

**Coeds 4: Life Happens**

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**Edited  
By  
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**Features characters from The Julieverse  
Jen Stevens & Morris Pinsky appear courtesy of Robert Arnold  
(A list of characters is located at the end)**

**“If you’re going through hell, keep going”  
Sir Winston Churchill**

**This story is dedicated to Robert B. Parker, the wonderful author of the Spencer Series**

**Chapter 1**

Beth Williams waved down a cab as she departed Penn Station. She had made this trip numerous times in the past few months and it wasn’t getting easier.

Ten minutes later she stepped out of the cab in front of her grandmother’s building. Technically Andrea Carlson wasn’t her grandmother, but Beth didn’t care. Andrea was the only tie she had to her original family and life.

For the most part Beth couldn’t complain about her current life. She had wonderful adopted parents who were as close to her as had been her birth parents. She had an adorable baby brother. She had a group of incredible friends. She had a great boyfriend. And last but not least she would soon become a fulltime agent for the federal law enforcement organization known as The Agency. In all, she had a great life since her transformation.

Still she missed her original family. They had no idea that she was even still alive as they only knew her as LT Ben Carlson who had died in a plane crash. Beth understood why there was a cover-up. It made perfect sense to protect everyone involved; but she still wished she could talk to them.

Through one of the many flukes that life deals out, Beth had been able to reestablish contact with her grandmother...but now that tie was soon to be cut.

Beth stepped out of the elevator and knocked on Andrea’s front door. As always, she was greeted by Paula, Andrea’s longtime employee.

“Good afternoon, Paula,” greeted Beth.

Paula smiled. “Hello, Beth. Mrs. Carlson is in her bedroom. She’s been expecting you.”

Beth nodded. "How's she doing?"

"She's tired...but she's glad to be out of the hospital," replied Paula.

"And how are you doing?" asked Beth who could see the strain on the woman's face.

"It's been hard. I've been in Mrs. Carlson's employment for over eight years and well, it doesn't feel like a job. In some ways she means more to me than some of my own family," replied Paula. "I would do anything for her."

"I understand," said Beth.

"Well, I know she wants to see you," said Paula. "Do you want me to take you back there?"

"That won't be necessary, Paula," replied Beth. "Thank you."

Beth walked down the hall to Andrea's bedroom. The door was open and she peeked inside to see Andrea sitting up in bed reading.

"Hi Gran," said Beth as she did her best to act cheerful.

Andrea smiled back. "Beth, I'm so happy you made it up here. Come on over and give me a hug."

Beth walked over and gently hugged her grandmother. Beth was slightly shocked by how thin Andrea felt.

"How're you feeling?" asked Beth as she sat down in the chair next to the bed.

"Better now that I'm back in my own bed and eating Paula's cooking," she replied.

"That's good to hear," replied Beth.

"I've made a big decision," said Andrea.

"What's that Gran?"

"I'm not going back to that blasted hospital," she said. "I've made arrangements for hospice care."

Beth nodded. She knew it was pointless to argue with her grandmother.

"You won't believe the fight I had with those so-called doctors so that they'd let me come home this time," stated Andrea. "I'm afraid that if I go back they won't let me out."

Beth just stared back.

"Honey, I know you disagree with my decision, but there's nothing they can do. Dying is just part of life. To be honest I'm sort of excited to see what's awaiting me," chuckled Andrea.

"I know," replied Beth. "I support your decision, but it doesn't change the fact that I'll miss you."

"I know that my dear," replied Andrea. "Anyway, I'll have a nurse stop by daily to check on me. She's very nice, her name is Kristen and guess what, and she's originally from Denmark!"

"Well, that will give you two much to talk about," said Beth.

"It already has," replied Andrea. "Her grandparents were also in the resistance during the war."

Beth smiled back.

"So how're you doing?" asked Andrea. "How's school?"

"I finish up this spring," replied Beth. "I can't believe I'm about to start my last year at Penn."

"It has gone by quickly; then again you have always been an overachiever."

"I had good role models," replied Beth.

Andrea nodded.

"And how're things between you and Jim?"

"Great," replied Beth. "We really get along well."

"I'm pleased to hear that. You should have someone in your life," replied Andrea. "And your flying?"

"I'm racking up the hours every weekend," said Beth. "I really love it."

"That's wonderful," said Andrea.

"I just wish that I could have taken you up for a flight," said Beth.

"I know, I wish it could happen too," said Andrea. "I'm just happy that you're learning to fly...it's good to see someone carrying on the family tradition. Speaking of traditions, what about work?"

Beth smiled. "I start as soon as I graduate. The Director waved the requirement for me to go through the academy."

"Considering your background that doesn't surprise me. I think he did it so you wouldn't show up the others."

Beth laughed.

“There that wasn’t so hard was it?” asked Andrea. “Do you know your assignment yet?”

Beth nodded vigorously. “I’m going to work in the Internet Crime Department.”

“The one that Ally Burns started?”

“That’s right. I won’t know my location until graduation, but I’m hoping for the main office. I would love to work for Donna.”

“I know you’ll excel wherever you are assigned,” said Andrea.

They talked for another hour, and then Andrea began to feel sleepy.

“I think it’s time for a nap. However, I would love for you to stay for dinner,” said Andrea.

“Of course,” replied Beth as she stood up and then leaned over to kiss and hug Andrea.

## Chapter 2

Beth sat out in the living room as Andrea napped.

Paula came out and asked if she needed anything.

“I’m fine, thank you,” replied Beth.

Paula nodded.

“I’m so happy you came up here to see her. She so enjoys your visits,” said Paula.

“She means a lot to me,” said Beth.

Paula smiled. “That’s obvious.”

“I know you won’t violate her trust or anything like that...but what does her doctor say?”

“He’s annoyed that she won’t take a more aggressive stance against her cancer,” confessed Paula.

“Anything else?” asked Beth.

“Not from him,” said Paula. “The nurse who comes in says that she may have a few months left...maybe less.”

“Thank you,” replied Beth.

### Chapter 3

After dinner Andrea handed Beth a folder of papers.

“What’s this?” asked Beth.

“It’s a copy of my will,” said Andrea.

Beth looked down at it without opening it. “Oh.”

“It won’t bite dear,” said Andrea.

Beth smiled back. “I know.”

“I wanted you to see it,” continued Andrea. “I’m leaving you some of my jewelry and a few select books from my library.”

Beth nodded.

“I also have made provisions for you to do a favor for me,” she continued.

“Anything, Gran,” replied Beth.

“I plan on being cremated. I see no reason to take up some precious space with my body. I would like you to take part of my ashes and ...well release them as you fly over the airfield that my father owned back in Ohio. The location is in the papers.”

Beth opened the folder and looked at the attached map and aerial photograph. She immediately recognized the location.

“This is over the house where you were born,” said Beth as she held up the photo.

“Exactly,” said Andrea. “The house is long gone and my father’s old airstrip is down there under all those trees. I like the idea of being united with the place where I first flew.”

“How old were you when you first went up?” asked Beth.

“Four,” she replied. “I know that Mom had kittens...but if Dad had had his way he would have taken me up as soon as I had been born.”

“Do you remember the flight?”

“I think so...then again it just be my mind playing tricks on me.”

“What type of plane was it?”

“It was an old Curtis Jenny. It was the first plane that my dad bought...and it was the first plane that I ever flew solo. There’s a photo of it in the living room.”

“Cool,” replied Beth.

“So will you do it?” asked Andrea.

“Um, what will...Dad say?” asked Beth.

“He’ll be fine. I’ve already told him my plans.”

“Okay,” replied Beth.

“I’ve also talked to my lawyer about arranging the rental of the plane,” continued Andrea.

“Make sure it’s one that I can fly,” replied Beth.

“I’m also arranging for you get some additional lessons,” she said. “While it wouldn’t be impossible to find a working Jenny, I wouldn’t do that to you, no I will have you fly something a little more modern. It will still be an open biplane so I’m sure you will love the experience.”

“You want me to fly a real biplane?” asked Beth.

“Yes, don’t worry I know you can do it,” said Andrea. “It’s quite exciting to feel the air in your face.”

Beth looked at the smile on Andrea’s face.

“I would be honored, Gran.”

“Thank you. I feel it’s a proper sendoff for me.”

Beth nodded.

“Um just one question, who will release the ashes?”

“Your father,” replied Andrea. “I know that I can trust him to do it. If not him then your young man.”

“Okay,” replied Beth.

## Chapter 4

Jirra Reid stepped out of the elevator on the fourth floor of the building where she lived. She could hear the excited barking of Spirit, Celeste’s dog.

Celeste opened the front door and Spirit ran over to greet Jirra.

“Good afternoon,” said Jirra as she pet Spirit.

“Hi Jirra,” replied Celeste. “Thanks for accepting my dinner invitation.”

“It’s my pleasure,” replied Jirra.

“I hate having dinner alone...no offense Spirit,” said Celeste.

Spirit let out a friendly woof.

“When does Beth get back?” asked Jirra as she followed Celeste.

“Tomorrow,” she replied.

“How’s Andrea?”

“Glad to be out of the hospital according to Beth.”

Jirra smiled.

“She sounds like quite a woman. Have you met her?”

Celeste nodded as she peeked into the oven to check the lasagna.

“She’s amazing,” replied Celeste.

Jirra sat down on one of the stools that were next to the kitchen counter. Spirit circled and then flopped down on the floor next to Jirra.

“It must be tough on Beth,” said Jirra.

“Beth’s tough, but this is breaking her up,” replied Celeste.

“Well, I might have an idea to cheer her up a little,” said Jirra.

“What’s that?” asked Celeste.

“Alexis called and told me that they’re almost finished shooting for this season and they’re going to have a wrap party in two weeks. I’d like you two to join me.”

“That would be fun. Where is it?”

“Boston. They’re taking over the top two floors of one of the big downtown hotels. Jen will be there and so will Diana, Faith, Max... and maybe even Tessa and Jonathan. Alexis is going to have some of the musicians who have contributed to her show’s soundtrack perform.”

“Really?”

“She’s hoping that Tina is available,” continued Jirra.

“That would be nice,” said Celeste.

“From what Alexis has said, Tina’s career has really taken off since she performed on the show.”

“I know, it’s wonderful. But it isn’t just her career that has taken off; she’s really made progress with her past. She really has turned into one of the success stories,” said Celeste. “I can still remember how withdrawn she was when I first met her.”

The oven timer went off and Celeste looked in the oven.

“A few more minutes,” she said as she inspected the lasagna. “Oh, speaking of success stories, how do you like your new neighbor?”

“You mean Rachel Green? She’s really cool,” replied Jirra.

“You know her story, right?”

Jirra nodded. “She told me everything the other night. It’s amazing that she’s doing so well.”

(For Rachel’s background please read Mentor)

“I know what you mean,” said Celeste.

“Um... do you think that I can trust her with my story?” asked Jirra.

“I think so. When you’re ready you can tell her up here with us.”

Jirra nodded. “Thanks.”

The timer went off again and Celeste checked on dinner.

“Looks ready,” she announced.

“Great, it smells wonderful.”

## Chapter 5

Over dinner they talked about school and their friends.

“I’m going to miss Cat. I mean, I’m happy she’s about to graduate this semester, but she’s such a great friend.”

“She’ll still be a friend,” said Celeste.

Jirra smiled. “I know, but you know what I mean. She’ll be in DC and we’ll be here...and soon we’ll be all over the place. I know life moves on and all that...but there are times when you wish you could freeze time...these few years here have been so special.”

"That's true, but we will always be close. I mean as soon as she finishes with the academy she's going to get married to Matt."

"Cool, another wedding," said Jirra.

"Besides, true friendship will last forever."

"Killara says the same thing," said Jirra as she referred to her spirit guide.

"I have to try that someday," said Celeste.

"It's incredible... and also a bit frustrating. For every answer Killara gives me...he adds three questions."

"Have you talked to him lately?"

Jirra shook her head.

"There really hasn't been a good reason...life has been so....well, normal lately."

"Do you count Iona's wedding as normal?" asked Celeste.

Jirra laughed. "Actually yes, considering what we've all been through."

Celeste began to laugh too. "Yes it's amazing what one can get used to."

## Chapter 6

Beth was back in Philly the next day. Celeste drove down to 30<sup>th</sup> Street Station to pick her up.

"How're you doing?" asked Celeste.

Beth updated on Andrea's health and also about the will.

"And are you going to do it?" asked Celeste.

Beth nodded.

"That's fantastic," said Celeste.

"I have the name of a flight instructor who will teach me to fly the biplane," continued Beth.

"Is it that different from what you've learned so far?"

"Depends on the plane, some of the biplanes in use today are pretty advanced technology-wise," said Beth. "I'm looking forward to the challenge."

Celeste nodded. "Just so you know, I would love to be there with you when you do it."

"Thanks," replied Beth. "I appreciate that."

"Oh, I had dinner with Jirra last night and she invited us to a party," said Celeste.

"I'm not much in the party mood right now," replied Beth.

"Which is why you need to go to one," said Celeste. "Besides, it will be good for you."

She then told Beth about the wrap party up in Boston.

Beth thought about it.

"Well, considering I'll know so many people there, I guess it would be fun," she replied.

"I think it will be really fun...and it will do you a world of good," said Celeste.

Beth glanced over at her roommate.

"Am I that bad?"

"You have been moping around a lot lately. I'm not downplaying what you're going through, but Andrea wouldn't want to see you like this. Life and death go hand in hand, I still miss Sherman, but I'm moving on. Sean has filled a void in my life. "

Beth glanced over. "I know...but it's just that Andrea is the last connection to my old family. I mean, I have a great family now...they're as dear to me as my original one...how do I replace Andrea?"

"Honor her with the way you live your own life. Maybe by starting your own family," suggested Celeste. "I mean, isn't that what Andrea did?"

Beth was about to answer and then she stopped. "Wow, I never thought about it like that."

"You know, in many ways you and Andrea have led parallel lives," said Celeste. "I don't know her as well as you do, but I suspect that she wouldn't want you to stop living your life to its fullest. I think that's also part of the reason why she wants you to learn to fly a biplane."

"You're right," said Beth.

"Look, if you don't want to go up to Boston, I know everyone will understand...but I think you should go."

"Thanks for being so honest...I suddenly feel better about everything."

"Glad to help," said Celeste. "Everyone needs help thinking things out sometimes."

