want to see you anymore. It was a lie, and she'd see through it. Worse yet, she'd tell him she knew it all along. She knew he was fickle. It was better this way. He just wished he could stop thinking about her.

Aaron came in with his mail and found Towney staring out the window again. His mood had been sour for a while now, ever since Delaney Shaw made her presentation and left in tears.

"Towney, whatever happened to the beauty with the green eyes? Another broken heart?"

He responded with a glare. "Her plans are still here. I was just wondering what to do with them.

Towney glanced over at the conference table at them. "Leave them. I'm certain she'll call and come and get them. Ah, Aaron. Could you let me know if she does call for them?"

"Well, surely, I will, but lament later - you have some calls to return, and your mother has been trying to see you for days. I wouldn't put off Dragon Lady any longer."

"Don't be bitchy, Aaron. Tell her I'm in all day."

"Tell who?" Eleanor Thorndike had poked her head in the door.

"You, that's who. Sorry. I've been in the middle of something"

"Not banking something. Is it your own project?"

Towney grinned in amazement, "Yes. However did you know that? Never mind, don't tell me. That woman 's intuition stuff makes me nervous. What did you want to see me about?"

"The board meeting coming up. It's time to elect new officers and since you are so busy elsewhere these days I was wondering how you'd feel about co-chairing the board?"

"With you?"

Her turn to smile, "Of course, dear."

Towney appraised his mother. She seemed different to him today, looking very smart in her DK suit and new short haircut. What was up here? "New outfit? New suit? Got a man in your life, Mother? You're looking younger all the time."

"That's the whole idea, silly. And, no. No man."

"I wouldn't mind co-chairing it with you at all, Mother. In fact, you're right, it would be a great help to me right now."

She stood up, "Good, then it's settled. They'll do whatever you say. Have Arnold send off a memo to the board members with your recommendation. Thank you."

"That's Aaron, not Arnold."

"Whatever."

"You never told me, why don't you like Aaron, he's extremely good at his job."

"I don't know. I just don't trust him. I see the way he looks at you sometimes, it gives me the shivers. It's not natural, darling."

Towney sneered at her, "No wonder he calls you that."

"What does he call me?"

"Dragon Lady."

She sniffed the air, "It fits. Thank you, again."

"For what, Mother? The bank is yours anyway. "

"And don't you forget it." On the way out Eleanor growled at Aaron and he hissed back at her behind her back.

Towney went over and looked at the plans. The day Delaney and Shafer were there he hadn't paid any attention to them at all. He unfurled the blueprints and architectural drawings and went over them painstakingly. They were good designs. The concept was very close to Towney's but the design strategy was more natural, less dense. Their plan for the marina was actually better, had easier access for larger boats. "Very smart."

Aaron looked up, "Did you need something Towney?"

"No. And close the door, please."

"A little late to be looking at those, wouldn't you say?"

Towney yelled, "Close the damned door!"

He went back to the plans. Their building was planned in three phases. The numbers reflected what they probably thought the bank would be willing to lend. As properties sold, they would have the money to build more and so on. Towney's plan was much more aggressive. No phases. He had decided the construction in phases with all it was going to take to get equipment and laborers to the island would be more expensive in the long run. His plan counted on this being a winner from the start. And with his money and contacts it would be.

There were photographs of the island that were beautiful, even in winter there was the sense of lushness about the land. Several of the photographs included Delaney smiling and pointing. He picked one and put it into his jacket pocket, then began reading the narrative. It was obvious Delaney composed most of it and it was well done, clear and concise. He read the whole thing. On the last page of his copy was a hand written note that he had never seen:

Towney,

I've missed you. Am all yours for the rest of the week. Take advantage.

Love,

Del

## Chapter XVIII

Delaney poured over the report from the detective with relish. "This is just great, Carol. I'm so glad you talked me into doing this. Mid-Lantic marine, a company made up of Thorndike, Bates, Kimball and Roscoe Wilson, the Judge's son, that slimy son of a bitch. He created a deal that sold the island and the money went right back into the limited partnership. Kimball would never have seen a penny of it."

Carol looked over the copies, "Not only that, but Roscoe had the power of attorney. It's his signature on all these documents. He literally sold it to himself. This deal took place the same day Kimball died. I would imagine his father, the Supreme Court Judge, would not be too happy to have that become public knowledge."

"Carol, there is one report here that suggests Kimball may have had Alzheimer's. This could give me grounds to contest the sale. He may not have been in his right mind when he signed those contracts. The problem is I have to be able to prove it."

"You have to go down there yourself and talk to the doctor. Maybe he can help."

Delaney drove down the next day and found Doctor Cavanaugh to be a nice man. He told Delaney about Kimball's condition, "The last time I saw him he was functioning pretty well. He was getting a little forgetful, but he got here on his own, so I could not really testify he was not in his right mind."

Delaney was at a dead end, "Oh, well, thank you very much."

"Sorry, I cannot be more helpful. Oh, wait a moment, why don't you call his nephew. Let me see if I can find his name and number."

"Nephew?"

"Yes, his nephew called to find out about his condition months ago. I told him the prognosis and he said the family would be taking care of Kimball from then on. I'm sorry his name does not seem to be in the file. Let me have my administrator check around and we will call you with it."

Another relative somewhere around. Just what I need, someone else with a claim to the island. This was not good news for her. She walked by the marina and saw James, the young man

who had taken her to the island the first time. She waved and he called her over. "Hey Ms. Shaw, how's the island business?"

"Don't ask, James. I got the blues."

"You asked me about Kimball when you were here. See that old guy in the store, he used to make the mail runs once a week for him. Go in and talk to him."

Delaney went in and introduced herself to Tupper McPherson. An old salty Scotsman that spoke with a brogue. She asked him about Kimball. "You know, lassie, he kept to himself. He was already on the island when I moved here. I've known him for years, but he never did share much with me. There was a nurse over there for a while taking care of him. She came around asking about him a few months ago after he died. She was trying to find out about some relatives Kimball was looking for. Maybe she'll know something."

"Do you know her name? Did she leave a number or anything?"

"Let me look." He shuffled through his card box. "Wait a minute. Here it is. Jane Hardy here's the card from the service. You can have it." Delaney went to her car phone and called the number. A machine answered, she left a message that she was Kimball's heir to the island and where they could reach and headed home.

She got in late and found Carol still at her desk, "Any news?"

"Some possibilities. Supposedly there is a nephew and some nurse. The doctor was not much help."

"Oh, yeah, Dr. Cavanaugh called and left a message on the service. They have the nephew's name and number for you."

Delaney called the number he left. It was the doctor's home phone. "Thank you, Doctor Cavanaugh, you've been such a help to me." Delaney got off the phone fuming. "Guess who his nephew is? ...Bates! George Bates. Is it possible he really is his nephew, or that he pretended to be his nephew?"

"This guy Bates is everywhere in this, Delaney."

"I know. The more I hear about that man the more I hate him, but perhaps I've got him now. He obviously knew all along Kimball was sick with Alzheimer's. Maybe that's enough. Time to face the boys, don't you think?"

Carol vigorously agreed. "How are you going to do that?"

Delaney picked up the phone, "You'll see . . . Aaron Katz, please. Aaron, this is Delaney Shaw. I never did get by to pick up those plans I left there. Do you still have them? When would be the absolutely worst time to pick them up?"

Aaron knew he was creating mischief, here, but Towney was miserable and he so deserved to be. All those poor unsuspecting women who gave him their hearts. "He's out of town until Friday . . . shall we say around three?"

"Thanks Aaron, I will forget this."

Carol beamed, "You know you're turning into quite the bitch. It's very becoming, the cheeks redden, the eyes flash, I like it, I really do."

On Friday afternoon, Delaney gathered her papers together from the house. She wanted to be freshly dressed to go to Towney's office. She picked out the Kelly green suit with a long skirt and slit, a fitted jacket and matching shawl. Instead of her usual ponytail, she blew her hair out and let it hang on her shoulders. She even wore some mascara and blush along with her lipstick. Her briefcase packed, her impact together, she was ready to go.

Aaron was quite pleased to see her. "Ms. Shaw, great suit. It matches your eyes."

"Yes, doesn't it?" Aaron giggled, "Of course. . . stay here a moment, I'll buzz him."

"Oh, Mr. Thorndike, there's a Ms. Shaw to see you . . . umhummm . . . fine . . . he'll be right out, have a seat."

Delaney sat in the chair across from the door and crossed her legs. Aaron nodded his approval. He hoped Dragon Lady would come in now and catch this drama. When Towney came to the door, he gasped and then took a moment before he spoke. He had forgotten how dazzling she was. Noticing her impact, Delaney slowly uncrossed her long legs and stood up from the chair.

Regaining his composure he said, "Ms. Shaw, what a pleasant surprise, won't you come in? Aaron, please hold my appointments."

"Even Mumsy?" Towney scowled. "Got it, even Mumsy."

"Please have a seat."

"No thank you. I want to get right to the point. I know everything."

"Everything? What do you mean?" Towney moved to close the door.

"I know about you and your fraternity brothers, George Bates and Roscoe Wilson. Surprised?"

"Go on."

"Okay, I know about Bates pretending to be Kimball's nephew. I know he knew Kimball had Alzheimer's. I know he used that to get those contracts signed. I know all about Roscoe being the inside man on this deal. I know you're part of it and I know you used me. So do not pretend anymore.

Towney sat on the edge of the desk and watched her. She wasn't pacing around. She stood very still, laid it all out at his feet and was sure of herself, all right. Cold. Her emerald eyes were icy green. No warmth at all. My god, he suddenly realized he loved this woman.

"Say something, Towney. No answer. Fine." Delaney walked over and began to open her briefcase. "Want some proof. It's all right here in this dossier from the detective I hired." Towney stood there stunned, not by what she was saying but by the thought in his head. One he never had before. "Will you say something dammit?"

"I love you." There it was. Out of his mouth, it felt good finally to say it so he said it again, "I love you." It even surprised him. Delaney stood, her arms crossed, not saying anything.

"Right."

"I know how that must sound right now, but it is true. I did not even know it, myself, until I saw you."

Delaney regarded the man across from her closely. "It won't work Towney. I am not the same easy mark. You and your little friends screwed me over and you can't tell me you didn't know what was happening."

"Listen to me. I love you. We can work through this thing together."

"Like what, love conquers all. Another ploy. Admit you used me Towney."