## Chapter 7

Jirra walked across campus after leaving the office of the campus newspaper. She had just got her latest assignment. Her editor wanted her to interview the head of the campus police concerning the new parking rules. It wasn't that exciting, but lately the campus police had been very active in enforcing the parking regulations. It had caused a lot of griping by the students.

Jirra didn't mind the assignment. She took the same attitude towards all her articles.

Jill Macintosh greeted her as she walked towards Billy Penn's, the campus coffee shop.

"So what did you get?" asked Jill.

"The parking issue," replied Jirra as she stepped into line.

"I know you'll do a great job. I kinda miss writing articles," replied Jill who was now an assistant editor.

"I have an appointment with the head of parking in an hour," said Jirra.

"Cool," replied Jill. "You know you're probably the second best writer at the paper now."

"Who's first?" asked Jirra.

Jill pointed at herself.

"A great writer and modest too," replied Jirra.

"Naturally modest," said Jill.

They both laughed.

"Oh, can you cover the next football game, it's next weekend?"

Jirra shook her head.

"I thought you liked football," said Jill.

"It's not that; I have a prior engagement out of town," she replied.

Jirra then told Jill about the wrap party up in Boston.

"That's so cool," replied Jill. "You know I take back what I said earlier... you're not the second best writer on the paper, you're the best."

Jirra shook her head. "I disagree; you're a much better reporter than me. I'm just better at making up stories. You can't do that and be a reporter."

Jill laughed. "Sure you can, have read some of the garbage online?"

## Chapter 8

"I'm really looking forward to seeing you, Alexis," said Jirra.

"I know, I feel the same way. The good thing is that we have a few weeks off until we start shooting the next season so I'll be able to spend some time with you down in Philly," replied Alexis. "So did you talk Beth into coming?"

Jirra adjusted her phone. "I didn't, but Celeste did."

"Great to hear. So how's her grandmother?"

Jirra told her.

"That's too bad. It's too bad that Andrea's story can't be told to the general public, it would make a great book."

"Who would believe it?" asked Jirra.

"True. It's a shame; people should know what great things she did. I mean just her time in Denmark during the war would be a bestseller."

"Well at least we know it," said Jirra. She then told Alexis about Andrea's request concerning the biplane.

"Wow, that's amazing. Do you think that she'd mind if we were there?"

"I can ask," replied Jirra.

"Cool. Then I gotta go, we have an early shoot in the morning. Oh, Faith is going to ask you for three scripts for next season," said Alexis.

"Three?" asked Jirra. "Are you sure?"

"She wants one original from you and she wants you to adapt two of her books."

"Which ones?" asked Jirra.

Alexis told her.

"Cool, I've read both, that will make it a little easier," said Jirra. "I'm not complaining, but I'm slightly shocked that Faith wants me to adapt her stories. She's so protective of her work."

"That's why she wants you. She knows that she can trust you to stay true to her characters. The last writer we tried had all these ideas on how Erin Flynn should act and Faith didn't like it one bit."

"I'll do my best," said Jirra.

"We both know that," said Alexis. "Oh, can you do me a favor with the original one?"

“Sure, what is it?”

“Faith was a huge fan of Robert Parker and the Spenser series. Can you work in a little tribute to Parker in your story as a surprise for her?”

“That sounds like a cool challenge. I’ll see what I can do,” said Jirra. “I also loved his books.”

“Thanks,” replied Alexis. “Well, good night. I love you Roo.”

“I love you too, Alexis,” replied Jirra.

## Chapter 9

“So did Alexis give you an update on who will be at the party?” asked Beth as they drove up to Boston.

“Yes,” replied Jirra. “Jen is already there, she was doing her waitress thing in the last episode they shot. Tessa and Jonathan will be there as will Faith, Max, Diana, and Kari.”

“Wow, Kari’s stepping away from the restaurant for a weekend?” asked Celeste.

“I know, Diana couldn’t believe it either,” said Jirra. “Oh, Aileen and Cailin will be there. Cailin’s taking photos of the event for Alexis.”

“And don’t forget the fact that Tina will be playing piano,” added Celeste.

Beth nodded. “Thanks for talking me into coming along.”

“You’re welcome,” said Celeste and Jirra simultaneously.

Beth smiled back. “At least we have a great weekend weather-wise. For late September it’s more like summer.”

“Another good sign of a memorable weekend,” said Jirra. “Even the traffic isn’t that bad.”

“I know, we made it around New York without any traffic jams,” said Celeste.

“Do you want to drive all the way, Jirra, or do you want me to take over?” asked Beth.

“Up to you,” replied Jirra. “We can switch when we stop and get gas. We should be in New London in another twenty minutes or so.”

“Sounds like a plan,” replied Beth as she looked out the window.

“Oh, how did the first lessons go in the biplane?” asked Jirra.

“Pretty good,” replied Beth. “It’s actually a lot of fun. Andrea was right; being out in the elements adds a whole new dimension to it.”

“Is the plane you’re practicing with the same type that you’ll be flying in Ohio?” asked Jirra.

Beth nodded. “Yes, it’s the same model. The company that Andrea’s lawyer contracted runs tours all over the country. They usually don’t lease out their planes, but he was able to convince them to do it.”

“That’s nice,” said Jirra. “How much did it cost to convince them?”

Beth laughed. “Actually not much at all. Apparently the company is family owned and the grandfather of the current owner knew Andrea’s father. Of course he doesn’t know the whole story.”

“What does he know?” asked Jirra.

“His grandfather worked with Andrea’s father during World War II. They ferried aircraft around the country,” said Beth.

“Small world,” said Celeste.

“I know,” replied Beth.

A short time later they reached New London and pulled off I-95 to make a pit stop.

Celeste pulled out her phone as soon as they got out of Jirra’s car.

“Checking on the baby?” asked Beth.

Celeste nodded. “Rachel is puppy-sitting for the first time for Spirit.”

“There’s no need to worry. I’m sure she has everything under control,” said Beth.

“Oh, I trust Rachel, but it is her first time,” said Celeste.

“I was talking about Spirit,” said Beth with a grin.

## Chapter 10

They stopped for dinner outside Providence so that they would miss the worst of the Boston traffic.

“So are we going right to the hotel?” asked Beth as they got back in the car.

“Yes. The production company has reserved the entire top two floors of the hotel. Tomorrow night they’ll also have the roof top bar and restaurant too,” said Jirra. “So in all they have the top four floors.”

“That can’t be cheap,” said Beth.

“It isn’t, Alexis said that they made a sweetheart of a deal with the hotel. They film a lot of scenes at the hotel...free advertizing,” said Jirra. “Also the company uses the hotel to put up guests during the shooting.”

“Do they still film everything locally?” asked Celeste.

“Yes. That was one of the stipulations that Faith insisted on. She hates it when some other area is standing in for New England,” said Jirra. “Now that the show is a hit they get their pick of filming locations. There’s actually a waiting line of people that have offered to let them film in their locations. You wouldn’t believe how much business has increased at some of the places they’ve used for filming.”

They arrived at the hotel thanks to the GPS system in Jirra’s car.

“I can’t imagine driving into Boston without one of these things,” said Jirra.

“It does lack one thing for Boston,” said Beth.

“What’s that?” asked Celeste.

“It should automatically curse out the driver in front of you,” replied Beth.

Jirra and Celeste laughed.

“That would be a timesaver,” said Jirra.

## **Chapter 11**

Alexis greeted Jirra with a hug and a kiss as soon as they entered her suite.

“How was your ride up?” she asked as they embraced.

“No problems at all,” replied Jirra. “It’s so nice to be in your arms again.”

“I’ve missed you too,” said Alexis. “Where’s Beth and Celeste.”

“They’re checking into their rooms...and they said that they’ll see you tomorrow...they wanted us to have some time alone,” said Jirra.

Alexis licked her lips. “How wonderful!”

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Within a few minutes of arriving in her room, Beth heard a knock on the door.

She looked through the peephole to see Jen standing outside her door.

“Hi Jen,” she greeted as she opened the door.

“How’re you doing Beth?” replied Jen as she gave her a hug.

“Doing good,” replied Beth. “What about you?”

“Busy as always. I think the main reason I do this role for Alexis is so I can get some time off,” replied Jen.

Beth laughed. “Celeste is next door. We figured that we’d round up the others and leave the lovebirds alone.”

“Ah, great minds think alike. I was planning the same thing. I already arranged for the others to meet in my room.”

“So what’s the plan?”

“You know Tina, right?”

Beth nodded.

“She’s playing at a local jazz club tonight; do you want to join us?”

“That would be fun,” she replied.

“Great, let’s go grab Celeste and meet the rest of the gang,” replied Jen.

“How’re we getting there?” asked Beth.

“Transportation has been taken care of,” replied Jen.

Beth cocked her head. “Um, I hope it’s something subtle.”

“Subtle is my middle name,” replied Jen.

Twenty minutes later a black stretch Hummer limo pulled up in front of the jazz bar and unloaded its guests.

## Chapter 12

“It was so nice of our friends to give us this time together,” said Jirra as she snuggled up close to Alexis in bed.

“Yes it was,” replied Alexis as she ran her fingers gently across Jirra’s breasts. “I’ve really missed you. I guess it’s a way of seeing how madly in love with you I am. I really hate these separations.”

“I know what you mean,” replied Jirra.

“Don’t get me wrong, I really want you to finish your degree, but I also can’t wait until we’re together all the time,” said Alexis. “I’ve been pretty lucky, I mean I have a very successful career, I’m financially set for life, I have great friends, a loving family...but you my dear are the best thing in my life. I honestly cannot imagine life without you.”

Jirra smiled back.

“When I was...transformed, I thought my life was over. I gradually accepted my new gender, but I thought that I would have to go through life alone. I decided that I would have to be honest with anyone I met...as it would be too unfair not to. I figured that no one would accept me...thank you for proving me wrong.”

“My pleasure,” replied Alexis as she leaned close and gave Jirra a long passionate kiss.

### Chapter 13

Alexis and Jirra invited the others to their room for breakfast.

The hotel set up a buffet table in the living room of the suite. A cook was on hand to cook omelets to order or to make Belgium waffles. There was also bacon, ham, sausages, bagels, muffins, fresh fruit, fresh coffee, teas, and a selection of juices.

Jen, Celeste, Beth, Aileen, Cailin, Jonathan and Tessa joined them.

“Faith called and said that they would be up shortly,” said Alexis. “They said not to wait for them so help yourself.”

“It all looks delicious,” said Beth.

“The waffles are wonderful,” said Alexis. “I keep trying to bribe the chefs to get the recipe.”

“Well, I’m going to start with one of them,” said Jirra. “Is that real maple syrup?”

The cook made a face of mock indignation. “Believe it or not we get guests who won’t touch the real stuff. We begrudgingly give them the imitation syrup.”

“Their loss,” said Jirra. She then glanced over at Jonathan. “I loved your latest article, it was excellent.”

He made a mock bow. “Thank you. It’s always a pleasure to get a compliment from a fellow writer.”

“I’m not in your league,” she replied.

He shook his head. “I disagree. I read your article online. You have a real talent.”

“You read my article?” asked Jirra with an astonished look on her face.

He nodded. “I particularly liked the one on those bad landlords that operate near your campus. It should have been in a major paper. I know you like working on the show, but you could be an excellent reporter if you wanted to.”

“Thanks,” she replied.

“The next time you’re up here for a while give me a call, I’d love to introduce you to my editor,” he continued. “He shares my opinion.”

Jirra looked at Tessa.

“He’s serious,” replied Tessa.

“Wow,” replied Jirra.

“Hey, even if you still want to write scripts it doesn’t hurt to have connections,” he continued.

“Thanks, I’ll keep that in mind,” replied Jirra.

There was a knock on the door and Alexis walked over. When she opened the door, she saw Faith, Max, and Diana standing in the hall.

“Good morning,” greeted Faith.

“Come on in, we just started to eat,” replied Alexis as she escorted them inside. “I believe you know everyone.”

## Chapter 14

The party started at eight that evening. There were over three hundred people invited, most of them worked as crew on the show. There were also a few VIPs including local politicians, athletes, and media. To keep out the paparazzi and other non-invited guests there was security. No one could get to the top floors without a special pass. Additional security guarded each floor to prevent people from sneaking in.

The production company also provided complementary hotel rooms. The last thing they wanted was a member of the crew or a guest getting a DUI.

“I’m sorry that I won’t be able to spend a lot of time with you at the party, but I’m sort of expected to mingle. Don’t worry, I’ll make it up to you later, Roo,” said Alexis.

“I understand. By the way you look incredible, that dress looks great on you,” said Jirra.

Alexis was wearing an emerald green colored dress.

“It’s a little showy, but the designer does a lot of our costumes,” she replied. “You look great yourself.”

Jirra was wearing a short black dress.

“Thank you.”

“I really like it when you wear a dress. I know it’s not your favorite thing to do, but you do have the body for it,” said Alexis.

Jirra nodded.

“Well, let’s go up and get this party underway,” said Alexis as she slipped her arm around Jirra’s waist.

## Chapter 15

Jirra was always amazed by the way Alexis could hit a switch and go from normal to celebrity. Once they reached the top floor of the hotel, Alexis began to greet the crew and guests.

Alexis led Jirra around as they greeted the heads of the production company and some of the local celebrities. Since she had come out as a lesbian a while back, no one was shocked or surprised that she walked around holding Jirra’s hand.

Alexis leaned over and whispered in Jirra’s ear. “You might want to go talk with some of the others now. The conversation is about to get rather dull. It’s business time.”

“Okay, I’ll see you later,” replied Jirra.

Alexis leaned over and gave her a quick kiss on the cheek.

Jirra was already well known to the regular crew and they greeted her like an old friend.

As she talked to some of the crew, she saw her other friends mingling. All, including Beth, appeared to be having a wonderful time.

Tina was playing the piano on a stage that had been set up for her. Celeste was standing nearby with a huge smile on her face. She was so pleased how Tina had overcome all the pain that Margo Simon had inflicted on her.

After a while, Jirra headed to the restaurant to see who was down there. She really just wanted to hang out with Alexis, but Jirra could see that Alexis was busy entertaining several local dignitaries.

On the way down to the restaurant Jirra shared the short elevator ride with a man who appeared to be in his mid-twenties. Jirra didn’t recognize him, although he apparently knew who she was.

“You’re Jirra Reid, one of the writers, right?” he asked.

Jirra nodded.

“I’m Bryan Longwell,” he replied. “I’m one of the stuntmen...not full time on the show yet.”

“Pleased to meet you,” she replied.

“It’s a great show to work on,” he continued as the doors opened.

Jirra nodded.

She then groaned when she saw the line to the bar.

Bryan noticed her disappointment.

“Can I get you something to drink?” he asked.

“The line is too long. I’ll come back later,” she said.

“I know the bartender, what do you want?” he asked pleasantly.

“Just a ginger ale, please,” she replied.

“Nothing stronger?” he asked.

Jirra shook her head.

He smiled. “I’ll be right back.”

A short time later he returned and handed her a drink. She noticed that he had a glass of beer.

“Well, here’s to a successful season,” he said as he made a toast.

Jirra smiled back and then took a sip of her drink.

## Chapter 16

Alexis freed herself from the obligated greetings and began to move among her crew. All the time she was looking for Jirra.

She didn’t see her anywhere.

Alexis then saw Beth and she motioned for her to come over.

“Have you seen Jirra lately?” asked Alexis.

"I saw her go down to the restaurant around thirty minutes ago," said Beth. "You want me to go find her for you?"

"That would be great. I want to get a photo of us together."

Beth nodded and then headed down to the restaurant. She looked around and didn't see Jirra anywhere. It was then that she got one of those feelings that something was wrong.

She walked over and picked up the house phone and called Jirra's room. There was no answer.

Beth glanced over and saw Tessa and Jonathan talking to a couple of the crew.

She walked over and asked if they had seen Jirra.

"No, we haven't," replied Tessa. "Is something wrong?"

"I don't know, but it's unlike her to just walk off."

"Let's go talk to the security guards," said Tessa.

Beth and Tessa walked over to one of the security guards. Beth then described Jirra to him.

He shook his head.

"Can you call to your other guards and see if they saw something?" asked Beth.

The guard nodded and spoke into his microphone.

"One of the guards on the next floor down saw a girl who matches your friend's description. He said that she looked drunk and was being helped into a room by one of the party guests."

"My friend doesn't drink," stated Beth.

"He says that a man was helping her into the room and that she looked out of it," repeated the guard.

Beth looked at Tessa. "Something's wrong."

"Have them meet us at the elevator, we're heading down there," said Tessa to the guard.

The guard on the next floor met Beth and Tessa as soon as they stepped out of the elevator. He looked like a college kid.

He described Jirra perfectly.

"Which room?" demanded Beth.

The guard hesitated.

Beth opened her purse and pulled out her badge. "Now, show me which room."

The guard nodded and led her down the hall.

"I'll go get Max," said Tessa.

Beth nodded.

"They went in here," he said nervously.

Beth reached down and tried the door. It was locked.

"Can you open this door?" she asked.

The guard nodded. "But I need permission."

Beth glared at him impatiently. "Get it...now!"

The guard called his supervisor who arrived a short time later. He immediately granted permission when he saw Beth's ID and badge. Beth noticed that he didn't look much older than the guard.

He opened the door for her.

"Stay out here and don't let anyone leave without my permission," said Beth.

The guards nodded.

As soon as Beth stepped into the room she knew something awful had happened. She saw Jirra's shoes and dress lying on the floor, just inside the door. She stepped in quietly and listened. She heard a man's voice in the bedroom.

"Hope you enjoyed that...dyke," said the man.

Beth slipped down the hall and into the bedroom. What she saw shocked her. Jirra was naked and tied down to the bed. She also appeared to be unconscious.

There was a man, partially dressed standing next to her. She recognized him from the party, although she didn't know his name.

The man turned suddenly and saw Beth.

He tried to bolt past her, but he was too slow. Beth tripped him and he tumbled hard to the floor.

The man jumped up and glared at her.

"You fucking bitch!" he screamed.

He took a swing at her, which she easily dodged. This caught him by surprise, but before he could react he was back on the floor as Beth knocked his legs out from under him.

“Stay there!” she yelled as she turned her attention to Jirra.

Beth could see that Jirra was breathing.

Bryan decided to take this opportunity to escape. He jumped up and fled the room.

Beth screamed to him to stop as she started after him.

Bryan easily knocked the two guards to the ground as he raced for the elevator. He knew if he could get off the floor he could get away.

He was almost to the elevator when the door opened out stepped a beautiful woman and an older man.

“Stop him!” screamed Beth.

Bryan ran past them and headed for the fire exit.

“He attacked Jirra!” screamed Beth as she ran after him.

Bryan could hear the people chasing him and as he got closer to the exit one of the room doors opened. Two of the party guests stepped out. Bryan knocked them down and ran into the room, closing the door behind him.

The supervisor limped up and produced his master key.

“Leave this to us,” ordered Max as they burst into the room.

Bryan was now out on the balcony. He looked to the floor below and estimated the distance to balcony one room over. He had made jumps like this before, but not under this sort of stress and never without a net.

He glanced over at the three people racing towards him and decided it was now or never.

Max, Tessa and Beth reached the balcony just in time to see Bryan leap.

He caught the railing with both hands, but he had misjudged the distance and he accidentally jammed one of his hands. He was now hanging twenty-five stories from the ground with only his right hand.

“I’ll head down to the next floor,” said Max.

Tessa and Beth nodded.

Max grabbed the security supervisor and ran towards the stairs.

On ground there was another party going outside, enjoying the warm weather. They were all soon staring up at the man dangling from the balcony.

“Help me!” cried Bryan. “I can’t hold on much longer.”

“Hold on,” yelled Beth.

“Why?” asked Tessa under her breath.

“Please don’t let me fall,” screamed Brian. “I don’t want to die!”

Before Beth could reply Bryan began to struggle with his grasp. He tried to reach up with his injured hand, but it was no good, he lost his grip and fell screaming to his death.

## Chapter 17

Alexis and the others waited in the ER waiting room as Jirra was examined.

Max, Beth, and Tessa gave their statements to the police.

A short time later one of the doctors came out to brief them.

“She’s still out of it. Actually I’m amazed she’s alive, he used a very high dose of Rohypnol on her. She has a very strong constitution,” she said.

“Did he rape her?” asked Alexis. “I need to know.”

The doctor nodded. “I’m sorry.”

Alexis let out a scream of rage and fell down on her knees. She was immediately comforted by Jen and the others.

“Can I see her?” begged Alexis.

“She’s still unconscious,” replied the doctor.

“I don’t care. I want to be there when she wakes up,” said Alexis as she wiped away her tears.

She was helped up by Jen and Max.

“Hospital rules state only family,” said the doctor.

“We’re engaged,” said Alexis as she extended her hand to show her ring.

The doctor nodded. “The nurse will show you the way.”

Alexis looked at the others who all motioned for her to go.

"I'll call her mom," said Beth.

"Thanks," replied Alexis as she left.

"Thank you," said Jen to the doctor.

The doctor sighed. "I wish I could do more."

"What about the dead guy?" asked Max.

"They're doing an autopsy on him as we speak. He'll be checked for STDs... and the like," replied the doctor.

The lead detective assigned to the case approached Max and the others.

"I just talked to my chief and we'll do what we can to keep a low profile on this one," he said. "We'll have to make a statement, but we'll do our best to keep everyone's name out of the spotlight."

"Thank you," said Max.

"What about the deceased, what do you know about him?" asked Beth.

"He has no priors, but we're conducting a search warrant on his place as we speak. He had to get those date rape drugs from someone," said the detective.

"Keep us informed, okay?" asked Max.

The detective nodded.

## Chapter 18

Jirra slowly opened her eyes. It took her a moment to realize that she was in a hospital room. She also noticed that Alexis was sitting next to her holding her hand.

"My head is killing me," she groaned. "What happened?"

"Thank god you're awake," exclaimed Alexis, who began to cry.

"What...what do you mean?"

"Oh god, Jirra, I'm so sorry...you were...you were attacked," stammered Alexis as she fought back tears.

"Attacked?" she asked as she sat up in bed. "What do you mean...don't hold it back...please."

"You were sexually assaulted. You were drugged and attacked," said Alexis.

Jirra gasped. "Raped?"

Alexis nodded. "I better get the nurse."

"No! Don't leave me," stated Jirra as she clutched Alexis's hand tightly.

"I won't," said Alexis as she reached up with her free hand and pressed the call button.

## Chapter 19

"We'd like to keep you here another day," said the doctor as she finished her examination.

"Why?" asked Jirra as she looked at the doctor's name tag. It read Dr. Schilling.

Dr. Schilling was a short blonde woman who looked to be in her late forties.

"You had a near fatal dosage of Rohypnol in your system. Actually it's the highest level we've ever recorded and we just want to make sure that you're okay. To be honest, I'm amazed you're awake."

Jirra stared back. "I've always had a high metabolism."

"You must," said Dr. Schilling. "Do you have a family physician back in Philly?"

"My mom," replied Jirra.

"Really, that's good to hear," she replied. "I'd like to talk to her."

"Actually she lives in New Mexico," answered Jirra.

"She's on her way," interjected Alexis. "We called her last night, Jirra."

"Thanks," replied Jirra.

"Good. I'd like her to keep an eye on you for the next few days," said Dr. Schilling. "When she gets here, have the nurse contact me."

"Okay," replied Jirra.

"Now, the good news is that the preliminary tests results are back and it doesn't look like your attacker had any STDs or HIV. I do recommend that you get checked again every few weeks," she said.

"I will," replied Jirra softly. "Anything else?"

The doctor hesitated before speaking. "I need to ask you this; are you on birth control?"

Jirra shook her head. "No...I didn't think I needed it. I mean, I'm a lesbian."

The doctor nodded. "I'll have one of the counselors come up and brief you."

"You mean...on my options if I'm...pregnant?" asked Jirra.

"Yes," she replied. "A woman should know all her choices I also recommend that you see a therapist when you get back to Philly."

Jirra nodded. "Okay."

"Jirra, I know this is an awful experience. There's no way to sugarcoat it. The thing is to not try and go through it alone. From what I've seen you have a lot of wonderful friends who are concerned about you. Don't hesitate to use them."

Jirra nodded again.

"Sounds like you have a lot of experience in these sorts of things," said Jirra.

"Too much," replied Dr. Schilling. "The good thing is that there are plenty of services available these days. The trouble is getting people to use them."

"I'm a bit bullheaded...but I know better than to go this alone...not that my friends would let me."

"You got that right," said Alexis.

Dr. Schilling smiled. "That's good to hear."

## Chapter 20

After the doctor left, Jirra and Alexis held hands quietly for the next few minutes.

"What if I'm pregnant?" asked Jirra as she broke the silence.

"You know you can count on me...I'll support you with whatever you want to do," said Alexis.

Jirra smiled back. "I know that...but what do I tell people? I mean, I'm supposed to be transgendered. How do I explain this?"

"We'll cross that bridge when we get to it."

"I know that there are things I can do to stop it...if I'm pregnant...and even if I decide to keep it...I can always put it up for adoption..."

"Roo, you'll drive your self crazy running though everything that could happen. The thing to do right now is to heal."

Jirra let out a sigh.

"This is so wrong....I don't remember a thing about what he did to me...one minute I'm at a party, having a great time and the next thing I know I wake up in a hospital bed and told that I was drugged and raped. Damnit, haven't I had enough challenges in my life so far? Who did I piss off? Damnit I've had enough challenges...why can't I just have a regular life!" she shouted with rage.

She then burst into tears and began to sob. Alexis held her tight and did her best to comfort her.

"This...isn't fair," she cried. "It's just not fair."

"I know, but I'll be with you...all the way," said Alexis.

Jirra hugged her tighter as she sobbed.

"Don't let go," cried Jirra.

"I won't," replied Alexis.

## Chapter 21

"How's she doing?" asked Jen as they talked outside of Jirra's room.

"She's asleep now. The doctor gave her a sedative," said Alexis. "She's pretty freaked out...and angry...and so am I."

"That's to be expected," said Jen.

"Where's everyone else?" asked Alexis.

"Max & Tessa had to go talk to Boston PD. Faith, Diana, and Jonathan went with them. Oh, your producer called and they're sending their lawyers to meet with the cops," said Jen. "He said that if you need anything just call."

"Any word on Jirra's mom?" asked Alexis.

"Her flight gets arrives in thirty minutes. Beth and Celeste are waiting for her at Logan," said Jen. "They'll bring her directly here."

"How did she get a flight so quickly?" asked Alexis.

"I took care of that. It was much faster to use one of my private jets," said Jen.

"Thank you," replied Alexis. "Jen, how am I going to face her? This is all my fault!"

Jen shook her head. "No, no it isn't. No one could have known that that stuntman was a rapist. I just checked with the production company and he passed all of the required background checks before

he was hired. Max just suggested that I call the Boudicca Agency to do some deeper background checks. The production company must have missed something the first time.”

Alexis wiped away a tear with her hand.

“I should have been with her...I was too busy playing the ‘star’. What a joke I am!”

“Alexis, this isn’t your fault. Unfortunately this kind of thing happens all the time. The only good thing is that the bastard proved that they haven’t repealed the laws of gravity.”

Alexis smiled in spite of herself.

“Don’t make me laugh, I want to feel bad,” said Alexis.

Jen shook her head. “No dice. As much as Jirra’s going to need her friends to get through this...you’ll need help too.”

Jen then gave Alexis a long comforting hug.

“I don’t deserve a friend like you,” said Alexis.

“That’s true...but you’re stuck with me,” said Jen.

## Chapter 22

Liz Reid was briefed on what happened on the ride from Logan to the hospital.

“Alexis called us and said that Jirra’s currently sedated. Also the doctor wants to talk to you,” said Beth.

“Do you have the doctor’s name?” asked Liz.

“Dr. Schilling,” said Beth.

“Thanks,” she replied.

“The doctor is concerned about the dosage of Rohypnol that was used on Jirra,” continued Beth. “Apparently the guy used a very high dosage.”

Liz nodded.

“We both know about Jirra’s ability to recover,” said Beth.

“She’s lucky to have such wonderful friends,” said Liz. “I know this goes without saying, but she’s going to need you even more than normal.”

“That’s not a problem,” said Celeste. “Jirra is like a sister to us...and we stick together.”

Liz smiled at her. "Thank you."

Beth then told her about the police.

"That's good to hear. I know this may sound awful, but I'm glad he's dead. It'll save Jirra the strain of a trial," said Liz.

"I think everyone feels the same way," said Beth.

They arrived at the hospital and headed right up to Jirra's room.

Alexis was talking to Jen just outside the room as they arrived.

Any apprehension that Alexis had about Liz evaporated immediately when Liz gave her a big hug.

"I'm so sorry," cried Alexis.