"There's nothing to admit. I did not even know until you and Shafer . . ."

Delaney threw up her hands, "I don't want to hear any more of your lies. You used me and we both know it."

"Delaney, I love you. I have never said that to a woman in my life."

"Sure. This is some sort of trick, Towney and I'm not falling for it. I came here to tell you one thing. I have the grounds to contest the sale of the land. I have a friend who will lend me the money to do it and if I have to I'll go public. I'll splash Judge Wilson's name and yours all over the paper." She picked up her briefcase and headed for the door. "But you probably already knew that's what I was coming here to say. Nice try Towney. See you in court."

"What friend? Shafer. Is he the friend who will give you the money?" Towney reached out and grabbed her and as she stormed by him.

"Jealousy on you is so becoming, Towney. But don't bother."

"Wait a minute, you think I'm lying. I am not. I mean what I am saying."

"Look, Towney, you tell your friends either I'm in and I mean all the way in, or you are all going to be in the tabloids together. A group shot would be enjoyable, I think. Front page."

"Who's going to be on the front page?" It was George bates standing in the open doorway.

"Oh, don't tell me . . . let me guess . . . this must be the slimy little bastard that tricked poor old Mr. Kimball into signing a contract he could not even understand. I recognize the sneer."

George walked over and sat on the sofa, "Who's the bitch, Towney?"

"Oh, you two have never met? Excuse me. Delaney Shaw, meet George Bates. George, meet your new partner."

"Partner?"

"That's right, George, Delaney wants into the deal, and I think we better let her in."

Aaron came in to announce the judge and Roscoe were also on their way in.

"Just in time gentlemen. I think you know Delaney Shaw, Judge. Roscoe, this is the heir to Kent Island."

"What is she doing here?"

"Would you like to tell them, dear? No? Okay, I'll do it. Ms. Shaw has been doing a little investigating on her own. She discovered George here posed as Kimball's nephew and knew all about his Alzheimer's and said she will use that as grounds to contest the sale. Would that work, do you think, judge?"

"Ahem."

Delaney spoke up now. "No comment, your Honor. Well then, how about a sale where the proceeds of the sale go right back into a company your son is a partner in, leaving the owner penniless? A deal he used his power of attorney to complete."

"We would never have left Kimball penniless. It was always our intention to take good care of him. And you. . .you were going to get the half million." Roscoe whined.

"While you were stealing his land out from under him. I am certain the newspapers would be very interested in hearing your side of the story."

"That's blackmail!" Roscoe gasped.

"Is it?" Delaney hopped up on the desk top and grabbed the phone. "Then let's call the police. You accuse me of blackmail and I'll accuse you of fraud. Here you go. You make the call."

Finally the Judge spoke up, "What do you want, Ms. Shaw?"

Delaney hopped off the desk and stood up. "Ah, finally a practical man. What do you think I want gentlemen? I want in. As a full partner. I want this company to buy my island from me for two million dollars."

"Two million!" George exclaimed.

"It's worth five and we all know it . . . and I want a full 25 percent of the partnership."

"No way. I have too much in this to give it away. She's bluffing. She doesn't have the balls, pardon me, the ovaries to go through with it. Toney, talk to them."

Toney sat at his desk, "Sorry, George, I think she does, have the ovaries, that is. We've been caught and I say we take our penance and move forward. Judge?"

"I agree. So does Roscoe. George, you have no choice. The vote is cast."

Delaney walked over to the couch where Bates was seated, "Oh, George, don't be such a spoilsport, as partners we have a lot in common. We both love real estate and hate each other. I know you will understand my having my own attorney draw up the contracts. Good-bye yawl. I'll be in touch."

After she left, they were silent for a few moments, then the judge spoke up first, "I say we got out of this easy."

Roscoe chimed in, "But she did not mention one thing. That is who Kimball is to her. I think that is the one thing we have to keep to ourselves."

"That's right. If she finds out the history, we could end up without a deal again." George agreed.

George nodded, "Towney, are you in agreement that she doesn't get to know?"

Towney was in a quandary now feeling the way he did, but knowing what Delaney was capable of, he reluctantly went along, "I think you are just asking for more trouble because when she does find out, and she is very curious, she is going to know we tricked her and we will be back in here again, under fire. But I will do as you wish for now."

Delaney floated out of Towney's office and winked at Aaron. "So long, toots, you'll be seeing a lot of me. Thanks."

"My pleasure, Ms. Shaw."

## Chapter XIX

It was over, and it was just beginning. She was now in business with men she hated and mistrusted. No wonder she could never get here before, she did not know what was required. Now she did.

She hired a smart female attorney Shafer recommended, Claire O'Malley who cost her more than she had, but who was very thorough. Carol went over the contracts with her. "Everything appears to be in order, Delaney. An agreement with all parties has canceled the original contract for the land transfer involved. The land officially transfers to you at probate on the twentieth. You have

an agreement of sale on the island to Midlantic Marine for two million dollars. All signed and sealed with a hundred thousand dollar deposit.

Carol was grinning, "How did she swing that?"

"She's brilliant, go on."

"You go to settlement with Midlantic Marine on the twenty-first. Your partnership papers in Midlantic Marine are already filed. You're set to go. How do you feel about being a real estate tycoon?"

"Marvelous. It's what I have been planning for since I was ten years old. Too bad my mother isn't around to see all this. Right now, we are only corresponding through telegrams. I have yet actually to speak to her. It worries me that she won't call."

"Look on the bright side. She would hate you building on that pristine land. She'd try to talk you out of it, probably organize demonstrations. Call Green Peace. You know it's true."

Delaney knew how her mother was about the environment. She would definitely be against the development, but she still worried about her.

"I have to go. There's a meeting at the bank about Kent Island."

"Towney, huh? How's it going between you and him?"

"All business, Carol and that's the way I like it. Can you imagine him telling me he loves me in the midst of all this and expecting me to believe him?"

"He might love you, Delaney. Have you considered that?"

"No. He loves one thing only - money. See ya." Still, there was a part of Delaney that hoped he did love her, that relished the idea of denying Townsend Thorndike something he wanted.

She made certain she was always dressed and looked perfectly for the partners' meetings and always arrived early, "What's the mood today?"

"Surly, darling, s u r l y. So watch out. Looking fab in fushia, Delaney."

Aaron and Delaney were getting chummy. They had lunch a few times, went shopping, but never talked about Towney. They agreed from the beginning he was off limits.

Delaney loved these meetings. Technical decisions made, budget drawn. She was building an entire town equipped with golf course, security force, fire house, roads, health club, stores, bicycle paths and wildlife preserve. This took great planning. Especially when you factored in that everything has to be loaded onto boats and shipped to the island. Temporary docks have to be built and an area dredged before they can even begin getting equipment to the island. They will factor all these things into the cost of the housing, plus upkeep and maintenance.

She was learning about the engineering aspect and it thrilled her. she had even signed up for more architectural courses as temple. She did not want to be just some silent partner. Her intention was to be involved in everything. And she was rarely silent, much to everyone's consternation.

She did not trust her partners so she had them send her copies of everything that she painstakingly went over every night. If she found something questionable, she was on the phone. George hated her involvement. It worked on his nerves. "Can't you do something with your girlfriend, Towney?"

"My girlfriend?"

"Yeah, I know all about your little romance. All the time we could have used you to bring her in line."

"Does she strike you as someone whom we can bring in line?"

"No, but if she had fallen for you, maybe. Your charm has converted many."

"Not her."

"What did you do to her, anyway Towney?"

"I tried to steal her island, defraud her out of millions, remember?"

Delaney remembered. Every time he spoke her green eyes narrowed to slits and she practically hissed if he asked her a question.

George spoke up one morning, "Towney wants to design the hotel. He has the background for it."

"And collect a fee?" Delaney snapped.

"Well why not, if we hired an outside architect, they would collect a fee," Roscoe added.

"I want Daniel Shafer to do it. Towney hasn't designed anything in two years. He's out of touch."

Towney looked wounded, "You saw what I can do. And I am not out of touch. Stop talking about me as if I am not here. Your boyfriend is not designing anything I'm financing, either."

Delaney ignored his reference to their weekend together and spoke around him, "It's not just Towney's decision, George, Daniel is one great architect."

"Girls, girls, calm down." George loved being the referee. "I say we allow them both to do some drawings and we look at them anonymously, and see what we like the best. Does that sound okay?"

"Oh, I'll bet they'll be anonymous."

Delaney snickered, "What's the matter, Towney, don't you trust me?"

These meetings were wretched for Towney. He smelled her perfume, heard her voice, watched as the light hit her hair. He became distracted, couldn't concentrate. Her insolence should have put off Towney, but instead he felt oddly drawn in by it. Hate was better than indifference. As long as she hated him, she still felt something for him.

Nevertheless, he was miserable. He could not sleep at night. He tried seeing other women but that didn't work either. He never missed a meeting, though.

Eleanor noticed, "What's going on with you and that Shaw woman, Towney? She looks at you as if she like to kill you."

He nodded, "She's the one." His mother didn't say much, just smiled knowingly. They had met briefly one day in passing. Delaney looked at her directly and shook her hand coldly. That impressed Eleanor. She liked women who didn't defer to anyone. And Towney was so unhappy.

Delaney would saunter in, her perfume filling the air, full of good cheer, "Good morning everyone. What's on the agenda today?" and Towney was off.

The day they that showed the preliminary drawings for the hotel he was as nervous as a school boy. He paced outside the main office with Daniel Shafer.

"Why are you so concerned? This is just a lark for you."

"A lark? Why because I am a banker?"

"A millionaire banker. Isn't architecture a hobby for you? It is my life, you know?"

"It was supposed to be my life too."

"What stopped it?"

"It's a long story. And you are the last person to whom I want to tell it.

"Why the last person?"

Towney sat and regarded Daniel carefully before he changed the subject. "Are you and Delaney seeing each other?"

"You mean do we see each other or are we having an affair?"

"It's none of my business, right?"

"Right."

Just then George came out and asked both of them in. "Well we have decided we like both designs so much we'd like to know if the two of you will collaborate."

"Sorry, Dan, I liked yours the best, but the vote was split." Delaney smiled and patted the chair next to her.

Towney was so jealous he felt a wave of heat go through his body.

Daniel spoke first, shuffling through the other drawings. "Sure, I'd love to work with Towney if he's willing."

"Towney?" Roscoe summoned, "Towney? What do you think?"

"Fine, sure, why not. We'll be buds."

Delaney addressed the rest of the group, "Then it's all settled. If that's it, we've got to run. Goodby, gentlemen. Coming Dan?"

Towney was shocked. "Would you all please tell me how that happened?"

George laughed. "She is a persuasive bitch. I'll give her that. Roscoe folded on the first round. Come on Towney, cheer up, at least you'll get to know her boyfriend. Maybe you can figure out his weaknesses, you know, learn where to hit him." George chuckled as he left.

"You know Aaron, an awful lot of people are enjoying my misery."

"Oh, I know, I know, and I cannot for the life of me imagine why."

## Chapter XX

Delaney returned to find a telegram from her mother. She was fine and would be arriving at Philly international on the nineteenth, day after tomorrow. "Does that strike you Carol as just in the nick of time?"

"Typically Sydney. When she sends you these telegrams, does she ever mention this island thing?"

"No, never. She simply says she is fine and where she is and she cannot call. It is weird, I know. And she won't answer any of my questions. I've spent a fortune in telegrams to her."

"Well, at least she is coming home. There was a call for you from a Jane Hardy. She said she was returning your call."

"Hardy? Doesn't sound familiar? I'll call her later. I have a lot to do before settlement."

Delaney had not been to the island since the day she found out it was hers. At first she was in too much turmoil. Then winter intervened. The worse winter the east coast has ever seen - seventeen snow and ice storms from November to the middle of March. Spring came in suddenly melting the mounds of snow into grey puddles. This was the first really warm day and she wanted to see the land once more while it still belonged to her. She called Daniel and asked if he would go for a drive. "I'll get us a suite at the Ritz in Annapolis and treat you to dinner."

"Are you planning to use me to forget Towner? I want you to know if that's your plan, it's fine. Use me." Although Daniel was very attractive, they were beyond any romance. They were friends and business partners and that's all they could ever be. "My mother is coming home at three o'clock tomorrow so we must leave early. Pick you up at ten."

Delaney packed some long underwear for the trip and left to get Daniel. The roads were wet from the melting snow mounds, but it was an enjoyable drive. Her car phone rang and she picked it up. "Hello, this is Jane Hardy, is this Delaney Shaw?"

"Yes, it is."

"Ms. Shaw, you tried to reach me a few months ago. I was Herbert Kimball's nurse." "Oh, Yes. I am sorry, I forgot I even called you."

"Well, I'm sorry it took so long to get back to you. I take these unusual assignments no one else wants and I was out at sea for two months. I got back and your message was on my service."

"I wanted to know about Herbert Kimball. He left me his island and I have no idea who he is or even if I am related to him. When I called, I was looking for information."

"Really? I would have thought someone . . . well . . . maybe we should meet. Your co-worker said you were headed to Annapolis now aren't you? Why don't we meet at the Bayside Marina around noon? Look for a woman of thirty with long red hair."

"Fine. I'll see you then."

"That was strange. That was Kimball's nurse. I was looking for her to give me some evidence he was incompetent, when I was planning to contest the sale. She seems very anxious to see me."

"You're still very curious about his relationship to you. Maybe he told her something about you."

The call disturbed Delaney, something in her voice. She frowned all the way to Maryland. "Here we are. Let's go in."

The restaurant was bright and cheery. She looked around and saw a redhead at a table by the window. "Are you, Jane Hardy?"

Jane stood up and put out her hand, "Oh, you have to be Delaney. Those green eyes are exactly the color of Herbert's!"

Delaney was taken aback, "My eyes and Herbert Kimball's?"

Jane smiled, "Sorry, I have a tendency to overwhelm people with my enthusiasm. Sit and we can talk some more." She shook Daniel's hand as well.

"Jane, how long were you Kimball's nurse?"

"Not very long, just a few weeks. I told you on the phone, I take all the odd jobs. Taking care of an Alzheimer's patient on a desolate island was one of those jobs."

"You could not have gotten to know him very well in just a few weeks."

"It is a bit strange, I know. But sometimes Alzheimer's patients have times of great lucidity, where they suddenly remember things. I happened to be there for one of those times."

"So he told you what?"

"First I told him about his illness. He was frightened, didn't know what was happening to him. It was so funny. At first he was very sad, then he perked up and said something like, 'If I can't remember, I won't remember I can't remember'. Something like that. Then he laughed. He said he had a story to tell his daughter . . . "

Delaney became very pale, "Are you insinuating I am his daughter? I cannot be his daughter. My father died when I was three years old. I do not even remember him."

"Look, all I know is he said he was leaving the island to his daughter. I just assumed since he left it to you that you are his daughter."

"It must be some sort of mistake . . . what else did he tell you?"

"He found all these photographs and newspaper clippings and he and I stayed up for an entire night and day putting together a sort of keepsake box for you, for his daughter that is."

"What happened to it?"

"I don't know. The next day Mr. Bates . . . "

"Bates! George Bates?"

"Yes, do you know him?"

"You bet I do." Delaney glared, "Go on."

"Anyway, the next day Mr. Bates took me back to the mainland for some time off and then the service told me that his family was taking him off the island. They wouldn't be needing me anymore. I came down and tried to see him, but no one knew where he was. Then I found out he passed away."

Delaney was in shock. If Bates was involved there had to be something sneaky going on. "Do you remember anything he said?"

"He told me he had to find his daughter before he died and tell her he loved her." Jane's eyes watered. "He told all about his life, things he wanted to share with her. It's all written down."

"This was in the cottage on the island?"

"Yes."

Delaney jumped up, "Let's go Daniel. I have to go into that cottage. Do you want to come with us, Jane? You could tell me whatever you remember."

"I'm sorry, I can't. I'm off to sea again in an hour. But I'll write and tell you whatever I can remember that he told me. But knowing Mr. Bates, I'm certain he's taken very good care of that stuff for you. Find him and you'll find that box. It's out there somewhere. Mr. Bates was so good to him. Send him my regards."

James ferried Delaney and Daniel over to the island. "Lots of activity over there, Ms. Shaw. They took a trailer over there this morning."

"I know." Delaney kept her eyes on the horizon. There it is. My island. Could it be my father's island? When they got to shore, they had a long walk to the Kimball cottage. "It never seemed this far before."

"It's not far. About midway around, up on a dune. There it is." The cottage had taken a beating from the winter. They did not board it up very well and windows were blown in and there was water damage. "Help me get this door open."

Daniel and she shoved and the door finally gave way. "What a mess! How are you going to find anything here?"

"With your help. Come on." Within a few hours they had the windows back in, and a fire in the fireplace. "That wasn't so bad. This is quite a charming little cottage."

"Right! It should be leveled and you know it. Now what are we looking for?"

"A box, Jane said. But anything personal will do." They began rummaging through drawers looking under things. "Nothing. Looks like somebody cleaned this place out."

"Bates! Oh, yeah, he took such good care of him."

Being in the house awakened feelings in her she had long since buried. It was frightening. She had not cried or felt this lost since she was a little girl. All of that longing for her father, for

information about her family she had put away, and now it came rushing back filling her with the old dreams and fantasies. Of her father who was a spy and kidnaped by Viet Cong and not allowed to return to his native land. She made up many stories for herself and for her playmates who questioned where her father was.

But her mother had explained he was killed in an automobile accident when she was a baby. She had even given her photos of him. "Sorry, dear, we eloped, this is the only one I have." Delaney treasured that small black and white photograph of a dark haired man with soft brown eyes and a kind smile. She had it with her always, until the fire. Nothing was left after the fire. On that day she buried those lost feelings with the rest of her possessions gone forever. Yet, here she was again, frantically searching for some evidence of herself, and for the father she never knew, in this forgotten beach house. Please let me find some answers.

"Wait a second, Delaney, there's a small piece of paper or something stuck behind this dresser . . . move it out. I got it. It's a little girl. Quite a funny mug on this one. Look at those Bugs Bunny teeth!"

"Let me see it." But Delaney already knew. It was her fourth grade school picture. Braids and Chicklett teeth.

"It's you, isn't it?"

"Yes, it's me. Eight year's old. Right before the fire. None of our pictures survived." Daniel sat down next to Delaney on the bed and held her.

"There are too many unanswered questions, Daniel. Do you mind spending the night here with me? It seems I just found my father. I can't leave here just yet."

"I'll go tell James to come back for us tomorrow at nine. Keep looking around and see if you can find some food. I'm starving."

Delaney wandered into the kitchen and sure enough there were cans of food, soup and baked beans and vegetables and some foil wrapped crackers. She lit the stove and opened some corned beef hash. While it was heating, she moved some furniture. Under the couch she found a drawing she had done in third grade. Bits and pieces of her childhood in this strange place. Her father was alive all

these years! She couldn't muster anger, it was all too unreal for her. She breathed in the betrayal that was everywhere. Even her own mother had lied to her. Daniel got back and smelled the food. "Ah, these hikes are building an appetite. You found something else? How cute. Is it a fire truck?"

"No, silly it's a picture of the house we lived in. Can't you tell?" She laughed. Daniel was a good friend.

"Let's eat, then we can look around some more, loosen some floorboards, move furniture. We'll have a treasure hunt. And I have to get the heat going. The wind is kicking up out there. Hope there's enough propane in that old tank."

Delaney stood on the porch, watched the sun set into the bay and listened to the fog horns baying from the mainland. She had only been to the island on business, looking at it as property, to be sold and developed. Now it was different. She and Daniel had found pieces of her life, lost in tiny crevices, stuck inside damp mildew books. Forgotten pieces of her life. Why else would this man have followed her life, if he were not her father. Tomorrow she would march into Roscoe's office and demand to know the truth. She was certain they knew it.

"Okay, got the heat on, but it'll still be cold. You'll have to sleep with me."

"Sleep?"

"Okay, lie down and snuggle with me." He put his arm around her and drew her in. "Come on Delaney, we'll go in and snuggle up on the couch and drink this." He held out a bottle of Napoleon brandy. "We'll get snookered."

"Oh, that sounds so wonderful."

"I knew you'd like it. We'll drink right out of the bottle, just like the pioneers, no glasses, okay?"

It was very okay. She felt frightened and confused and needed this man's humor right now in her life.

They didn't awaken until James knocked on the door. "Oh, god, sorry, James. No alarm clocks. Come on in. Delaney, wake up, it's after nine."