"You have nothing to apologize for, dear. I know this isn't your fault," comforted Liz.

"Thank you," replied Alexis.

"The important thing is that you support her...there are going to be some rough days ahead for both of you," said Liz.

Alexis nodded as she wiped her eyes.

"Now, come on in with me," said Liz.

"Don't you want to be alone?" asked Alexis.

"There will be time for that later, right now she can use all the support she can get," said Liz.

## Chapter 23

An hour later, Jirra woke up and smiled when she saw her mom and the others.

"Hi," said Jirra.

Liz stood up and walked over to hug her daughter.

"I'm sorry, Mom."

"Roo, you have nothing to apologize for, you did nothing wrong," said Liz.

Jirra smiled back.

"How're you feeling? Any pain?" asked Liz.

Jirra shook her head. "Just tired. I was a bit nauseous earlier, but that's gone."

"I'm glad to hear that," said Liz.

"So you know everything?" asked Jirra.

"Yes. I was updated by your friends. I still need to talk to the doctor," said Liz.

"Mom, I'm not on birth control," said Jirra.

"I know dear," said Liz.

"I'm worried that I might be pregnant," confessed Jirra.

"That's a possibility," said Liz.

"I think it might be more than that," said Jirra. "I mean, the process that transformed me was part of a fertility ceremony. What do I do if I am pregnant? How do we explain it?"

"We have time to figure that out," said Liz as she looked at the others. "The important thing now is for you to get help for this."

"I just want to get back down to Philly and start back with my classes," replied Jirra.

"Maybe you should take some time off?" suggested Beth.

Jirra shook her head. "I don't want to fall behind in my classes."

"Well, the fact that you're being stubborn is a good sign," said Liz with a wink.

Jirra smiled back. "Going to class will keep my mind off this. Also sleeping in my own bed will be nice too."

"Do you mind some company?" asked Alexis.

"No, in fact I was counting on it," said Jirra.

"I'd like to stay in Philly with you for a while too," added Liz.

"I'd like that too," said Jirra.

## Chapter 24

Jirra was discharged the next morning.

"I'm so glad to be out of there," said Jirra as they drove over to Alexis's place.

Beth and Celeste took Jirra's car and drove back down to Philly. Jirra, Alexis and Liz would drive down in Alexis's car.

"I'm sorry that I didn't have a chance to say good bye to the others," said Jirra.

"They all understand," said Alexis as they drove out of Boston. "They also promised to come down and visit you."

Jirra nodded as she looked out the window.

"Jen will be in the city next month for an interview. She'll definitely stop by and see you," continued Alexis.

"That's cool," said Jirra.

"I suspect that she'll drag you down to Pat's for a cheese steak."

"The horror!" laughed Jirra.

"So how long will you be off, Alexis?" asked Liz.

"A couple of weeks," she replied.

"I thought you were going back to Ohio to see your family?" asked Jirra.

"I called and told them what happened. They understand completely. I'll see them later this year," she said.

"You didn't have to do that," said Jirra.

"Yes I did...you'd do it for me," she replied.

Jirra smiled back. "Thanks. So how much of what happened made it out?"

"The production company worked with the police and the press to minimize attention," said Alexis.

She then described how the story was downplayed by the press. Of course there was no way that it could totally kept out of the spotlight. A man falling over twenty stories to his death is always news. But the details of the rape and Jirra's name were kept out of the reports.

The police also found a large supply of illegal drugs in Bryan's apartment ranging from steroids to date-rape drugs.

"Did you know...the guy who attacked me?" asked Jirra.

Alexis shook her head. "I've searched my memories and can't place him. He might have worked with the second unit or he might have been so made up that I didn't see his real face."

They took their time driving down and made several stops. Jirra was still feeling a bit tired and appreciated the leisurely pace.

“How did you explain to Dr. Schilling about the amount of drugs in my system?” asked Jirra as they ate lunch.

“I tap-danced around that one a bit,” replied Liz. “She said that she had never seen anyone live with that high a dosage in their system.”

Jirra nodded.

“So when’s the earliest I can find out if I’m pregnant?” she asked.

“A month,” she replied. “Maybe a bit longer.”

“Okay,” replied Jirra. “It’s going to be a long month.”

“I know, Roo,” said Liz. “Do you have a doctor locally?”

“You,” replied Jirra.

Liz smiled back. “I think you should have one. I still have some connections in the area and can help you.”

“I appreciate that,” said Jirra.

“Does Penn have a sexual assault support group?” asked Alexis.

Jirra nodded.

“Good. How do you feel about going to a meeting?” asked Liz.

Jirra shrugged. “I don’t know if I belong. I mean, I have no memory of the attack.”

“You wouldn’t be the first,” said Liz. “Besides, the support is for after the attack.”

“You’re right,” said Jirra as she looked at her watch. “I guess it’s time to get back on the road if we want to miss the traffic round New York.”

## Chapter 25

“It’s so good to be home,” said Jirra as she walked into her apartment.

Alexis and Liz followed her inside.

A few minutes later Celeste and Beth came down and joined them. Spirit was with them and she immediately ran over to greet Jirra.

“Here’re your car keys,” said Beth as she set Jirra’s keys down on the coffee table.

“Thanks,” replied Jirra as she petted Spirit.

“Liz, I’ve been using one of the empty units down the hall as my office. It’s also fully furnished with a bed if you want to use it,” offered Celeste.

“That’s very thoughtful, Celeste. Thank you,” replied Liz.

“Feel free to use it as long as you want,” said Celeste.

Liz nodded.

“So how long can you stay out here, Mom?” asked Jirra as she sat down on the couch.

“Judy said I could take as much time as necessary,” replied Liz.

“I’ll have to thank her,” said Jirra as she rubbed Spirit’s chin.

“So are you hungry?” asked Beth.

Jirra nodded. “A little.”

“What do you feel like eating? We’re going to make a food run,” said Beth.

“Pizza sounds good,” said Jirra.

The others nodded.

“Great, they can deliver too,” said Celeste.

As Beth picked up the phone there was a knock on the door. Celeste went up to answer it.

“Hi,” said Cat.

Jirra smiled as she heard her friend’s voice. “Come on in.”

Cat came in and rushed over and gave Jirra a hug.

“I just want you to know that if you need anything at all don’t hesitate to call me,” said Cat.

“I won’t,” replied Jirra. “Thanks. So does everyone here know?”

“Just your friends,” said Celeste. “We didn’t think you would mind.”

“I don’t. Well, might as well invite them over now. Beth, you better order a few more pizzas,” said Jirra.

“You sure?” asked Liz.

Jirra nodded. "Yes, I want to be surrounded by friends right now."

## Chapter 26

Jirra helped her mom make the bed in the apartment down the hall.

"I'm really pleased that you have so many wonderful and caring friends," said Liz.

"I'm lucky to have them," replied Jirra.

"Just one question, how do you keep track of who knows the truth about you?" asked Liz.

"It's not that hard. Most of my close friends know...I plan on telling Jill and TC eventually," she replied.

"I'm pleased that you have friends that you can trust," said Liz.

Jirra sat down on the chair next to bed. "It's not my friends that worry me. I mean, what do I do about people who don't know if I am pregnant?"

"To be honest I don't know...but we will think of something," said Liz. "Have you thought about your options if you are pregnant?"

"I've been thinking about my options...but no, I have no idea what I'm going to do," she replied. "Alexis and I have talked about having a family...some day."

Liz nodded as she sat down on the edge of the bed.

"Here, sit next to me," said Liz.

Jirra got up and sat down next to her mom.

"Now, just tell me what's on your mind," said Liz.

"I hate what was done to me...but I can't even vent against him...I mean, he's dead. If he got me pregnant...I'm not sure I want to have a child that came from him. But then again...it's not the baby's fault."

Jirra took a sip of water.

"So one option is to have an abortion...there's something I never thought I would ever have to worry about. If I do have the child, I could put it up for adoption. That would give the baby a fresh start. Then there's the last option...keeping it," said Jirra.

"Have you talked to Alexis about this?" asked Liz.

Jirra nodded.

“Nothing serious, I was mostly venting,” she replied.

“I know it must be difficult,” replied Liz. “I’ve had patients who have had to deal with issues like this...there’s no easy decision.”

“I know. I mean, if I decide to have the baby...I don’t want to stay here. It would be...complicated,” said Jirra. “Alexis said that I could move up with her...or I could go back to New Mexico.”

Liz didn’t reply.

Jirra smiled slightly. “Don’t worry; I will finish my degree no whatever I decide. It’s too important to me.”

“I have faith in you to do the right thing, Roo.”

“Celeste had a good suggestion that I talk to my academic advisor and maybe take a sabbatical,” continued Jirra. “I could even work as a writer. Faith wants me to work on three scripts for the next season.”

“That’s an interesting idea,” said Liz.

“Did you work while you were pregnant with me?” asked Jirra.

“Up until the last month,” she replied. “I got some very interesting looks when I walked in on a patient and my belly was sticking out.”

Jirra let out a laugh.

“If you decide to have the baby you’ll need a doctor. If you come back to New Mexico, I can be your regular doctor, but you’ll need a specialist. I know a few good ones in the area. If you go up to Boston, you’ll have to find one up there that you can trust.”

“I know. I’m going to ask Aileen if she can recommend anyone,” replied Jirra.

“I know the name, but please refresh my memory,” said Liz.

“She’s the woman I met in Newport last year.”

“Oh the one who’s friend was the surrogate mother?” asked Liz.

Jirra nodded. “I mean, all this worrying may be over nothing...but it doesn’t hurt to plan this out.”

“Of course. What about the first option you listed?”

“You mean an abortion?”

“Yes,” replied Liz.

“I don’t know that much about them...I know there’s an office on campus that provides resources,” she replied. “I never really had an opinion about this sort of thing one way or the other. I mean as a guy I felt it was the woman’s choice...and as a woman, I never suspected that I would have a need for one.”

“Medically speaking, it’s a safe procedure...but it’s never an easy one, even for those who are deadset against being pregnant. I just want you to know that I will always love and support you whatever decision you pick.”

Jirra looked at her mom and started to smile. Tears then began to roll down her cheeks and Liz pulled her close and began to hug her.

“This isn’t fair,” muttered Jirra.

“I know, Roo,” replied Liz. “Just let it out.”

Jirra hugged her mom tightly as she cried.

## Chapter 27

After Jirra said goodnight to her mom, she returned to her apartment.

“How’re you doing?” asked Alexis who was sitting on the couch.

“I had another nice cry with Mom,” replied Jirra as she sat down next to Alexis.

“A good cry?”

“Yes, it was very good,” replied Jirra.

“That’s good,” said Alexis. “So, how do you want to work the sleeping arrangement?”

“What do you mean?” asked Jirra.

“I can crash here on the couch,” said Alexis. “I don’t mind.”

Jirra shook her head. “Don’t you want to sleep with me?”

Alexis smiled. “Of course...but I don’t want to...how do I put this...invade your privacy...maybe you want to be alone?”

Jirra shook her head. “No, I want the exact opposite. I want to be close to you. I appreciate your concern, but the only good thing about how that bastard...assaulted me...is that I have no memory of it. I love you so much Alexis. I can’t imagine going through this without you. Does that make sense?”

“Perfect sense, Roo,” replied Alexis as she slipped her arm around Jirra’s shoulders.

“Good,” replied Jirra as she rested her head on Alexis’s shoulder. “Just hold me...I need you...I need your love so badly.”

“As you wish,” replied Alexis.

## Chapter 28

“How’d it go today?” asked Alexis as Jirra returned home following her day at school.

“Better than I thought it would be...It was nice to be focused on something else,” replied Jirra as she set her bag down.

They then hugged and kissed.

“The problems started as soon as I wasn’t in class or having anything to do,” said Jirra. “As long as I stay busy I’m okay. But when I have time to think...it sinks in what happened to me.”

“Did you call the support group?”

Jirra nodded. “They have a meeting tomorrow evening.”

“Good, what time?”

“Seven,” replied Jirra.

“Great, I’ll take you,” said Alexis.

“Thanks, I’d appreciate that,” said Jirra. “So what did you do today?”

“I went downtown with your Mom for some shopping and lunch,” replied Alexis.

“Did anyone recognize you?” asked Jirra as she sat down on the couch.

Alexis shook her head as she sat down next to Jirra. “No. I dressed casually and had my hair up. It also helps that we’re here in Philly...no one expects to see me here.”

“Do you get recognized often in Boston?”

“It happens occasionally. Usually more often when I’m out somewhere expensive...which is usually something work related. My neighbors all know who I am...and are very cool about it. They take great pleasure in giving misinformation to tourists and the press.”

“What about out at the Cape?”

“The same thing,” replied Alexis.

“Cool,” replied Jirra.

“Okay, what’s on your mind? You’ve been at both of my places and you’ve met some of my neighbors,” said Alexis.

“How do you think they’d react if I was up there...and was pregnant?”

Alexis nodded. “I thought so. I doubt it would make any difference...especially if we were married.”

Jirra smiled back. “I appreciate that...but I want our wedding to be special... like Iona’s.”

“Well, we can always do that...but there’s no reason why we can’t just do it now...make it legal and all that,” said Alexis.

“You mean that?”

Alexis rolled her eyes. “Of course!”

She then gave Jirra a kiss.

“I know you have a lot on your mind, but I’ll always be there for you...so that’s one less thing for you to worry about,” continued Alexis.

Jirra nodded.

“I’m sure you’re not going to be shocked by the fact that Liz and I talked about you today,” said Alexis.

Jirra smiled back. “I figured that.”

“If you are pregnant, we’ll support your decision,” said Alexis.

“Thanks,” said Jirra as she let out a sigh. She then placed her hands on her stomach. “I not against the idea of having a baby...it’s just that I wanted it to be our decision...not to have it thrust upon us.”

“Do you think you’re pregnant?”

“I...I don’t know...maybe,” replied Jirra. “The waiting is the worst part of this.”

“Maybe you should ask Killara,” suggested Alexis.

“I thought about it, but I have the feeling that it won’t work right now...I’m too stressed out to concentrate enough to do it,” said Jirra.

She then looked at her watch.

“I’d better call my mom.”

“She’s up with Celeste and Beth cooking dinner,” said Alexis.

“Really?” asked Jirra. “What’re they making?”

“It’s a surprise,” said Alexis.

## Chapter 29

“So now I know where you went shopping,” said Jirra as she walked into Celeste’s kitchen.