Delaney jumped up and ran into the bathroom. "I'll be out in a moment, guys."

Daniel and James closed the cabin and they all hiked out to the boat. "I'm going to see Roscoe. Will you get my mother and send her down here? You probably won't have to tell her why if you tell her where I am. "

"Okay, Delaney, but watch out for those men. They're treacherous. I'd check into the hotel and get cleaned up, too."

Delaney took a long hot shower, got dressed quickly in her professional, no nonsense armor, then marched herself into the Judge's office. "I want to see Judge Wilson. Tell him Herbert Kimball's daughter is here."

The secretary scurried off to find the judge and relayed the message. "Eh? Kimball's daughter did you say? Get Roscoe and see her in."

"Good Morning, Ms. Shaw."

"Is it? And is it Shaw, Judge, or is it Kimball? "

"What do you mean?"

"Don't be coy. You know exactly what I mean. I spoke to the nurse who took care of my father on the island, and I've been out there. Your people did a pretty good job of cleaning up but you missed a few places, like inside books and backs of drawers." Delaney stood up and banged her fist on the desk, "My whole goddamn life was in that cottage and you destroyed it. I want the truth!"

"You're getting excited. Calm down. Roscoe, come in. Get Delaney some tea."

"I do not want any tea. I want the truth and I want it NOW!"

The judge reached into his top desk drawer and took out the sealed envelope with her name on it. "Here, they misplaced this and just discovered it this morning. I was going to call you, but . . . "

She held up her hand indicating he need go not further and then slowly reached across the desk and took the envelope. It had her name scrawled across the front. She didn't open it. She just held it, then quietly got up and left. She did not want to read that letter anywhere but on the island.

Delaney stuffed it into her briefcase and went down to the marina. After buying some supplies, she had James run her back. He helped her carry her bags and groceries into the house and

got the generator and the heat going. She went out for a walk and gathered some driftwood for a fire. Once it was blazing, she took a good gulp of brandy and sat opening the letter. It read:

Dearest Delaney,

My daughter. How strange to write the word, daughter. I have missed so much of your life and if you are reading this, it means I have missed it for good. Don't hate me. An overzealous conscience led me to do things I never even imagined, I could do. The mistakes I made were big ones. Ones that may be unforgivable, but I made them for what I believed in at the time. I am not now asking for you to forgive me, though I admit, even after all this time, it would be a blessing to be forgiven by you. I am asking a lot, I know. I am asking that you believe in your heart that I loved you, in the only way I know how.

This undefiled land I have left you is all I have left to give you. It is all that remains of a long and honorable family history. It is the embodiment of all my beliefs. The only part of me worthy to belong to you. I have held onto it for you. To replace the years, or if not replace them, then to try to make them up to you. There were times when selling it would have been easier, but I held onto it with one thought in my mind always, that someday this would be yours. I tell you this not to make you feel sorry for me, but to make you understand how important this land is to keep whole, untouched and intact. It is the land your ancestors came here to have. It is the land they fought to keep, and now it is yours to keep.

Keep it well.

Love,

Your Father

Herbert Kimball

## Chapter XXI

Sydney Shaw got off the plane loaded down with carry-ons and resembled a turn of the century immigrant except for her salt and pepper page-boy haircut. She was not a bit surprised to find Daniel there instead of Delaney. "She's on the island, isn't she?"

"Yes. How did you know?"

"She left messages for me all over Europe. Look at these." "Who's Herbert Kimball? why would he leave me an island?' I could hardly tell her over the phone," Sydney fished into her knapsack and shoved a handful of telegrams under Shafer's nose.

"She's waiting for you. Where the hell have you been?"

"Hassled everywhere I went. Every visa challenged. They detained me in Moscow for ten days and I could not leave. I do not speak Russian you know. Communication was very difficult. It was horrid. They hate what I am dredging up. Finally all her messages caught up with me and I chose the coward's way out and sent her telegrams simply stating I was fine. It seemed better to me she didn't know the whole thing." Daniel stared at her and let her rattle on. "Look. I'm here, now." She dropped her bags to the ground with a thud, "God it's good to be in the USA!"

Daniel studied her tired face while he loaded her belongings into the trunk. Finally she asked, "Stop eye balling me Danny and tell me, is Delaney okay?"

"Well, she was when I left her, Syd, but she was heading to Judge Wilson's office, so I don't know."

"He's a crooked bastard. I don't know why Herbert kept dealing with him all these years. There was even a rumor he had an affair with Herbert's mother. Can you imagine?"

Dan let Sydney into the car and went around and got in himself hesitating before he started the engine, "Excuse me, Sydney, are you saying Herbert Kimball is Delaney's father?"

Sydney looked across the car at him before she answered weighing her words. "Yes he was her father and before you judge me, dear, let me tell you it hasn't been easy all these years for me either. Keeping secrets, having to change our names and locate somewhere new. Starting all over. I worked hard to take care of us all these years and I'm not ashamed. I've done OK by her. I was not

young when I had Delaney, but I won't bore you with the details. Besides, I'm just going to have to tell it all again in a few hours." She put her hand to her head, "Damn Herbert! Leaving this mess for me! Damn him!" Then quickly changed gears, "Oh, well, knew it had to happen someday. I have rehearsed this speech a thousand times. Better catch some sleep so I can handle it."

Daniel was amazed Sydney curled up and dozed off instantly while he drove to Maryland.

When they arrived at the Bayside Marina, she recognized someone and dragged Dan around the back. "That old salt is still here. He must be a hundred by now. I don't want to reminisce, let's get going." But the old man saw her and waved. "Yes I know I know. We'll talk later. I cannot believe the old codger recognized me."

Delaney was waiting for them on the dock with flashlights. "Mother!"

"Delly, How are you honey?"

"I've been better." They hugged and let Daniel and James carry the bags to the cottage before they both departed. The four of them walked in silence.

Daniel stopped Delaney on the steps before he walked back to the dock. "Are you going to be all right here alone with your mother? You're not going to kill her or anything are you? Should I confiscate the knives?"

Delaney hugged him close to her and kissed him on the lips. "I love you, you know."

"Yeah, yeah, like the brother you wished you had. Take care and call me when you get back."

Sydney watched them from the cottage porch, "Why is it you never dated him? He's such a nice boy."

Delaney pushed by her mother and shoved open the door. "Do not start on me, Mother. You're the one in trouble here."

She ignored the comment, "I haven't been in this cottage in thirty years. It's a mess."

"He didn't have any money to take care of it."

"I know. The land, the land." She regarded her daughter carefully in the dim light. "The telegrams you sent were not very clear. Did he send for you? Did you speak to him?"

"No, thanks to you. He left me a letter. Come on in, it's cold out here."

"God, he lived like this all these years."

Delaney couldn't help but laugh at Sydney. "It's not so bad. It's actually sort of charming . . . Now, you start explaining. I should be very angry with you."

"Are you saying you're not, Delly?"

"I have been through a lot in the past few months. Nothing is as it seems to me. I question everything and get few answers. I'm worn out and a little numb, and I would very much like you to tell me what is going on, here."

Sydney hesitated before reciting to Delaney what she had rehearsed. "Could I have a cup of tea?"

Delaney went into the kitchen and put on the kettle. "What is it about being older that makes you want tea?"

"Older people are always cold. Anyway. I'm not so old you know. Got a blanket or something. It's very damp in here."

"Okay Mother, here's your blanket, I'll get the tea, settle in and start talking. Now."

"You're right. I have dreaded this day almost your whole life. I gather from Daniel you already suspect, Herbert Kimball is your father." She stopped to let the impact of that statement settle in. Delaney waited for her mother to finish. "Of course, he is your father, Delly, well was your father. Sorry."

Delaney crumbled to the floor. "I want to know why you kept it from me my whole life. I would like to know about my father and I would like it to be the truth for a change." Her voice was shaking.

Sydney took a sip of her tea and took a deep breath, "All right, I will start at the beginning. Okay? The beginning?" Delaney nodded. "We met on a weekend trip to ocean city Maryland when I was twenty-five. 1962. free love was just coming into style. The world was going crazy. Herbert was a very dashing political science professor at Georgetown University. An intellectual. He was so full of himself and his opinions. Right in the middle of every controversial issue of the day, and there were

many. We went to demonstrations together. It was very exciting for me. My family was from rural Roanoke. His was from Georgetown. Two different worlds.

We had to elope in the end, but we did not mind. We only got married because the university frowned on our living together openly. His family was not too keen on him marrying a dirt farmer's daughter, but they came around. Understand, Delly, this is the reader's digest version, you can ask questions later.

Delaney sat at her feet staring up at her mother's expressionless face, "Did you love him?"

"What a question, Delly. Of course, I loved him."

"Go on, mother, finish your rehearsed speech."

"The demonstrations heated up. Some students got expelled and your father defended them. He organized a student strike. It all settled down but in the end your father lost his teaching position.

No school would have him. It was as if they blacklisted him. We traveled out west but we could not seem to get far enough away. His past always caught up with him somehow or another. Eventually we decided that separating would be best and for us to change our names. I know people think MaCarthyism is dead in this country but I am living proof it is not."

"Mother when was all this? How old was I when you left him?"

She pushed Delaney's hair away from her face. "You were three. His heart was broken, but he knew it was for the best. He was never able to help much financially. He felt terrible. Like he did not deserve to see you, be part of your life. He was a proud righteous man."

"You should have never left him."

"Delaney, it was another time. Herbert's father disowned him. They blamed me for his troubles. They never even tried to contact you all those years. "

"They're alive?"

"No, I know his parents and his great-aunt have passed on. Probably his cousin Toby is gone, too. If there is other family about, I'm not aware of it."

"I am certain if there were family lurking they would have surfaced over the past few months."

"They were not a close family. Herbert's problems embarrassed them. They pretended he was dead. We tried to understand their perspective. They educated Herbert on a grand scale, had high hopes for his life and they thought he threw it all away. I believe they thought he threw his heritage away as well. Except Toby. He was your father's favorite cousin. He helped him and let him worked in his dry goods store in Annapolis.

Sydney stopped for a minute and laid her head back on the sofa and closed her eyes."Delly, this is so exhausting."

"Yes, I am sure it is, Mother. Go on."

She sat up and went on, "When his mother died, she left him the island. It belonged to her family. His father could never get her to change her will and write Herbert out. He was glad of that, it let him know his mother still cared for him. The problem was, this island costs money to maintain. The bulkhead, the dock, this cottage, all require upkeep, and the taxes are high. Have you been inside of the big house?"

Delaney shook her head no. "He probably had to let it go to ruin. What a monstrosity that is. Anyway, at some point he applied and got approval to subdivide the island. He sold a very few pieces to people for very little money, but there was a catch."

"Yeah, I know, the right of first refusal. I cannot believe this, Mother. You kept in touch with him all these years! You knew where he was and never told me! Mother, you told me my father was dead, and all this time he was living fifty miles away. How could you do that to me?"

"Me! It was his idea, not mine. He was the one who didn't want to you know he was alive. He was the one who thought he would only bring you trouble. What could I do? Tell you and let you show up on his doorstep. This cottage is a palace compared with some places he's been. Now give me a shot of that brandy."

"I have to say, Mother. It all sounds very strange to me, and I know it's the shortened version but I suspect you are leaving quite a bit out."

Sydney put her head back again and closed her eyes, "Can that be enough for now, please?"

"No, I have been trying to talk with you for months. Telegrams! You sent me telegrams instead of calling me."

"You wanted me to call you long distance and say, Herbert Kimball is your father? I've been lying to you all this time? Sorry, I felt I needed to tell you face to face."

"Well, here we are, Mother, talk to me. Tell me why you kept in touch with him?"

"It was not very often. Just off and on. I would send him a picture or a drawing. He loved you, Delly, he just had some of his priorities screwed up. People might say that of me these days, going off to Russia and all. I'm sorry. I am so sorry. He insisted you not be tainted by his problems. What was I to do?"

"Please. Don't pretend to be so helpless, Mother. Look, I don't really want to get into a fight with you right now."

Sydney patted Delaney on the head, "Oh, me either!" Sydney looked around the old cottage and changed the subject, "Where are all your fathers' things?" Delaney looked at her quizzically. "His pictures and paintings. This place looks like someone cleaned everything out."

"Oh, yes, that would be the villain, George Bates."

"He did a very good job of it. See that outline there?" She pointed to the space over the fireplace. "A painting of your grandmother used to hang there, and over there by the kitchen door where that nail is was a photo of your dad and his graduating class from Harvard. This was one of the guests' cottages to the big house, but mostly it was your dad's hideout."

"Harvard, huh?" Delaney got up and went over and touched the lines left by the soot. "I wish I could have seen her portrait."

"Herbert thought you looked like her when you were a baby. It's too bad, everything is gone. His family was so fond of their heritage. They had mountains of things they passed on from generation to generation. I wonder where it all is. I am certain Herbert would never have parted with any of it." She stopped and looked around the ceiling. "Maybe some things are in the crawl space in the attic."

"Attic? In this tiny cottage. Where?"

Sydney got to her feet. "It was somewhere over here by the kitchen. A couple of boards move. It's not really an attic, more of a storage space, but I think it runs the entire length of the cottage. Give me that broom handle." She began tapping around the ceiling boards until she found one that sounded hollow. "There. This is the one. Get something to move it with, a hammer or something." Delaney rushed off and grabbed the poker and a stool to stand on. Her mother held it while she pried and pried and finally the old wood split in two. "Quick, get that flashlight in the kitchen!"

Sydney grabbed the flashlight and held in the gaping hole. "I can see some things. I'm going to pull myself up so I can see better. Hand me the flashlight." Delaney reached up and pulled the boards away from the opening then hopped up and into the blackness. "Hand me the light." She scanned the room with the flashlight and sure enough there were some trunks and boxes. "I can see some things, but we're going to have to make a bigger hole to get them down."

"Oh, the hell with getting them down. Let's just make room to come up." An hour later half of the ceiling boards in the kitchen had been removed leaving a space large enough for Delaney and Sydney to fit in with some lamps. They bundled up in sweaters and began treasure hunting. "This is amazing. I don't know what to open first."

Sydney had already opened an old steamer trunk and was reading a small note that they pinned to a shawl. "This says Margaret wore this at her sixteenth birthday party. Margaret was your grandmother." She pulled the shawl out of the trunk in a swoop and wrapped it around Delaney. It was turquoise silk embroidered on the bottom with tiny seed pearls and finished with three inch fringes.

Tears welled up in Delaney's eyes and she coughed and gagged. "It reeks of camphor."

Sydney laughed. "I know. Everything up here does." She turned back to the trunk. "Hankies with your grandmother's initials. Look." She handed them over. "And look at this dress. Oh my, I think this was your grandmother's wedding dress. Look how nicely it has been packed. They stuffed the sleeves and the bodice with tissue paper." Delaney and her mother very carefully lifted this tiny white lace and satin dress out of the trunk and the paper disintegrated all over the attic.

"Look how small she must have been. It only comes up to my knees." Delaney held the dress in front of her.

"I guess wearing it for your wedding is out then." Delaney cast her a sharp look. "For a tiny little thing, she was a formidable woman to deal with."

"Did you know her well?"

"Not really. We didn't see much of them and then when it all fell apart, she blamed me. Obviously, it was my influence that got him into trouble. She could not bear to blame Herbert. He was her baby boy." She sat again. "Look at these old photos. I think this young dark haired woman is your grandmother, do you see the resemblance?"

"Oh my god, Mother, it's a tiny version of me!" Delaney took the picture over under the light. "Finally I look like somebody." She spoke almost in a whisper and Sydney flinched.

"Open that trunk over there."

Delaney obeyed and inside found a wooden trunk, and two dolls with china faces. "This is full of old toys. I wonder whose they were." She turned the trunk over and read. H.W.K. "This must have been my father's trunk. These are his initials, aren't they?" she handed it to Sydney.

"Yes, dear they are." Sydney fondled the trunk and sighed, "Suddenly I'm exhausted. Would you mind terribly if I left you to these mementoes and went to bed?"

"No, not at all. Go on. I'm going to stay here a while."

Sydney reluctantly climbed down into the kitchen. "Delly, I'm sorry. It's just been a long day. I think I'll sleep on the couch, do you mind?"

"It's fine, mother. Really. Go to sleep."

Sydney turned away and then turned back again, "OK. . . . Tomorrow, though I would like to see Herbert's grave."

"His grave? Mom I never even asked about that. I don't even know where they buried him."

"I am certain Herbert left instructions they bury him with his family here on the island."

"A cemetery here? No one has found it." She thought again, "Or at least no one has informed me they found it."

"I can tell you for a fact it's here. I've seen it, and I'm sure your father's there. Well, we can talk about it more tomorrow. Good night dear."

Sydney went into the bedroom and went to sleep. Delaney stayed in the crawl space, curled up in the corner by the light, unpacking. Finding tiny little cups and saucers with pink roses on them that must have been some relative's tea set, but whose? Wooden building blocks with the initials G.W.K. carved slightly in the corners. In the barrel she found countless pieces of canton china. Piece after piece of blue on blue plates, cups, platters. Little salt plates. Demure crystal sherry glasses, damask napkins with the letters, M.D.K. on them. Was the D for Delaney she wondered and made a mental note to find out? In one trunk she found journals dating back 120 years. "Today Mrs. Jonson came to call with her son Charles. While a beautiful child to look at, he desires much in manners. She chuckled to herself.

In one journal were pencil sketches of wedding presents with notations: "The brass urn was from Gerald and Martha weed." The artist was very adept and as she continued to unpack things, she excitedly began to identify some items described in the journal.

So much here. So many pieces of the lives of those who came before her. all loving wrapped and packed and carefully saved. For whom? She wondered and immediately answered aloud, "For me." She felt it with every piece of history she unpacked. With every hand-carved toy, with every little hand scrawled note pinned to a hankie, with every photo. "Herb at nine." They had all saved it for her. Saved for her to pass on, like they passed it onto her.

She did not look up from her newly found treasure until the sunlight came in the attic slats sideways and drew her attention away. "God, it's daybreak already." She said to the things around her. "Today the island becomes officially mine." And for the first time since she found out, the thought made her shudder.

## Chapter XXII

Sydney got up at dawn and found Delaney awake and looking out at the sea. "Isn't it beautiful here, Mom?"

"To tell you the truth, Delaney, I never liked the beach. All that sand." She wrinkled her nose and rubbed her fingers together, "It is in everything."

Delaney laughed and remembered how her mother would sit on the boardwalk at the shore and wave to her. "I'm going for a morning walk, I've been up all night looking through all these things and I need to clear my head?"

Delaney began her walk around the island. It was unseasonably warm for early spring. The birds were singing. Off in the distance boats were getting ready to go out for a morning catch. In the distance she heard a cigarette boat and knew instantly who it was. She walked toward the dock and met Bates.

He was red-faced, "What are you doing here, Delaney? We go to settlement tomorrow."

She faced him directly with all the bravado she could muster, "I can be here, it is after all my island."

"Only for another day, Delaney."

She pulled her hair back off her face into a pony tail, stealing herself, "Maybe not, George. I am not sure I can go through with this."

George threw up his hands, "You are crazy, you'll be in default. We will sue you, Delaney. You put us through too much to let this go now. Have you any idea how much money has already been spent? More than four million dollars. How are you going to pay us back?"

"I don't know. I don't care. This land belonged to my father's family for generations. Did you know that George? MY father, Herbert Kimball was my father, but you already knew that. You have known all along. And if you knew that then you know he didn't ever want me to sell it. It's my legacy. The only thing I have of him. If I let you develop it, he'll be gone from me forever."

"Gone is where he should be, Delaney. you don't know what you're saying or doing . . . what happened to the business woman who cut this deal? Where is she? ... You're going to ruin all of us, Delaney, me Towney. Don't you care about him?"

"Why would you say that George? Am I supposed to care about the man who tried to steal this away from me? Forget it. I will find a way."

"There is no way. You'll have to transfer this land. Delaney, you really don't have any choice. You're locked in. You've made a legal commitment . . .

"Yeah, well what about my father's commitment? What it meant to him to leave this all to me. Did it even matter to you? Did you even care a little about a dying man's wishes? "

"Your father was a nut case, Delaney and it's about time you faced it."

"Alzheimer's! Oh, now you admit to knowing he was sick. Finally some truth from you."

"No, not the Alzheimer's, before that, Delaney, your father had some real problems with the government."

"What do you know about it?"