“Hannah’s been teaching cooking classes for the guests and the staff and I have been able to sneak in a few times,” said Liz. “Lindsey told me where to buy the ingredients around here. Although I had to drive over to Jersey to buy the beer. When is this backward state going to change its idiotic beer laws?”

“Never. When did you talk to Lindsey?” asked Jirra.

“I emailed her this morning. She said that she would call you later tonight,” replied Liz.

Jirra smiled. “Thanks.”

“You can thank me by coming over here and helping,” said Liz.

“Okay, let me wash my hands first,” said Jirra.

“Can you use another set of hands?” asked Alexis.

“Always,” replied Liz with a smile. “In fact I plan on using all of you.”

“Cool,” replied Alexis.

“What’s Spirit’s job?” asked Jirra.

“Keeping the kitchen floor clean,” piped in Beth.

“Well, we’d better be careful with as some of the ingredients are rather spicy,” said Liz.

“So what’s the meal? This all looks very interesting,” asked Celeste as she looked at all the ingredients spread out on the kitchen counter.

“As Hannah describes it, we’re having a semi-authentic, but damn-good kinda Mexican dinner,” said Liz. “We’re starting off with chicken tortilla soup, also known as Sopa Azteca, then for the main course beef and chicken enchiladas con queso, red rice and a salad. For drinks I have Dos Equis Amber and limeade.”

(Author’s note: The complete recipes are at the end of the story)

“Sounds great, so what do you need us to do?” asked Celeste.

“Why don’t you and Beth get started on the soup, and I’ll get Jirra and Alexis started on the enchiladas and rice. Most of the ingredients are ready to go. I’m glad that you have such a well stocked kitchen.”

“I don’t get to use it as much as I’d like,” replied Celeste. “So what do you want us to do?”

“Celeste you can start by toasting the chilies over an open flame for a few seconds. Then cool and break them into pieces. The next step is to put them in the blender jar with the canned tomatoes with the juice. Oh, don’t forget to wash your hands after handling the chilies...the last thing you want to do is have any contact with your eyes,” said Liz.

“Been there, done that, have the t-shirt,” replied Beth.

“So you know how painful it can be,” said Liz. “Oh, and be careful with the cooking. I may be a doctor, but I don’t want to practice medicine tonight.”

“So, what do I do?” asked Beth.

Liz set down a copy of the recipe in front of Beth.

“Heat two tablespoons of oil in the medium saucepan, medium heat. Then add the onion and garlic, cook until golden, which should be around ten minutes. Then scoop the onion and garlic with this slotted spoon, press against the side of the pan to leave behind as much oil as possible. This will also go into the blender,” explained Liz.

“Okay,” said Beth.

“When it’s smooth return it to the pan, medium-high heat. When it’s hot add the chili/tomato puree and stir until thickened to the consistency of tomato paste. Then add the chicken broth, reduce the heat to medium-low and simmer fifteen minutes. Taste it and season with salt if needed. Later we’ll add the chicken,” said Liz and she turned to Celeste. “While Beth is doing that, cut the tortillas into quarter inch wide strips, approximately one inch long. Heat the oil in the skillet until hot, add the tortillas and toss until they are golden brown. Then remove them and drain on paper towels.”

Both Beth and Celeste nodded.

“Don’t worry, I’ll be here if you have any questions,” said Liz as she turned to Jirra and Alexis. “As with the soup I’ve done a lot of the prep work. The chicken and beef is ready to go.”

“Please tell me you didn’t cook a whole chicken,” said Alexis.

Liz shook her head. “No, I bought a rotisserie chicken at the Acme.”

Jirra smiled as her mom pronounced it Ack-a-me.

“First thing that you have to do is sauté the onion in oil until soften, then add the chilies. Then you’ll turn off the heat and set it aside. Place the enchilada sauce in the bottom of the baking dish. I’ve already turned on the oven. Next heat a pan to fry the tortillas. Then we’re going to need lots of help.”

“What do you want us to do?” asked Alexis.

“Spread the cream cheese on the tortilla, add some of the chili/onion mixture, then some of the chicken or beef, shredded cheese and roll up and place it seam side up in the casserole. When the casserole is filled, add more sauce and cheese. We then put it in the oven and bake.”

“Besides ensuring we don’t create a disaster, what are you going to do, Mom?” asked Jirra.

“I’m cooking the rice,” said Liz.

She then described the recipe.

“If we do this right everything will be ready on time...and if it isn’t then we’ll eat it as it’s ready. The point is to have fun while we’re doing this,” said Liz.

Jirra updated the others on her day as they prepared the dinner. She told them about the sexual assault support group.

“So you’re going?” asked Liz.

Jirra nodded. “I’m getting smarter in my old age.”

“And prettier,” added Alexis as she blew Jirra a kiss.

“Well, I’m glad that you’re going to the group,” said Celeste. “I’ve heard good things about them.”

“Diana had great praise for them,” replied Jirra as she noticed the container for one of the cheeses. “Chihuahua cheese?”

Liz nodded.

“It’s for the soup. Be careful and don’t spill any, it’s very expensive as it’s not easy to milk a Chihuahua,” said Liz.

Jirra rolled her eyes.

“Wow. Now I know where Jirra gets her sense of humor,” said Beth.

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The organized confusion that existed in the kitchen resulted in an excellent dinner.

“How many times have you cooked this, Liz?” asked Celeste.

“Twice. The first time...we won’t talk about...some things are best left alone. But it was better the second time and this was the best,” said Liz. “Of course, having a lot of helping hands helped.”

“Do you think that Hannah can send me some recipes with instructions? I’d love to do something like this up at the foundation,” said Celeste.

“I’m sure she would love to help,” said Liz.

“Great. I’m always looking for new ways to get the girls involved in group activities,” said Celeste.

“The soup was delicious,” said Beth. “I can’t wait to try this on our own.”

“Everything was great. Thank you for doing this Liz,” said Alexis.

“You’re welcome, but you can also thank yourselves, this was a group effort.”

“Well, then here’s a toast to the cooks,” said Alexis.

They all held up their glasses.

Spirit sat up when the glasses clinked and let out a woof.

“And you did an excellent job keeping the floor clean, Spirit,” said Celeste.

“She definitely enjoyed the leftover shredded beef,” said Beth.

“Without the spices of course,” added Celeste.

### **Chapter 30**

Later that evening Jirra sorted through her email. There were many words of encouragement from friends which served to boost her spirits. She didn’t mind that the news of the attack had been sent out to her many friends all over the country.

She answered over twenty emails from people ranging from Jen to Iona when her cell phone went off. Jirra was pleased to see that it was Lindsey.

“Hi Lindsey,” she greeted.

“Hey...how’re you doing?”

“Okay,” replied Jirra.

“Just okay?” asked Lindsey.

“Pretty much...I’m on a bit of an emotional rollercoaster right now. Thankfully I have a great support group around me,” replied Jirra.

“I wish I could be out there with you.”

“In a way you were...thanks for giving my mom help on finding the ingredients. Dinner was wonderful...it made me realize how much I miss the spa,” replied Jirra.

“Glad to help,” replied Lindsey.

Jirra then updated her on what was going on.

“So I know you’ve been thinking about this...what are you going to do if you are pregnant?”

“I wish I knew,” replied Jirra. “I don’t think I would be as freaked out about this if I didn’t have this massive secret. If you think of a good way out of this, let me know.”

There was a pause.

“Um, so if you’re pregnant you’re considering keeping it?” asked Lindsey.

“Again, I’m not sure...I’m not on either side of the political argument...I’m weighing all options.”

“Including abortion?” asked Lindsey cautiously.

“Yes,” replied Jirra.

There was another pause.

“I’d like to tell you what I would do...but I have no idea either. I mean, I want to have a family someday...but I don’t think I would be ready now,” said Lindsey.

“I feel the same way,” said Jirra. “Alexis has been very cool and supportive.”

“Would it bother you to carry a child that was the result of...well, an attack?”

“I’ve bounced that around more than a few times. Part of me is disgusted about carrying the child of the man who raped me. But then, it’s not the baby’s fault. I just hope that all this worrying is over nothing.”

“You don’t sound very confident,” said Lindsey.

“I have a bad feeling that my transformation left me very fertile...especially after seeing the pictographs back in the canyon.”

“Well, I’m sure you’ve heard this from the others, but whatever you decide, I’ll be there for you,” said Lindsey.

“Thanks,” replied Jirra.

"If I was there right now, I'd give you a big hug."

"I know...hold it for me and you can give it to me the next time we meet," said Jirra.

"Okay," replied Lindsey. "Take care."

"I will, thanks for calling."

"Hey, that's what friends are for."

### Chapter 31

"Is this the place?" asked Alexis as she looked at three story building

Jirra looked down on her phone and nodded.

"Yep, the group meets on the second floor in room 206," replied Jirra.

"Okay, I'll be over in that coffeehouse," said Alexis. "Call me when you're done."

"I'll just meet you over there," said Jirra. She then pointed to the book under Alexis's arm. "So what're you reading?"

"The last book of the Millennium Trilogy by Stieg Larsson. I don't get much of a chance to read when I'm working," replied Alexis.

"It's a good read," replied Jirra. "I liked it a lot."

Alexis gave Jirra a hug.

"See you later," said Alexis.

Jirra nodded and headed into the building. She skipped the elevator and headed up the stairs. Room 206 was just to the right of the stairs. She took a deep breath and let it out before walking in.

A woman in her thirties greeted Jirra as she walked into the room.

"Hi, I'm Terri Palmer," said the woman as she greeted Jirra.

Jirra nodded. "We talked on the phone yesterday. I'm Jirra."

"Oh yes. I'm glad you came," said Terri. "Many people call several times before attending their first meeting."

"How many are in the group?" asked Jirra.

“Tonight I’m expecting between six and ten,” said Terri. “They’ll start arriving in the next twenty minutes or so. I always like to have the new members arrive early so I can talk to them.”

Jirra nodded again as she looked around the room. It was furnished with comfortable looking chairs and couches, and it looked more like a faculty lounge than a classroom.

“Why don’t we sit down,” suggested Terri.

“Sure,” replied Jirra.

Jirra picked a large arm chair and sat down.

“I need to ask you this, Jirra, please don’t be offended, but I recognize your name from the campus paper...I just need to know that you’re not doing this for a story,” said Terri. “I have the others in the group to think about.”

“It’s okay. No. I’m not working on a story,” said Jirra.

“I almost wish you had said yes. I’m so sorry it’s the other reason,” said Terri.

“Me too,” added Jirra. “Do you want me to tell you what happened?”

“Why don’t you save it for when the others arrive?” suggested Terri. “I know how hard it is to talk about this.”

“So, you’re more than a moderator?”

Terri nodded. “I was attacked during a date last year.”

“I’m sorry,” said Jirra.

“I was finishing up my doctorate when it happened. The university hired me when I graduated,” said Terri. “I accepted when they said I could run this group.”

“Cool,” replied Jirra.

“Now, the way this works is that we always offer the new members a chance to speak first. If you just want to sit back and listen, that’s fine too. We want people to be comfortable here.”

“Okay,” replied Jirra.

“You probably noticed that we have lots of Kleenex here, so don’t worry about holding back the emotions.”

Jirra let out a nervous laugh. “Um, that hasn’t been a problem lately.”

Jirra walked into the coffeehouse two hours later. She immediately saw Alexis and she walked over to join her.

Alexis put down her book, stood up, and gave Jirra a hug.

"How was it?" asked Alexis.

"Eye-opening," replied Jirra.

"You want to get something or would you rather go home?" asked Alexis.

Looking around at the crowded business, Jirra motioned towards the door.

"Okay," replied Alexis as she picked up her things.

As they walked towards the parking lot, Jirra began to talk about the meeting.

"There was a real mixed bag of people in the group. Many were victims of date-rape and a few were abused by family members," she said. "Two were outright attacked...and there was one other like me who was drugged. Unfortunately she was just conscious enough to realize what was happening and unable to do anything about it. In some ways, I had it the easiest."

"Don't try to compare it...rape is rape," said Alexis.

"That's what Terri, the leader of the group told me," said Jirra.

"So are you going back?"

Jirra nodded.

"Good," replied Alexis.

Jirra then told Alexis that Terri knew that Jirra wrote for the paper.

"I told her that some day I would like to write about the group...but that I could clear it with her first," said Jirra.

"I think it's a worthwhile topic. I've been on the phone with Faith and we're talking about doing an episode about it. She wants to do it without looking like she's exploiting what happened to you...we probably won't do it this season."

"I'd like to write that one," said Jirra.

"Really?"

Jirra nodded. "Writing allows me to vent. A couple of the girls in the group said that while the trials were awful it did allow them closure. The bastard who attacked me is dead...I still hate him...but I don't want to keep that in me."

“What about seeing your therapist?”

“I made an appointment for next week,” said Jirra.

“I’m glad to hear it,” replied Alexis.

“I’m getting to be an old hand at therapy,” said Jirra.

“It’s just the smart thing to do...I’m very proud of the way you’ve handled this. I doubt I would be as calm as you have been. I freaked out when they told what happened to you.”

“I would have done the same,” said Jirra. “Also I still have some major hurdles ahead.”

### Chapter 33

“Thanks for inviting me over for dinner,” said Rachel.

“It’s our pleasure,” said Beth. “Besides, we had plenty of leftovers from yesterday.”

“This is really delicious. I’ve always loved good Mexican food.”

“So how’re you adapting to Penn?” asked Celeste.

“I’m still in awe that I’m here. I never thought I’d be an Ivy-Leaguer,” she replied. “Especially as a grad student.”

“Well, considering what you went through, you deserve this,” said Celeste.

“It’s been strange,” she replied. “The good thing is that after what happened at school, this is a piece of cake.”

“Many of the others feel the same way,” said Celeste.

“So does Jirra know about you two?” asked Rachel.

“Yes,” replied Celeste.

“I hope you don’t mind me asking, but what’s her story? I mean, I like her a lot...and I’m sickened by what happened to her...but I just sense she’s hiding something,” said Rachel.

Beth glanced at Celeste and then looked back at Rachel.

“She’ll tell you when the time is right,” said Beth.

Rachel nodded. “That’s cool.”

“So when is Ken going to visit?” asked Beth.

“Hopefully next month,” replied Rachel. “I can’t believe how much I love him.”

“I’m sort of shocked by that too,” replied Beth with a laugh.

“He likes you too,” said Rachel.

“I know. He’s a pretty cool cousin. He’s a lot like Dad in so many ways,” said Beth.