"I know a great deal. Did you think I would get Towney involved in a deal without knowing everything? "

"Towney knows too? What else do you and Towney know, George that I don't?"

"Your precious father, the man you are saving this land for was a murderer. He blew up buildings. With people in them."

"You're a liar. You would say anything to save your ass."

"No, I am not lying Delaney. Your father killed some people, with a group of radicals. He went to prison, federal prison. Ask your mother. Don't waste your allegiance on him. He is not worth it."

Delaney threw her cup at him and missed. "You are a god damn liar. You son of a bitch," she was crying hard now, "You mother fucking son of a bitch. I look for my father all my life and finally find him and you try ruin it. You have been in every rotten scheme from the beginning. Did you know

he's buried here? Did anybody bother telling me they buried my own father somewhere on this island?"

"He is not buried here, Delaney. Another fantasy about a man who doesn't deserve this."

"Why isn't he buried here, George? He's supposed to be. Did you have something to do with that too, George? Come on George. I'll find out. You cannot stop me from finding out and when I do you'll be very sorry."

He grabbed her by the shoulders, "Look this man was in Federal prison for crissake. You are ruining everything for a convict."

Delaney wrenched herself out of his hands, "I don't believe you."

George ran after her shouting. "I can prove it, Delaney, do you hear me I can prove I am not lying," he yelled after her down the beach.

Delaney ran all the way back to the cabin crying. When she got there, she slammed the door behind her. "MOTHER!"

"My god Delaney, What's wrong?"

"You said there was more to tell me. Tell me now. Now I am angry and you better tell me the whole truth."

Sydney slumped into the old worn couch and a cloud of dust filled the air. "He made me swear I'd never tell you. I don't want it to come from me."

"It didn't. I heard it from a heartless bastard. George Bates told me my father was in Federal prison?"

"He told you that?" Sydney sighed and covered her face with her hands . . . "Well, I guess I have no choice." Sydney looked around the cottage, "Sorry, Herb . . . sit down Delaney."

She stood her ground, arms crossed and defiant. "No, I don't think so. Spit it out. Mother. Is it true?"

"Yes, it's true." Delaney threw her hands up. "Wait a minute, now, you need to hear the reasons. Your father was a good conscientious man. He got in with some very misguided people. It

seemed so harmless at first. A bomb scare here to empty a building out, to make a point, but then the bombs became real."

Sydney's eyes welled and she reached for a tissue. "In the last explosion, ten people died. Ten people! Everyone ran, scattered across the country. But even on the road, we were so paranoid. No one trusted anyone else. Remember the fire?"

Delaney nodded, "I always thought it was an explosion and not just a fire."

"You were right. It was no accident. One of his buddies found us and blew up the house we were living in, just to warn us not to talk, not to give ourselves up. The F.B.I. was trailing us. It was quite a life. He sent us away before he got caught. He had me change our names and start over in Philadelphia. When they finally caught up with him, he would not even let me come to the trial, or even see him or speak to him until he went to jail. We sent secret messages through one of his cousins."

"Mother, are you wanted?"

"No. I did have someone check into all that years later. There were never any charges brought against me."

Delaney sighed with relief and her mother cried a little, "Oh, after that, after he went away, it was a terrible time, Delly. But we both agreed that not associating with him at all would be better, to keep a low profile. The trial was a big scandal and it was in all the papers. I was only wanted for questioning. They couldn't make me testify against your father, but the others, well, they knew I had a lot of information. I was scared. Your father was scared for you. He testified honestly, not a plea bargain, he simply told the truth, and that sent two of the men away for life. In the end that did work towards an early parole for him, but he thought perhaps the others had friends on the outside, that maybe they would try to hurt you.

Time passed. By the time Herbert got out of jail, you were thirteen years old, an impressionable age. I am sorry, but he insisted I tell you he died. He never wanted you to know what happened. Your father never stopped believing you and I were in danger. He was haunted by it, Delly. It never let him go."

"So he was a murderer."

"No. He had no idea what he was getting in to. Herbert was an idealist, an intellectual. The principle above everything. He always listened to some inner guide, he called it. And after he got out he still never felt safe, he never believed you and I were safe. Never! He made up a story and I never deterred from it."

"All these years, Mother. I can see as a child, but I'm adult."

"I made a promise. You can hate me for it because your generation don't know promises and commitments, but we did."

"And now? The work you're doing with the nuclear plants. Isn't it dangerous for you to be involved this way?"

"No. I don't think so. With your father's testimony they didn't need me to convict the others. Years went by and I never heard a word from anyone. I felt it was safe to get involved again. I have to tell you, though, it did cross my mind when I got hassled all over Russia that perhaps someone figured out who I was. That I was still on someone's list. I don't know."

"Perhaps your name is on a list? Have you completely lost any semblance of reality, here?"

"Don't speak to me in that tone, Delly. I still am your Mother."

"Some Mother you have turned out to be!" Delaney and her mother talked and argued until very late that evening without resolving anything.

The next morning at dawn, Toney knocked softly on the door, "Delaney, are you there. Let me in." He had driven all night from New York after George called him in a panic.

"Toney, you have to come down, now, tonight. Delaney's not going to settle tomorrow."

"What are you talking about George?"

"Your girlfriend, Toney, she's changed her mind. She loves her father or something. You've got to come down here right now. Maybe she will listen to you."

"George, you didn't tell her did you?"

"Well . . . yeah, I did. I had to knock some sense into her."

"Shut up, George. I'm on my way." The entire ride down he kept thinking about the deal and then Delaney. Did he love her enough to see it her way. Enough to walk away from a fifty million-dollar profit? And even if he did, could he change her mind?

He knocked again, "Delaney, please."

"Go away, Towney. I do not want to see you right now."

"Let me in Delaney. I've got to talk to you."

"Worried about settlement, Towney?"

"No I'm worried about you, Delaney, let me in."

"The only thing you and your friends are worried about is the deal, Towney. Now go away, please, that is unless you can tell me where my father was buried." She waited for a moment. "Guess not."

Towney stood at the door for a long time not knowing what to do. He didn't know anything about Kimball's burial. Perhaps that was the key to this whole thing.

"Delaney, I will try to find out what happened to your father, but could you just tell me . . . what are you going to do. Are you going to settle?"

Silence.

"Delaney?"

What Towney really cared about was clear to Delaney. Men will just break your heart and leave you, her mother had told her a long time ago. Now she knew why her mother felt that way. What was she going to do? If she did not show up, everything she had would be lost. They would definitely sue. Even if by some twist of fate she got to keep the island, she wouldn't have a penny to her name. Oh, dad, help me. She said to the papers and the books. What am I supposed to do?

### Chapter XXIII

Back at the trailer things were heating up. Roscoe and the judge were waiting.

"Well, Towney. Is she coming? "

"You know George, you are really a son of a bitch. Why didn't you just call me? Why did you have to tell her? You may have pushed her over the edge and I am holding you responsible."

"Me, Towney? Not her?"

"And what the hell did you do with Kimball? Where did you bury him?"

"Why do you want to know?"

"It seems important to her. Really, George, where is he?"

George hesitated, "Shady Hill."

Roscoe said, "He was supposed to be buried here in the family plot on the hill, but George took him and wouldn't tell us where he was."

"Body snatching, now George. Is there anything you will not do to close this deal? I cannot believe you! What name is he buried under?"

"Bates. Herbert Bates."

"Of course. Roscoe, have him interred immediately and brought over here. Do you know where the family plot is?"

"It's at the top of that hill. he pointed out the window, but you'll have to get the crew to cut a path. You cannot get to it by foot. Too many brambles."

"Makes sense they would put the cemetery on the highest point. Fine. I'll handle that. You just go get Kimball, and get a minister too. If Delaney wants a proper burial for her father, we'll give him one. And George . . . "

"Yeah?"

"Don't do anything to get my way." He looked over his sunglasses at him in a way that George knew he better not question.

"See you at two?"

"Who knows? Just stay out of the way."

"All right, all right, but don't go soft on me here, Towney because I will tie you up in court for years." Then George quickly left the trailer.

Towney knew he could and would cause as much trouble as was possible. He picked up his portable phone,

"Aaron, get my attorney on the phone and tell him to come down right now. We have got big problems here, and get me a helicopter. I need to go to Philly right away."

Delaney heard the helicopters land at the other side of the island. "Relax, mother, it's probably Townsend Thorndike flying in some heavy artillery."

"That handsome man that was here earlier? Are you dating him?"

"God, no. We did fuck a few times though."

"Delaney you're horrible."

"I'm horrible! You lie to me and cheat me out of my father all my life, but I'm the horrible one here. You're the one with the screwed up priorities, mother!"

"You have the rest of your life to hate me, but right now you have some big decisions to make. What are you going to do?"

"What would you do Mother?"

"Delaney, I worked in this business for a long time and it amounts to one thing. The one with the most money wins. You don't have the money to take these people on."

"I didn't need money the last time." Delaney moved away from the window, "But I may have played all my cards. I'm going to get dressed and go down there."

Meanwhile Roscoe, George and the Judge met with their attorneys. George was running the show, "So gentlemen, what do we have here if she does not settle?"

"We have her. She's signed an agreement of sale. She defaults, we sue. We file a Les Pendants so she can't sell it to anyone else and we go to court to force the sale, or at the very least to collect damages. What have you spent so far?"

"Two million."

"We sue for ten."

"She doesn't have ten million dollars."

"No, all she has is the island."

"So if we win it's ours?"

"Nevertheless, we cannot win," The judge chimed in. "She will bring in every lousy little thing that has happened and you know it."

"What do we do? I don't want to walk away from this now. There's too much invested."

George was getting nervous.

"Is there some sort of compromise you can reach with her?" One attorney asked.

"Like what?" Roscoe responded.

"Have any of you spoke to her?"

"No, none of them ever SPEAK to me. They only yell and scream and threaten. What's going on out there?"

"Delaney!" Towney gasped, "Come in, sit down."

"Thank you, Towney, always the gentleman. I thought your helicopter flew you away."

"Not yet, it's waiting."

"How nice for you." She smiled, "Now, did someone want to speak to me?"

The judge answered, "We all do, Delaney, we want to know what you want to go to settlement."

"How about you Towney, dear? Do you want to speak to me? Do you want to tell me again how much you love me? It almost worked. He almost had it all. Did you know that? What were you going to do, romance the island away from your partners?"

Towney's face reddened. She was taunting them all. And obviously enjoying it. "This morning, my Mother, you remember her don't you, Judge, she called you a crooked bastard. Did you really have an affair with my grandmother? Tsk, tsk. Maybe someone else better speak to me. How about you George? Want to spread a few more lies about?"

Everyone looked at George. "Oh, your friends don't know what a big mouth you have. They don't know Towney loves me. The Judge and my grandmother. All these secrets. How do you all keep up?"

"That's why you are so ready to give the whole thing away, so you can have it all to yourself," Roscoe screamed at Towney.

Another helicopter landed and they went to the window to see who it was. It was with Claire O'Malley, Delaney's lawyer. "Very convenient, Towney, your idea?"

"You need her here, Delaney. I did it for you. Let's give them a few minutes gentlemen."

The trailer emptied but for Delaney and Claire. "What's the deal here, Claire? What will happen?"

"You know what will happen. You will lose it all. You may get to keep this island, but it will cost you and you don't have it, and eventually you may lose it anyway, to the government. Won't that be worse than these men developing it? Okay, maybe not worse, but at least if you settle you will still have a piece of it."

"This is so frustrating. I want more. I want the land the big house is on and ten acres around it. I'll fix it up so it blends, but that's what I want. And I want the land around the cemetery. My father is buried here. There's some family plot where Kimball's have been buried for more than three centuries."

"Are you willing to give anything up to get this?"

"No. Sell it Claire. Remind them of how they got into this deal to begin with. I will see you at Roscoe's office at two.

"I will do my best. You know, Delaney, you do have one very important thing on your side here."

"What's that?"

"Thorndike. I think he's in love with you."

"Yeah, so he says. Talk is cheap."

"Not this talk." Claire laughed and Delaney walked out of the trailer.

"Go talk to my lawyer, guys. You brought her here." She ambled off down the beach.

"Ten acres and the cemetery! No way. Towney, do you know where that cemetery is? It's the center of the island. The high point! It's the best acreage." George screamed. "I would rather sue."

Everyone was talking and screaming at once. Finally Towney interceded. "Give it to her."

"I said, give it to her. Haven't we put her through enough? I know none of you care anything about her and all you're trying to save are your own asses, but I am telling you. Give it to her or . . .

"Or what, Towney? She has really gotten to you."

"Maybe she has or maybe I just don't have the heart for this. Give her what she wants or I'm out. Completely. My money and the bank's."

The room went into an uproar. George screamed, "You can't pull the funding, the bank's already committed and dispersed funds. We'll sue you!"

"I'll pay it back."

"How, Towney? You don't have the resources to do that. That's what this deal was about for you, remember buddy boy? Freedom? Getting out?"

"Yes, George, I remember what it was about and how that kept me going way beyond anything I had ever considered, before. I will buy you all out."

"You don't have the money to do that, Towney," Roscoe whined, "But your mother does."

"Yeah, Towney, Momma Bank. She does have the resources to pick up the mess her little boy made."

Towney glared at George. "What's true gentlemen is that you have no idea what I have or don't have."

George began to fidget, "Maybe you should buy us out then? Yeah, then you get to be a hero. You get the girl and the island and we get what we would've made if the deal happened. It's only fair."

Claire looked around the room. Everyone was silent. "What about you, Judge?"

"Truthfully, Towney, if we got back what we have put out Roscoe and I would consider us lucky . . ."

"Now wait a minute, here Father."

"Shut up Roscoe, and sit. You are in no position to have a say in the matter."

"That just leaves me, Towney. What's it worth? The girl and the island? I'm willing to deal here. Those long legs wrapped around you every night, what are those legs worth to you?"

Towney looked around the room at the faces. "Careful there, George." There was so much at stake here. His reputation, the bank's, and so much money riding on this deal. How funny. It was supposed to be his way out and he was genuinely considering giving up everything for a woman!

"I need some time, George. I'll get back to you at five. The rest of you know what you have to do."

## Chapter XXIV

Towney had a visit to make. One he had avoided since he learned of his father's will. He had to go back to Philly and see Harold Katz, his father's attorney and the man who handled the Thorndike estate. Obviously he was going to need money, and his mother would never give it to him, not for this scheme. She was too sharp. She would want to know all the details. He recanted them in his head from the first meeting with George until now. All the intrigue, all the shadiness. His mother could sniff out a swindle. He needed his money. Perhaps the will wasn't as iron clad as his mother painted it to be. Perhaps Harold could help him find a way to get his hands on some of his inheritance. He had Aaron call ahead and let Katz know he was coming over and to wait for him.

"Towney, come in. I haven't seen you since your father's service, that's a long time. How are you doing, son?" Harold was one of his father's peers and always called him son.

"I'm in quite a mess right now Harold and I thought perhaps you could give me some legal advice."

"I'm not too active in the firm right now, sort of not quite retired. Why haven't we seen you around?" He smiled and motioned for Towney to sit. He had always liked Harold. He ran a very honest and small firm and had advised Towney senior since he began his career in banking. They had been college chums. He smirked, just like he and George and Roscoe.

"I've been very busy as you probably guessed. I know you're not practicing much, but you are definitely the man I need to advise me right now. It's about my estate. I need to get my hands on my money and I was wondering if you could help me do that?"

Harold looked puzzled, "Your estate, Towney?"

"Yes, my estate. Remember I cannot have the money my father left me until I am thirty-five, and I am in dire need of some of it right now. I thought perhaps there might be some contingencies built in that might permit me to have the money sooner, or at least to borrow against it."

"You know, son, I'm a little confused here. You didn't come to the reading of the will?"

"No, I couldn't handle it. My mother and my sister were there and my mother explained to me what the stipulations were. I have to tell you Harold, I was more than a little upset my father manipulated me the way he did. I even blamed you for a long time."

"Blamed me for what? I'm sorry Towney. I don't have any idea what you are talking about."

Towney stood up and began pacing, very frustrated now, "Look Harold, all that is over and done with now. My father got his way, I'm heading the bank like he wanted. I know it wasn't your fault. You were just doing his bidding. All I need to know is if there is a way for me to get a hold of some of my money."

"Towney, What are you saying? You mean you never received the inheritance from your father's estate?"

"What inheritance. What's going on here?"

"Son, will you stop pacing and sit down?" Towney sat across from Harold and he went on, "After the will went to probate, they instructed me to turn the funds over to a local accounting firm immediately."

"What funds? What are you talking about? They told me I was not to get my money . . . wait a minute. Are you telling me my father did leave me money?"

Harold Katz suddenly realized what had happened. Eleanor, of course. He unbuttoned his jacket and took a deep breath. "Oh, yes, Towney and stock in the bank. Quite a bit of stock. The funds were disbursed directly to Schloor and Shuster. As far as I know they have been handling the estate since then. I have never been instructed otherwise."

"Instructed by whom?"

Katz waited a moment before answering. "You know Towney, she must have had a very good reason for doing it this way."

A cold chill went through Towney as he recounted that morning in his father's study after his mother told him he had been left nothing unless he worked for the bank. That all the shares passed directly to her to do with as she wished. He remembered the steel blue grey in her eyes as she patted him on the arm to console him.

When had she hatched the plan he wondered. Was it while Towney Sr. was lying in his death bed? Was it grave side? Or did it come to her at the last minute while she was listening to poor Harold read his father's will. He stood up abruptly, "Where did you say my money is, Harold?"

"I know you're anxious to get what's yours, Towney, but sit a moment and talk to me. Your mother is a very complicated woman."

Towney began pacing around the room, "Complicated, you say? She has taken the last five years of my life from me. I had other plans for my life, Harold."

"I know you did, but your mother had plans, too. When she married your father, they had an understanding they would be in this together. Then slowly your father inched her out. I do not even know why. She was invaluable to him. Perhaps that was why. He had some funny ideas about women that were not common knowledge. Anyway, we will never know now."

"It doesn't matter."

"But it does matter. He did not leave her in a very good position with the board. When he got sick instead of having her step in, she was the logical choice, he had you come in and help him. That was very difficult for Eleanor. Simply to sit back and let her son do what she has wanted to do her whole life."

"Are you saying that what my mother wanted all along was the bank?"

"It's rightfully hers, Towney. Not yours. Without her your father would never have made it. She had the connections, the influence, and initially, the shares that gave him the controlling interest."

"She could have had it. All she had to do was give me my inheritance."

"If only it were that simple. The board had to approve her. Even with your stock they still had to approve her and she knew they never would. Your father made his intentions for the bank clear to everyone on the board. Maybe she was afraid you wouldn't take her ambitions seriously. Your father didn't. Suppose you sold out to the highest bidder and went back to architecture."

"Are you saying my father didn't leave her well off? Didn't leave her bank stock? I cannot believe that of my father."

"Let's just say, Towney, he left most of his fortune to you. She could have contested it, but you're her son. No, you have to face it, your father was very determined that you head up the bank. He felt by leaving it to you, you would have no alternative but to take your place."

"Her way to prove herself was to back me as head and then show her own stuff. Is that what you think happened?"

"That would be a good guess. I think if you left now, the board, with your backing of course, would let her take over."

Towney sat in a chair and snickered, "I cannot believe this. My own mother!"

"She is not just any mother, Towney. She is Eleanor Gamble Thorndike. A banker by birthright."

"That has never been more evident than it has in the past few years. You know, I could never have accomplished what I have without her help. She has made me look brilliant." Towner stood up and extended his hand to Harold, "Thank you very much. I have a feeling this little story is more than speculation on your part Harold."

He snorted and shook Towner's hand, "Now get on out of here and find your treasure. Schloor and Shuster have your accounts. I will have my assistant call and tell them you are on your way over. You can walk it. It's a block away."

Towner was already running out the door. He yelled over his shoulder, "You tell them I'll be there in two minutes and they better have everything in order."

Harold laughed, "Just like a Thorndike."

The head of the firm greeted Towner at the door, "Mr. Thorndike, how pleasant to finally meet you. We have your entire estate coming off the computer right now. Just come right into my office and have a seat."

Towner followed him in and watched as the computer printed out ledger sheets after ledger sheets. "How much do I have?"

"Pardon me?" Mr. Shuster asked.

"How much do I have?" Towner said louder.

"How much do you have? Total? You want a total of everything? Cash value?" Towney nodded. "Wait for a few minutes and I'll add it up. I will need some of today's closing prices."