“He thinks the world of your dad...so do I. If it hadn’t been for them...I have no idea where I’d be today,” said Rachel. “Considering what happened...it has all turned out pretty good so far.”

Beth and Celeste both nodded in agreement.

“Um... when things calm down some, please tell Jirra that I would like to be her friend,” said Rachel.

“We will,” said Beth.

### Chapter 34

Up in Boston Max sat down with the lead detective assigned to the case.

“Thank you for agreeing to meet with me,” said Max as he shook hands Detective Michael Conway.

“No problem. Besides it’s nice to meet you in person,” replied Michael. “Would you like some coffee?”

Max nodded. “Black, no sugar. So what have you found out?”

The detective handed Max a cup.

“Bryan Longwell has no record...not even a parking ticket, which is pretty amazing for someone who has lived in the city for the most of their adult life,” said Michael.

“Is he originally from Boston?”

Michael nodded as he sipped his coffee.

“So is his father a cop or a politician?” asked Max.

“Neither, just rich,” said Michael. “His father is in real estate.”

“So the old man has kept Bryan out of trouble?” asked Max.

“That’s what it looks like,” said Michael. “While we were searching the deceased’s condo a lawyer showed up and seemed rather upset. He tried to stop us, but by then we had found several stashes of illegal drugs.”

“What did you find besides the Rohypnol?” asked Max as he took another sip of coffee.

“Steroids, HGH, and some other stuff that the lab guys are still analyzing,” said Michael.

“Anything else?” asked Max.

“We’re trying to track down his connections and customers. With the amount of drugs we found it was pretty obvious that he was dealing.”

“Thanks,” replied Max.

“We’ll send you a copy of the report when we finish it. I suspect the production company’s lawyers will want to see it.”

“I’m sure they will. Anything else?”

Michael nodded. “The father, Frank Longwell is a real bastard. He has a reputation of always getting his way, either by legitimate means or by intimidation.”

Max smirked. “I’m shaking in my shoes.”

“I just thought you’d want to know. If the victim tries to press for restitution you can tell her that Frank will put up a big fight.”

“Thanks for the head’s up, but I doubt she will. Knowing Jirra, she’ll just want to put this behind her.”

Michael rubbed his chin. “Frank’s lawyer also contacted us to contradict the causes of Bryan’s death. They claim he was just horsing around and it was all a tragic accident.”

“Really?”

Michael nodded. “It would have been an interesting trial if you had caught him. The lawyer stated that they would refute any allegations that Bryan had assaulted anyone.”

“Interesting,” replied Max. “Do me a favor, if this lawyer continues to nose around let me know, I don’t want him harassing Jirra.”

“I will...what about the others...Beth Williams and ...Tessa Barnard?” asked Michael as he looked at his notes. “He might try and contact them to get them to recount their statements.”

Max laughed. "Let him try; first he would get eaten alive by Beth...she's actually a Federal Agent...and if he tries to harass Tessa...well I'll guarantee that it would be his funeral. She's a private security officer...and tough as they come. They're also very close friends of Jirra Reid."

Michael smiled. "I wouldn't mind seeing that. Well, I'll send you the report as soon as it's finalized."

"Good. I'm also conducting my own investigation...if I come up with anything good I'll let you know."

"Thanks," said Michael. "How's Ms. Reid doing?"

"From what I've heard, she's okay...all things considered."

### Chapter 35

Ten days later Jirra stopped by a local doctor's office to pick up her latest test results. Liz accompanied her to the appointment. Even though Bryan Longwell's autopsy had come back clean, Liz had explained that it was a good idea to get regular checkups and lab work.

The good news was that all the tests came back negative.

"How have you been feeling?" asked Dr. Yvonne Garcia.

"Physically or mentally?" asked Jirra with a slight grin.

"Let's stick to physical," replied Dr. Garcia.

"Nothing new...I'm still worried about the possibility of being pregnant. My Mom has told me what to look for," said Jirra as she smiled at Liz. "My breasts were tender, but they were that way after the attack. They're fine now. Also I was a bit fatigued, but I think that was due to not taking a break and going right back to school. I'm feeling okay now."

"That's good to hear. However, many women don't experience the initial signs that you mentioned," said Dr. Garcia.

"I know," replied Jirra. "I also did a home test...the other night, but it came back negative."

"Is your period late?" asked Dr. Garcia.

"It's due now," admitted Jirra.

"False negatives are common in the early stages," said Dr. Garcia. "Which brand of home testing are you using?"

Jirra told her.

“Okay, that’s a good brand. The only harm in taking them too often is the cost,” she said.

Jirra smiled.

“Dr Garcia, do you have any doctors you’d recommend...if Jirra is pregnant?” asked Liz.

She nodded. “I will provide Jirra with a list if it’s needed.”

Jirra fidgeted for a moment. “Um, if I am pregnant I haven’t decided what I will do...can you also give me information on...um other resources?”

Dr. Garcia nodded. “Of course Jirra. Look, I’m here to help you...and I want you to get the best medical care...I’m not here to judge you.”

“Thanks,” said Jirra.

Liz reached over and took Jirra’s hand into her own for support.

“Considering what happened, it can’t be an easy decision,” continued Dr. Garcia. “The important thing is to be fully informed about all options.”

“Thanks Dr. Garcia,” said Jirra.

“You’re welcome, Jirra. Now, I’ll see you in two weeks. You can make the appointment on the way out with the receptionist,” said Dr. Garcia.

Liz and Jirra shook hands with the doctor and left.

On the way back home, Liz turned to Jirra and spoke.

“I’m very proud about the way you’re handling this, Roo. I know how hard it must be,” said Liz.

“Thanks Mom,” replied Jirra.

## Chapter 36

Three days later Jirra sat on her couch next to Alexis as she unwrapped the pregnancy test.

“How many will this make?” asked Alexis.

“Five,” replied Jirra as she examined the testing device.

“Okay,” replied Alexis. “I’ll be right out here.”

“Thanks,” said Jirra nervously.

Alexis leaned over and kissed her. “For luck.”

“Thanks,” repeated Jirra as she got up and headed towards the bathroom.

Alexis stayed on the couch and fidgeted as she waited for Jirra to return. With each passing minute Alexis glanced silently at her watch.

The silence was shattered by Jirra’s scream.

Alexis jumped up and ran to the bathroom. Jirra was trembling as she stared at the indicator on the testing device. Without a word, Jirra held it up and showed the results...positive.

Alexis stared at the indicator and reached over, took it from Jirra’s hand, and set it down on the sink. She then wrapped her arms around Jirra and hugged her.

At first Jirra was silent, but then she began to cry, softly at first and then it grew into sobbing.

“Let it out, Roo,” whispered Alexis as she comforted her lover.

Alexis could feel Jirra slump into her arms as if all energy had exited her body.

Together they slumped down to the floor, never letting go of each other.

“Please...please let this be a nightmare...please let it be a mistake,” stammered Jirra. “Please make it better.”

Alexis held her tightly as the tears began to roll down her own face.

Twenty minutes later they walked into the living room together.

“What do you want to do?” asked Alexis.

“Better call my mom,” said Jirra as she blew her nose.

Alexis picked up her cell phone and called Liz.

### **Chapter 37**

“We’ll call Dr. Garcia in the morning,” said Liz after she confirmed the positive pregnancy test.

“So, what’re the odds of a false positive?” asked Jirra hopefully.

She was sitting on the couch next to Alexis who had her arm around Jirra’s shoulders.

“Slim,” replied Liz. “I’m sorry, but I can’t lie to you.”

“I know...thanks,” replied Jirra as she let out a sigh. “Mom, what am I going to do?”

“Have you had dinner yet?”

Jirra cocked her head. "Um, no...I'm not very hungry now."

"You should still eat something. Let me cook you dinner and then we can talk, okay? There's no sense in panicking, Roo. You have some time to make a decision," said Liz.

"Panicking sounds like a good option right now," said Jirra who smiled in spite of herself.

"Roo, I'm not downplaying this...but you need to take care of yourself...not eating doesn't do you any good."

Jirra nodded.

"So what do you feel like?"

"Comfort food," replied Jirra.

### Chapter 38

Jirra took a bite of her grilled cheese sandwich.

"Thanks Mom," she said.

"You're welcome, Roo," replied Liz. "Alexis do you want some more tomato soup?"

Alexis nodded. "Thank you. This is the ultimate comfort food."

"Agreed," said Liz as she got up to refill Alexis's mug. "Tomorrow we'll call Dr. Garcia and make an appointment."

Jirra nodded as she sipped her soup. She then set the mug down.

"Then comes the hard part," said Jirra.

Liz handed Alexis her mug.

"That's true," said Liz as she sat down.

"Whatever you decide, I'm going to be there with you," said Alexis.

"Even if I decide to keep the baby?" asked Jirra.

"Of course," replied Alexis. "I said that before and I meant it."

"Thanks," replied Jirra. She reached up and wiped away a tear. "Crap, I'm crying again. I knew this was a possibility and I'm still freaking out."

“You’re not freaking out...you’re acting very normally,” said Liz. “Even when women plan on getting pregnant it’s a big moment when they find out. It’s an emotional time and I would be more shocked if you weren’t crying.”

“Thanks Mom,” replied Jirra.

“I also think that you shouldn’t make any choices until the both of you have had a chance to think about it,” continued Liz. “You have time.”

Jirra and Alexis nodded.

“What do you think, Mom? Please, I need to know,” asked Jirra.

“I’m not going to kid you, this is a huge decision that needs to be based, not on emotion, but on a mutual and logical conclusion,” replied Liz. “Personally, I have no doubt that you two could raise a child, you’re both loving and caring women. But remember, this will a long obligation, a minimum of eighteen years...usually much longer.”

Liz took a sip of wine before continuing.

“What about...abortion?” asked Jirra.

“It’s an option, Roo. I support a woman’s right to chose...especially in cases like this. This wasn’t the result of carelessness; it was the result of a criminal act. I know that no one who is your friend...no one who loves you would hold it against you if you decided to get an abortion.”

“Thanks, Mom,” said Jirra.

“There’s another choice,” said Liz. “You could have the child and then put it up for adoption.”

“True,” said Jirra softly. “There’s also the status of my...gender...and the cover story. If I decide to have the baby I won’t be able to stay here. I mean, I was ‘outed’ as transgendered, so how would I explain getting pregnant?”

“You should be able to finish this semester without issue,” said Alexis. “Then you could move up to Boston and stay with me...or you could go back to New Mexico...I just want you to feel safe.”

Jirra smiled at Alexis. “Thanks.”

“Those are both options,” said Liz. “But tonight isn’t the time to make those choices.”

“You’re right Mom; we have much to talk about. Thanks for dinner...and thanks for everything,” said Jirra. “I feel a little better about this.”

Jirra called Dr. Garcia the next morning during a break between classes and made an appointment with her for the next afternoon.

"I appreciate you getting me in so quickly," said Jirra.

"I understand how important this is to you. Unfortunately I've had to treat many young women who have gone through similar situations," replied Dr. Garcia.

"How soon will you get the results back?"

"A few hours, I have a family connection in the lab," she replied. "My cousin works there."

"Thanks," replied Jirra.

"I'll see you tomorrow at two," said Dr. Garcia.

"I'll be there," replied Jirra.

#### **Chapter 40**

"Jirra just called and said that she has an appointment with Dr. Garcia tomorrow at two," Liz said to Alexis over the phone.

"That's good to hear," said Alexis. "Um, Liz are you busy?"

"No dear, do you want to talk?"

"I'd appreciate it," replied Alexis.

"Come on over to my room, I'll make some coffee," said Liz.

A short time later, Liz and Alexis were sitting next to each other on the couch in the guest room.

"How're you doing, dear?" asked Liz.

"I'm trying to stay calm so I can help Jirra...but I'm close to freaking out," she admitted. "I love her so much...and it hurts so bad to see her have to deal with this."

"It's okay for to let out your emotions," said Liz.

Alexis nodded as she took a sip of her coffee.

"I've had a few good cries...I'm still angry that this happened in the first place...and I hate that bastard so much. I know it's not good to speak badly of the dead...but I hope that he's burning in hell!"

"I know what you mean," said Liz. "I feel the same way."

“What the hell was he thinking? I mean who gets pleasure from having sex with someone who’s unconscious?” continued Alexis.

Liz sipped her coffee and let Alexis vent for another five minutes.

“You feel better?” asked Liz.

Alexis nodded. “A little.”

“Good,” replied Liz. “I care about you too.”

“Thanks,” replied Alexis.

“I’m so happy that you and Jirra love each other so much. It gives me one less thing to worry about,” said Liz as she stood up. “You want some more coffee?”

“Yes please,” said Alexis.

Liz refilled their cups and then sat down.

“Thank you. I imagine that this isn’t something that you imagined would ever happen,” said Alexis.

“To a degree that’s true. But as I’ve accepted her as my daughter it’s something that I worried might happen,” said Liz. “I know she’s worried about being outted, but overall she’s handling things like a normal woman. If this had happened to her right after her change I can’t imagine the turmoil she would be experiencing.”

Alexis took a sip of her coffee. “So what do you think we should do? I know it’s going to be up to us...but I value your opinion.”

“I suspect that Jirra will want to have the baby,” said Liz.

Alexis nodded. “I agree...we’ve talked about the other options. I think Jirra feels having an abortion would only make a bad thing worse...and I have to agree with her.”

“That’s logical,” said Liz who took a long sip of her coffee. “I think that it might be best for all concerned if the baby was put up for adoption. I know you’ve both talked about having a family, but I don’t think you’re ready. I have no doubt that if you kept the child that you’d be excellent parents...but I think it would best if you waited. Adoption would also be a fresh start for the baby.”

Alexis didn’t reply at first.

“You asked my opinion,” said Liz.

“I know...my silence wasn’t because I disagreed with you...you confirmed my own feelings.”

“Have you told Jirra this?”

Alexis nodded. "She's still undecided. I think she'll make up her mind as soon as she gets confirmation from Dr. Garcia...she's like that."

Liz smiled. "I know."

"So, if we do put the baby up for adoption...how do we do it?" asked Alexis.

"That depends, you can contact an agency...there are many good ones out there. Or you can set it up yourself," said Liz.

"What do you mean?"

"Do you know anyone who wants to have a family but can't?" asked Liz.

Alexis thought about it for a moment. "Yes."

"You could approach them and talk to them," said Liz. "The benefit of this plan is that you'll know who's raising the baby...that's also the negative side."

"I see what you mean," said Alexis. "It's a huge decision."