"Just a ball park figure. I am not looking for a penny accounting right this minute."

"You know we just sent you a full list of your investments and how they are doing two weeks ago."

"Really? Where do you send them?"

"444 Thimble Lane."

"Of course. How much money do I have?" Towney stood up leaned over the desk and screamed in the man's face, "How fucking much?"

"Okay, okay. Here it comes. Give or take a few thousand, eight hundred and forty two-million dollars."

Towney sat back in the chair, totally stunned. "Eight hundred and forty-two million, is that what you said?"

"Yes, and it is all in order, Mr. Thorndike, I can assure you . . . and of course that does not include the shares in the bank."

"Shares in the bank?"

"Well, yes, we do have them listed as part of your portfolio but we don't manage them. We assumed you . . . "

"Of course, and how many shares of the bank do I have?"

"500,000 shares. I assume you know that is a controlling interest as you are head of the bank and.."

Towney put up his hand to stop Shuster, "Don't bother. No time to review it all now. And you can be certain I will review it, every line, every entry." The blood drained from Shuster's face and he attempted to stammer a reply but nothing came out.

"Send all of my accounts and investment portfolio over to my office. Here is my address, and from now on Mr. Shuster. No one, Do you hear me, no one is to have any access to any of this information except me directly. I want them hand delivered, by you personally. Do you understand?"

Finally he could speak, "Yes, I certainly do." Towney put his hand out and shook Shuster's and left the office.

Eleanor Thorndike opened the envelope she was handed only a few moments ago, and read it:

Mother,

Bank's yours to run. Have already sent memos to board. I am taking an extended vacation. .

Love, Towney

P.S. Simon and Shuster will be sending me my own mail from now on. And call Harold. He will be worried about you.

She went to her office door, closed it, sat in her desk chair and cried.

## Chapter XXV

Towney walked over to the Kimball cottage to see Delaney and found her sitting on the steps, barefoot in jeans and a tee-shirt. He approached her. "I cannot believe it's this hot, almost eighty today. May I sit?"

"Sure, why not?"

"Kimball has been found. He's being interred and brought over to the island."

Delaney glared at Towney, "Has he? And who lost him?"

Towney looked at his feet, "I wasn't certain if you wanted a service, or something said when he was buried. I thought, well, I'd let you decide."

"How thoughtful." This was the closest they had been for months, sitting in breathing space of each other on the steps of the Kimball cottage. Delaney looked at his attire. She had never seen him in shorts. He looked innocent in these very casual duds. There was something different about him. An edge was missing. She baited him and he hadn't reacted. Was it because she had lost and he felt sorry for her?

Towney turned to look at her, "Are you going to be all right?"

"You tell me. Do I have a piece of this island or not?"

He sighed, "I haven't said how sorry I am about all this, have I?"

"Sorry about what thing exactly?"

"You're not going to make this easy on me, are you?"

She held her hand over her eyes so she could see him clearly in the setting sun. "Should I?"

Towney looked away, "No, I guess not."

They sat together in the silence, listening to the water lapping the shore. "Delaney, what can I say? I have been a mercenary pig."

She laughed, "That does about sum it up."

"And I know that no matter how this all turns out, well, I know it will take a long time for you to ever trust me again."

"Trust you, again. Why would I have to do that? Truth is, Towney, after this mess is behind me there won't be any reason to even speak to you again." He winced and she caught it. "Or is there some reason you have yet to tell me?"

He stood up and faced her, "I know I deserve all this, but I think everything I did, everything we all did, I think it's all been righted."

"Righted? Like a cup you knocked over. It's now righted. What about all that spilled liquid all over the place? How do you right that? You don't think you can come in here like some knight on a white charger and save me with your money and your influence and everything is now fine, do you? You cannot possibly think that, can you Towney? Because it never can be!"

"Knight on a white charger, huh? You know I sort of like that image." Delaney looked up at him disgustedly. "Sorry, but I guess that is exactly what I did. And yes. Yes! I did somehow believe I could fix it all with my money and my influence."

"And just how did you fix it all? Do I get to know that?"

Towney sighed and sat next to her again. "I bought them all out."

"The Three Stooges are gone?" She giggled at the thought.

"Yes, they're gone."

"Well, now, where does that leave little old me?"

"That depends."

"On what?"

"On whether you think we would make good partners."

"Who? You and I?" She chuckled and stood to face him this time. He chuckled, and then she began to laugh really hard, and so did Towney, until tears welled up in her eyes. "Partners! Ha, ha ha ha ha!" She was absolutely cackling and holding her belly gasping for breath. Suddenly he stopped laughing, and stood in front of her. She couldn't stop laughing. "Oh, Towney, I'm sorry, but partners, ha ha....."

He shook her shoulders and looked into her teary eyes. She stammered, "Oh, god, I feel like I haven't laughed in months. Oh, Towner you look so wounded, but you have to see the humor in all this, Don't you? I mean, from where we began to where we went, to partners, again. It too surreal."

He relaxed his grip on her, "Yes. I see what you mean. And I so had my heart on being a hero. Can we walk a while, I have something to tell you?" He let go of her and they fell into an easy gait next to each other.

Townsend Thorndike stopped, took off his Docksidiers and shook the sand out of them relishing the anticipation of this moment. The prospect of telling this magnificent woman he loved that yes, he was indeed very rich on his own now, that he could give her this island, and buy her three more if she wanted, but held off. It was not easy. This afternoon had been hell.

First he found out he was a multimillionaire. In fact, had been since his father's death. All these years he had been resentful of his Father and today he found out it was his poor dear Mother all along. That it was her ambition that was the driving force behind the family wealth. How could he have not seen this? Suddenly, today when he listened to Harold Katz, he knew the sense of it. He recognized his Mother's power. Many things that had never quite made sense to him came together. His Father was the charming one, the one everyone liked and wanted to work for, but it was his Mother that made all the decisions, that made it all work, that had amassed the fortune he now inherited.

Delaney was looking at him expectantly. It crossed his mind on the trip down how like his Mother she could be. Ambitious, almost ruthless, at times. He looked into those emerald green eyes. No wonder he was so at home with her.

They walked for almost a mile before he spoke again. "As strange as it all it, nevertheless, it seems that we are, partners."

Delaney looked up at him quizzically. "I don't understand. What price are you attempting to extract from me now? Isn't it enough you seduced me to get the island in the first place?"

"I seduced you! Wait a minute here, you're the one who I found hiding in my bedroom."

"I was not hiding. I was looking for a way out."

"Oh, right, right. I noticed how badly you were trying to escape." He laughed and she laughed with him, her cheeks flushing.

Then they stopped. "Okay, Towney, tell me what's going on, and try hard to have it be the truth."

"The island is mine Delaney. All of it."

"Wait a minute, yours! Yours. You mean I didn't get the house and the cemetery? That was my stipulation. Dammit! I thought I would at least walk away with that!"

"That depends on our partnership."

"What do you mean Towney? Seriously, how could we be partners again?"

"You have a right to be angry, not to trust me. But you're stuck with me if you want this island."

"It's more than anger. I feel . . . weird. Everything I grew up thinking was true I find now is not. It's as if the ground shook and everything is still standing but nothing is in its place, anymore. You say partners and I think, in what? In an island I now feel I cannot even consider of developing? Whatever do we do with this now?"

"I'm sure your father never meant for this to happen." Towney reached out his hand. Delaney looked at it for a moment and decided against taking it.

Towney shoved his hands into the pockets of his shorts, "Delaney, eventually you'll have to work through this. Rebuild. Regain faith in people, faith in yourself and your own instincts. When we got involved, I did not have an agenda. Honestly. If I had, things would have turned out much differently."

She stopped walking, "Oh, you mean I would never have resisted that Thorndike charm?"

"I didn't notice much resistance." He smiled and looked at her until she smiled back. "We might have been partners from the beginning. It crossed my mind many times that I should have simply gone right to you. Told you everything."

"Why didn't you?"

"Truth?"

"God! That would be so refreshing."

"Women who insist on the truth are very dangerous. I think I didn't want you to know what a weasel I was, you know, about acquiring the land and all."

"Instead you kept on being a weasel? Interesting choice."

He laughed, "I know. Ridiculous. I also didn't know then that I cared for you. I thought it was just chemistry."

"How do you know it isn't, Towney? I could be another quick romance for you to reject."

He stopped walking and grabbed her hand and pulled her into his arms. "No. I love you, Delaney." And he kissed her.

She fell into his grasp, first, without resistance, but pulled back, "Take it easy, Towney. You're going to have to work hard for this one. Remember, I never read fairytales as a child. You're still looking weaselly to me."

Towney gestured towards his face, "But isn't the pointy nose rounding, just a little? Delaney, do you have any idea how much money this all cost me?"

"No, and I really don't care. You deserve it. I'm only sorry the other three got off so easily. You, ah, you, my love I intend to make pay for this for a very long time."

Towney relaxed a little. "Torture, huh? You're going to torture me?"

"That's right. Come on, come on, don't stop walking. I'm not going to torture you out here."

In front of god and everyone, you mean? What movie did you say that was from?

"A Summer Place. Sandra Dee, Troy Donahue."

"Right, right. I remember now . . . lust in the fifties or something."

"Towney? Do you think we could get the money to restore this place? It would cost a lot but there may be some tax advantages for you."

He put his shoes back on. The amount he saw on the papers Shuster handed him still gave him a queasy feeling. Eight hundred forty-two million dollars, not including bank stock options. A lot of money. His so-called partners had milked him a little. Knowing how he felt about Delaney, they squeezed him for every cent they could.

He looked at this amazing smart young woman standing in front of him, her chestnut hair glistening in the ebbing light and remembered the curve of her hip, the feel of her skin against his, and held himself in check, "Yes, I think I know where we can some money to restore this place and you may be right about a tax break."

The two partners walked off down the beach quibbling over what buildings would be restored first and whether they would turn it into a historic attraction or a state park, and how much land they should keep for the original house and whether the marina would go in as planned, and the impact on the environment and on and on.

Quibble, quibble, Towney thought to himself, watching Delaney speaking animatedly about the possibilities of restoration. He watched her pulling her hair out of its band and into her hands, then letting it loose again to flow free and then tying it up again. He remembered she did this when excited about something.

He smiled and nodded in all the right places, totally lost inside of her passion, her beauty, the way her body bounced along the sand. The news of his inheritance would just have to wait for another day.