"Exactly, but I know you two will make the right one," said Liz. "I also think that having her move up with you to Boston would be a good idea. Don't get me wrong, I'd love to have her back at the spa, but I think that being up in Boston would give her the privacy she'll need."

"I appreciate hearing that from you," said Alexis. "Do you mind if I share what we talked about with Jirra?"

"Of course not," said Liz with a smile.

Alexis let out a sigh. She then felt Liz wrapping her arms around her to give her a hug.

"Thanks, I really needed this," said Alexis as she began to cry.

"You can always talk to me, Alexis," comforted Liz.

## Chapter 41

The next afternoon Jirra walked out of Dr. Garcia's office with Alexis.

She didn't say a thing for nearly five minutes and Alexis didn't try to force anything.

Finally as they started to drive back to the house, Jirra let out a sigh.

"Well, at least I now know for sure," she said.

"That's true," replied Alexis.

“We have some decisions to make,” continued Jirra.

Alexis nodded.

“I...I can't end this,” she said softly.

“Okay,” replied Alexis.

“But, like we've talked about...I'm not ready to have a family. I know this may sound selfish, but I want time with you first...not as just lovers, but as married. I think it would be best if we put the baby up for adoption...do you agree?”

“I want a family too...but you're right, it's not the time,” said Alexis.

Jirra nodded.

“Last night we talked about this...how do you feel about giving the baby to someone I know,” said Alexis.

“You mean Stella Gabriel?”

Alexis glanced over and nodded.

Stella Gabriel was one of the producers for the show. She was married to a writer and they had tried for years to have a baby. They were currently looking at adopting.

“She's a nice person,” said Alexis.

Jirra nodded. “I know...I like her a lot. It also seems to be a good solution to all this. Do you think she'd do it?”

“We can call and ask,” said Alexis.

“I'll think about it okay?” replied Jirra.

## Chapter 42

Back at the condo, Jirra and Alexis met up with Liz and headed up to Beth and Celeste's to tell them the news.

Jirra also explained that she would have the baby and that they would put it up for adoption.

Alexis then brought up about the plan to offer the baby to Stella and Logan Gabriel.

“Sounds like a good plan,” said Beth. “What about the rest?”

Jirra nodded. "I should be able to finish this semester without any difficulties. I never thought I'd say it but I'm glad that it will be cold soon."

"What about the spring semester?" asked Celeste.

"That's a problem," said Jirra. "I really don't want to take the semester off...but it would be very difficult to...even if there wasn't the 800 pound gorilla in the room. I mean, there are people on campus who think I'm transgendered...it will be best for everyone concerned if I left the area for a while."

"Where?" asked Celeste.

Jirra looked at Alexis and smiled. "Boston."

"That makes sense," said Beth.

"I still don't like losing a semester," said Jirra. "And I definitely want to graduate from Penn, so transferring to another school is out of the question."

"Maybe you don't have to lose the semester," stated Celeste.

All eyes turned to Celeste.

"Faith wants you to write for the show, right? So why not get Penn to count that?" suggested Celeste.

"Do you think they'd go for that?" asked Jirra.

"Why not? You could count it as a special academic program or something like that. I suspect that Faith Collins will go along with it," said Celeste.

"It's a possibility," said Alexis.

"I can also sweeten the pot," said Celeste.

"What do you mean?" asked Jirra.

"The university doesn't know it, but I'm about to make a sizable contribution to the business department. I had planned on this long before this happened, but I can make a small provision that the grant is dependent upon letting you get credit for your spring semester sabbatical," she explained. "I mean, what's the point of being filthy rich if I can't use it for good?"

Jirra immediately hugged Celeste.

"Thank you so much."

"My pleasure," said Celeste.

"So, another problem solved," said Beth. "But we still have a few to work on."

“You mean, how to explain the fact that I’m pregnant? Even in Boston there’s the possibility someone down here will find out,” said Jirra.

“Exactly,” said Beth. “We have time, but we need to come up with a cover story.”

“Well, I’m open to suggestions,” said Jirra.

“We need to find it soon...while you can get by in class, what about the others who live here?” pointed out Alexis. “I know Cat knows about you and she’s completely trustworthy.”

“So who doesn’t know about you?” asked Liz.

“Just TC, Jill, and Rebecca,” said Jirra. “I don’t know the new renters.”

“What do you want to do?” asked Beth.

Jirra looked around the room.

“Call them...might as well tell them now,” said Jirra.

### Chapter 43

“That’s absolutely amazing Jirra,” said Jill. “I always suspected that you were special, but I had no idea.”

“You can definitely count on us to protect your secret,” said TC. “Thank you for trusting us.”

Rebecca nodded. “I guess I’m not the most unique person in this building anymore.”

“You never were,” said Beth with a smile.

“Well, you can trust all of us,” continued Rebecca.

“Thank you,” replied Jirra. “I wanted to tell you sooner, but I never knew the right time.”

“I understand, I can’t imagine how I would act under similar circumstances,” said Jill.

Jirra then explained the plan concerning the baby.

“I’m so relieved that I can open with you three now,” said Jirra.

“Thank you for trusting us,” said Jill.

“So no hard feelings about deceiving you?” asked Jirra.

Jill shook her head and gave Jirra a ling hug, which was immediately followed by the others.

## Chapter 44

That night Alexis and Jirra cuddled next to each other bed.

“Well, we have a plan in place,” said Alexis.

“So far so good,” said Jirra.

“I hate the fact that I have to leave soon,” said Alexis.

“I understand completely. I’m looking forward to moving in with you,” said Jirra.

“That makes two of us,” replied Alexis.

“Dr. Garcia is going to email me a list of doctors,” said Jirra. “I also need to call Aileen and Cailin and see if they know the name of a good doctor in Boston or should we look for one out on the Cape?”

“I don’t get out to the Cape when we’re shooting. Looking at the schedule for this season, Boston might be the best choice.”

“Okay,” said Jirra.

“When you come up...I’d like to get married...let’s make this official,” said Alexis.

“Okay,” replied Jirra without hesitation.

“We can do a small ceremony...I know we’d both prefer something bigger...but we can always do that later,” said Alexis.

“How small?” asked Jirra.

“We can invite our close friends and family, but we’ll do the full blow out later...if that’s okay with you?”

“It’s perfect...all things considered,” said Jirra.

Alexis leaned over and kissed her softly on the lips.

“I love you so much. We’ll get through this I promise,” said Alexis. “I’m so proud of the way you’ve handled this.”

“I haven’t done anything special,” replied Jirra.

“Yes you have, Roo,” countered Alexis. “You’re a very special woman and I’m so happy that you’re in my life.”

## Chapter 45

The next day a few more pieces of the puzzle fell into place. Diana agreed to support Jirra's plan for the spring semester.

"I think that the administration will agree to this, Jirra. You have an excellent GPA and you're on your way to becoming a distinguished graduate," said Diana. "The fact that you'll be working on a well respected TV show won't hurt either."

"Thank you," replied Jirra.

"You're earning a very good reputation as a writer. Faith has been hearing some very good things about you. I wouldn't be surprised if you start getting some other writing offers. Also Faith feels that there's a possibility that you could get nominated for an Emmy."

Jirra shook her head.

"I'm not that good."

"Don't sell yourself short; I don't know if you know this, but you were in contention this past season."

"Really?" asked Jirra.

Diana nodded.

"You're writing for a show that is starting to get a lot of buzz, but don't let it go to your head," said Diana with a grin.

"I won't...thank you," said Jirra.

"On a serious note, if you need anything at all, let me know. We were all shocked by what happened up in Boston. You're my student, but I also consider you my friend."

"I appreciate that Diana. I value your friendship too."

"Those of us that you've shared your secret with will do whatever is possible to protect it."

Jirra nodded.

Back at the condo, Alexis talked to Stella and Logan about the possibility of adopting Jirra's baby. They were both very interested.

"We were shocked to hear what that creep did to Jirra. As much as we're sorry what happened to Jirra, it looks like some good is going to come out of this," said Stella.

"Well, when I get back up to Boston we'll get together and start working on the details," replied Alexis. "The big thing is to keep this on the quiet side."

“We both understand,” said Stella. “Thank you so much for considering us. We will do our best to be good parents.”

## Chapter 46

At the same time, Beth arrived in New York City via the Amtrak Acela express train. A short time later Paula was welcoming her into Andrea’s apartment.

“It’s good to see you Beth,” greeted Paula.

“Hello Paula, How’s she doing today?” asked Beth.

“She’s doing better. The last few days were rough as she had a cold...unfortunately with her immune system being weak any infection is troublesome.”

Beth nodded.

“You can go right in, I know she’ll be glad to see you,” continued Paula.

Beth walked back to Andrea’s room and was pleased to see that not only was her grandmother awake, but she was sitting up in bed reading.

“Hello Beth,” greeted Andrea.

“Hi Gran,” said Beth as she walked into the room. “Is it okay to give you a hug?”

“Always my dear,” replied Andrea.

Beth leaned over and gave Andrea a long hug.

“Please sit down and tell me how things are going?” asked Andrea as she set the book aside.

Beth talked about her flying lessons and school.

Andrea gave her a serious look. “Okay, what’re you holding back? You never could lie to me.”

Beth grinned slightly.

“Are you okay?” asked Andrea.

“It’s not me,” admitted Beth.

“So tell me,” stated Andrea.

Beth sighed and then told Andrea about Jirra.

“That’s awful,” said Andrea. “So she’s going to have the baby?”

Beth nodded. "She's going to put the baby up for adoption."

"I suppose that's the smart thing to do," replied Andrea.

Beth hesitated before talking again.

"Gran, there's more to it. I know that I can trust you, but I need you to promise not to tell anyone what I'm about to tell you."

"Of course my dear, what is it?"

Beth sighed again. "I feel funny telling someone this...without her permission, but I need your advice."

"Please tell me."

Beth then told Andrea about Jirra's past.

Andrea listened without interrupting.

"So you see how this could destroy her life," said Beth.

"She obviously means a lot to you," said Andrea.

"She's one of my best friends. But there's more to it...in many ways I realize how lucky I was to have been given a new identity...and I'm amazed by how well she has handled it all."

Andrea nodded. "I see."

"We're all trying to think of a plausible way to explain this...but so far we haven't been able to come up with anything remotely believable," said Beth.

"I see. Do you think that Jirra would be willing to come up here and talk to me?" asked Andrea.

"I'm sure of it, she's wanted to meet you for a long time," said Beth. "Do you have an idea?"

"Maybe...I need to have some research done for me...give me a few weeks, maybe more."

Beth looked into her grandmother's eyes and saw a spark.

"I can't wait to hear your idea," said Beth.

"That makes two of us," replied Andrea with a wink.

## Chapter 47

A few days later Jirra hugged Alexis good bye outside security at Philadelphia International Airport.

"I already miss you," said Jirra.

"Hang in there, Roo," replied Alexis. "I won't be that far away from you."

"I know," said Jirra. "Call me when you get in, okay?"

"I will," replied Alexis. She then gave Jirra a long kiss.

Jirra watched as Alexis entered security and continued to watch until she was out of sight. She then walked over to the coffee stand and met up with Beth and Celeste.

"Thanks for waiting," said Jirra. "Seeing both Mom and Alexis off in the same day isn't easy."

"No problem, let's go home," said Beth.

As they pulled out of the parking lot and headed back into the city, they failed to notice a dark sedan following them.

## Chapter 48

That night Beth and Celeste invited Jirra over for dinner.

"Cat called and said that she would try to stop by," said Beth. "She was stuck in traffic down in Maryland."

"Where has she been the last few weeks?" asked Jirra as she sat on the couch and began to pet Spirit.

"She had to go down and take her physical and do a bunch of other entrance examinations," said Beth.

"If they don't take her they're idiots," said Jirra.

"I agree," said Celeste.

"I don't know why she wants to join the FBI anyway, The Agency is much better," said Beth.

Jirra and Celeste laughed.

Celeste then got up to check on dinner.

"Jirra, I have a confession to make," said Beth.

"What's that?" asked Jirra.

"I know I promised never to tell anyone your past without your permission, but I did...I talked to Andrea about your situation. I'm sorry," said Beth.

Jirra shrugged her shoulders.

"It's okay. I have the feeling we can trust her...I mean she went through something similar."

"Well, she would like to meet you," continued Beth.

"Really? I'd like that," said Jirra.

"There's more, she may have a solution to your identity problem," said Beth.

"What is it?" asked Jirra.

"I have no idea," said Beth. "She said that she would have something in a few weeks, but I have no idea what it is."

"Well she has my interest," said Jirra.

"Dinner should be ready in ten minutes," announced Celeste.

"The chicken smells wonderful," said Jirra.

"It's one of Lindsey's recipes," said Celeste. "Margarita chicken."

## Chapter 49

Cat knocked on Jirra's door the next day.

"Hi," said Jirra.

"Sorry I didn't stop by last night, but I didn't get in until after ten," said Cat.

"No problem, come on in," said Jirra.

Cat came in and immediately gave Jirra a hug.

"Thanks," replied Jirra. "So you know?"

"Celeste updated me on your situation. I'm so sorry."

They sat down on the couch.

Jirra nodded. "Did they tell you that I'm going to have the baby?"

"Yes," she replied. "I agree with your decision...and to put it up for adoption."

"Thanks. So how did your tests go?"

"Piece of cake," replied Cat. "Oh, I have to tell you this...I've already been accepted to work in the crime lab...and wait for it...they're going to send me to grad school!"

"Really! That's great!" exclaimed Jirra. "Where will you go?"

"Believe it or not, here! And what makes it better is that Matt is going to be assigned to the Philadelphia office."

"That's awesome," said Jirra.

"We're planning on staying here until I finish grad school," continued Cat.

"Celeste will be glad to hear that," said Jirra. "I'm so happy for you and Matt."

"We're going to get married next year. Of course you and Alexis will be invited."

"I can't wait," said Jirra. "Wait, when?"

"Most likely early fall," said Cat.

Jirra let out a sigh of relief. "Good, I don't want to go to a wedding while I'm pregnant."

She then froze. "I can't believe I just said that."

"It's okay," said Cat. "I understand."

"Thanks."

Jirra then told Cat about her plans to move up to Boston for the spring semester.

"That makes sense... although I wish you could stay here. I like you as my neighbor."

"I'll be back to finish up my degree," said Jirra.

Cat then asked Jirra about how she was handling the attack.

"I go to the group sessions, they help," said Jirra. "I also talk to Jenna on the phone."

"That's good. Do you want to talk to my friend Erika?"

Jirra thought about it and then said yes.

"I'll call her and give her your number," said Cat.

"I appreciate that," said Jirra. She then told Cat that she had told Jill, TC, and Rebecca about her transformation.

"I'm glad; you can never have too many friends."

## Chapter 50

A week later Jirra had her first appointment with the doctor recommended by Dr. Garcia.

Dr. Stewart had an office twenty minutes away. Beth volunteered to ride along to keep Jirra company.

“Besides, there might be a day when I will have to go through this,” said Beth.

“Really?” asked Jirra as she drove through the city traffic.

“Jim wants to have a family...and I have to admit the idea appeals to me,” said Beth.

“I like him, he’s got a good sense of humor,” said Jirra.

“He’s pretty special,” said Beth.

Thankfully Jirra didn’t have to wait long for her appointment. Dr. Stewart was very understanding. She asked Jirra if she had picked a doctor in Boston yet.

“We have a short list,” said Jirra and she named the three doctors that Aileen had recommended.

Dr Stewart nodded. “I know all three. I’m sure you’ll be happy with any of them.”

“Cool.” Replied Jirra.

“Now, until you move to Boston you’re still my patient and I want to see you every few weeks. My receptionist will set up a schedule for you,” said Dr. Stewart.

“Thanks, Doc,” said Jirra.

“I’m also going to give you some reading materials on diet and other things like that,” said Dr. Stewart.

Ten minutes later Jirra and Beth were walking into the parking garage.

As they headed back to the condo Jirra updated Beth on Dr Stewart.

“Jirra, I hate to interrupt you, but would you look in your rearview mirror and tell me if you see a black Ford behind us,” said Beth.

Jirra looked confused but did as Beth asked.

“Yes, there’s a black Ford Taurus back there. How did you know?”

"I thought I was imagining it. I saw it parked across the street from our condo as we left and again as we pulled out of the parking lot," said Beth.

"What does it mean?"

"I don't know. Tell you what; drop me off at the Acme up the street from home. I'll see if I can get a license plate or maybe even see who's in it."

"And then what?"

"I'll call Max," said Beth. "Don't take the direct route home; if they are following us I want them to stay interested. Let's see if they follow us when you make a few detours."

"What do you think they want? Are we in danger?"

"I doubt it. I think they're just curious where you're going," replied Beth. "After you drop me off go right home and pull into the garage. I doubt they'll try and follow you. Still, I'll call Cat and let her know to keep an eye out for you."

"Okay," replied Jirra nervously.

It took Jirra thirty minutes to reach the Acme. She pulled into the parking lot as if she was going to park, but instead she just dropped off Beth, who got out and waved good bye.

Jirra then drove home. A quick glance in the mirror confirmed that she was still being followed. The good thing was that the car didn't try and follow her into the parking garage.

## Chapter 51

Beth arrived home a short time later. She stopped by Jirra's place and found her talking to Cat.

"Well?" asked Jirra.

"I got the plate and a photo of the driver. I sent both to Max," said Beth proudly. "Hopefully he'll be able to run a trace."

"Why is someone following Jirra?" asked Cat.

"I have no idea," said Beth.

Jirra shook her head.

Two hours later Max called Beth.

"I have some interesting news for you," he said. "It appears that Jirra's being followed by a local PI by the name of Gordon Beck."

“Why?” asked Beth.

“No idea, but I can find out. Nina Vasquez of Boudica has been contacted and she’s going to see what he’s up to,” said Max.

“Thanks Max,” said Beth.

“No problem. By the way, nice job, your old man would be proud.”

Beth grinned. “Thanks.”

## Chapter 52

It had been a long day of classes and Jirra was glad that it was over as she settled into her apartment. Jen had called earlier in the day and had promised to take Jirra out for supper after completing her meetings. She was just finishing up in her bathroom when she heard a knock on the door. A look in the security peephole showed that Jen had arrived as promised.

“Jen! Come on in!” I’m glad you have the time to visit.”

Jen stepped inside the apartment and enveloped Jirra in a hug. “How are you doing, kiddo? I’ve been getting reports from Alexis and your mom so I’m pretty current on most things”

“I’m trying to handle things day by day, Jen. Having my normal classes keeps me busy and I really don’t have much time right now to think about... um... other things.”

Jen followed Jirra over to the couch and sat down next to Jirra.

“So how are you feeling? Any signs yet?”

“Nothing major, Jen. No morning sickness yet either. I just tend to get tired a little easier than before I was...”

“That’s okay, Jirra. You don’t need to go any further. I remember what it was like too.”

“What? Now you’ve got me confused. What are you talking about?”

“Sorry, Jirra. I forgot that me getting raped really didn’t make it into the headlines.”

“You were raped? How long ago did that happen?”

“Unlike you, it was just a few months after my transformation. I was in a hotel when I interrupted a thief ransacking my room. He decided to rape me then I think he was going to kill me. Fortunately a person traveling with me at the time nailed him with a chair and called hotel security.”

“Does anyone else know about this, Jen?”

“Alexis knows. I could hardly keep it from her after I woke her up when she was staying with me after she and I first met. We had separate rooms in my home in upstate New York when I woke up screaming my head off in the middle of the night. She came running into my bedroom to find me all twisted up in the blankets, huddled under my bed and terrified out of my mind. She wouldn’t let go of it until I told her why.”

“Have you had any more nightmares over the years?”

“A few, Jirra. And that’s another reason why I envy you. You were given a big dose of that drug that knocked you out. You don’t have any memory of what that bastard did to you. I remember everything my attacker did to me, the feel of his knife at my throat, how he.... he...”

Jen began sobbing and Jirra embraced her in as tight a hug as she could. Together they sat there until Jen stopped crying.

“I never knew, Jen. Alexis never said anything about it to me.”

“Because I asked her not to talk about it, Jirra. It’s taken me many years to try to forget what was done to me that night. I may never fully be able to forget it but at least I can handle it better now.”

Jen started to giggle softly to herself. “Here I was going to come and try to talk to you about your problem and here you are hugging me over my problem. Weird world isn’t it?”

Jirra laughed. “You got that right! Nobody else would even begin to remotely believe what all of us have been through.”

“Maybe one day you’ll be able to write a fictional book about all of this. Maybe though it’ll all be too strange even for a work of fiction.”

“Maybe, Jen. Ancient gods and goddesses, lost civilizations, magical beings, monsters, international bad guys, science gone bad and who knows what else will turn up! I’ve lived through some of it myself and know others that have been through the rest and I still can’t believe it even though we both know that it’s all true.”

“Don’t even think about me asking for a movie script, Jirra. I’d get laughed out of Hollywood if I pitched something like that to a studio.”

Their conversation reduced itself quickly to a giggling session. Fortunately they both felt an empty spot in their tummies and were rudely interrupted by loud growls.

“Thanks, Jirra. I needed a good laugh. Now as I promised let me take you out to supper. Is Pat’s okay or would you prefer Gino’s?”

“Alexis said you were a Pat’s fan.”

“Contrary to her misinformation, I am solidly a Philly cheese steak fan. I don’t much care which place it comes from as long as it is completely authentic. The main reason I go to Pat’s when I’m in town is that I know how to get there.”

“Boy is Gino’s going to be glad to meet you!”

### Chapter 53

Gordon Beck yawned and then lit another cigarette. He had become a private detective for excitement, not to follow some college girl all over Philly. Still the contract was too good to pass up. He was getting a couple hundred of dollars to watch where the red head with the big boobs went. The lawyer who was paying him just wanted him to record everywhere the girl went.

So far it was pretty tame. The girl mainly went to class and then home. She did make a trip once a week to what he had discovered was a sexual assault support group. He also discovered that she was going to a medical office, but so far he hadn’t determined who she was seeing there.

If the lawyer was expecting for him to dig up a lot of dirt on the girl he was going to be disappointed. As far as he could tell the girl’s biggest vice was the occasional cheese steak. She didn’t smoke or drink, it was all kinda boring.

He was so lost in his own thoughts that he didn’t notice that he was being followed. His first indication was when he arrived near his office. When he got out of his car he was approached by an attractive...yet hard looking Hispanic woman.

“Can I help you?” he asked.

She nodded. “Let’s talk in your office.”

“My office?” he asked.

“Don’t play dumb, you’re not good at it,” said the woman. “You’re Gordon Beck, self employed private investigator. Do you want me to recite your license number?”

“So who are you?” he demanded.

“Someone who knows who you are,” she replied. “I just have a few questions for you...or would you rather I call the police?”

Gordon nodded and walked into the rundown building where he had his office.

Once inside he sat down behind his desk.

“So, what do you want?” he asked.

"I want to know why you've been following a young woman named Jirra Reid for the past few weeks," demanded Nina.

"Who?" he asked feinting ignorance.

It took all of Nina's self control not to reach over his desk and grab him by the throat. Instead she pulled out a stack of photos and tossed them on his desk.

"As you can see from the time/dates on the photos, I've been following you as you've been following her," said Nina.

Gordon gasped as he scanned through the photos. She had been following him for nearly ten days and he never knew it.

"Now, why don't you tell me what you're up to?" she asked.

"I can't...I have a contract," he stammered.

"Fine, I'll go to see the cops and see about getting a restraining order against you," said Nina.

"You can't do that," he snapped.

Nina grinned back. "Just watch me. If you're lucky all you'll get is a suspended license."

Gordon cursed under his breath. She was probably bluffing, but he couldn't take that risk. He had a shaky history with the cops.

"Okay...I was hired to watch her, see where she goes and to email weekly reports," he stated. "That's all."

"Who hired you?" she asked.

Gordon shook his head. "I can't give you that...you know client privacy... and all that."

Nina stared back. "Fine, but just so you know your following days are over."

"That's it?" he asked.

Nina nodded.

"If I see you anywhere near her I'll call the police," stated Nina as she got up and left.

Gordon nervously lit up another cigarette. He couldn't risk having his license pulled. He then typed out his last report.

“Any trouble getting into his computer?” asked Max the next day.

“None at all. Our computer expert called his security ...‘worthless’. I’m forwarding you a copy of his files,” replied Nina.

“Good Job, Nina,” he said. “I got the file.”

“All the reports were sent to a lawyer over in Haddonfield, New Jersey,” said Nina. “His name is Neil Sanders.”

“Interesting,” said Max. “Why would a lawyer in Jersey be interested in Jirra Reid?”

“You want us to find out?” asked Nina.

“Yes, but don’t contact him; just see what you can find out about him,” he replied.

“Okay,” said Nina. “I’ll stick around a few more days and just make sure Beck keeps his word.”

“Sounds good,” said Max.

“Glad to help. We’ll get back to you in a few days with our report on Sanders.”

“I’m looking forward to reading it.”

## Chapter 55

As promised, Max received a report from Boudicca on Neil Sanders.

Sanders was a criminal defense attorney with a clean record. He was currently licensed to practice law in five states. His firm mainly represented the rich and powerful. His firm specialized in making deals to minimize damage to their client’s reputations. Max was intrigued when he read how the firm specialized in representing the family members of the wealthy.

Max then picked up the phone and called one of the assistant DA’s in Philadelphia.

“Good morning Carla,” he greeted.

“Max! How’re you doing you old pirate?” she asked.

“Keeping busy,” he replied.

“Are you in town?” she asked.

“No, I’m up in Stonington with Faith,” he replied. “Carla, I need a favor.”

“Sure, what’s up?”

“What do you know about a lawyer named Neil Sanders?” asked Max. “He has an office in Haddonfield.”

“We’re well acquainted with Mr. Sanders,” replied Carla. “Whenever some rich brat gets in trouble Neil Sanders is brought in.”

“What’s your professional opinion of him?”

“Overall he’s an excellent attorney, but quick to make a deal...often gets the victims to accept a financial deal in exchange for dropping the charges,” she stated. “There are rumors of him crossing the line legally, but no proof.”

“Do you know if he ever represented someone by the name of Bryan Longwell?”

“The name doesn’t ring a bell, but I can check. What’s up?”

“Did you hear what happened to Jirra Reid up in Boston?” asked Max.

“Yes, Cat told me,” replied Carla. “I’m so sorry...it would have to be her.”

“I know. Well, Longwell is the one who attacked her,” said Max.

“I thought he died,” said Carla.

“A twenty something story fall followed by a sudden stop at ground level will do that,” said Max.

“Too bad,” said Carla.

“Anyway, I’m just following up some leads to close up the case,” said Max.

Carla laughed. “You used to be a better liar, Max.”

Max chuckled. “I just wanted to see if Longwell ran afoul of the law in the City of Brotherly Love and if so, was he represented by Sanders.”

“Anything else?” asked Carla.

“Officially no, unofficially Sanders hired a local detective to track Jirra. I’m trying to find out why.”

“I’ll get back to you this afternoon,” said Carla.

“Thanks,” he replied.

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Four hours later Carla called Max.

“Sanders represented Mr. Longwell twice,” she stated.

"What were the charges?" asked Max.

"One was a fight in a South Street club; the second time was for sexual assault."

"Tell me about the second one," said Max.

"Longwell was accused by a local girl of date rape. We had a pretty good case, but then the girl dropped the charges. She's currently attending college at Villanova," said Carla.

"Interesting," said Max. "Can you send me the name of the girl?"

"Will do," she replied.

"Thanks Carla. I owe you one," he replied.

"Well the next time you and Faith are down here you can take me to dinner," she said.

"Le Bec Fin?" asked Max.

"How about Ashburn Alley at Citizen Bank Park?" she suggested.

"Sounds good," he replied.

"Let me know if there's anything else we can do for you," she said.

"I will, Carla," he replied.

"Give my love to Faith," she said.

"I will, thanks," replied Max.

## Chapter 56

"I'm glad that Max and Nina are involved with this," said Beth.

Jirra nodded as they walked across campus.

"What I don't understand is why someone would want to have me followed?" asked Jirra. "I mean the guy who attacked me is dead."

"Well, you could file papers to claim his estate," said Celeste. "We've done that many times concerning the girls at the foundation. Maybe they're concerned about that."

"You mean his family?" asked Jirra.

"Exactly," said Celeste. "We've had some legal fights concerning compensation."

"I don't want anything from him," countered Jirra.

“Yes, but they don’t know that,” added Beth.

“I don’t care one way or another,” said Jirra. “I’m angry about what happened to me...but I’m trying to look to the future too. I have health care...and enough money to get by. The idea of profiting from this horrible event is obscene.”

“Not everyone feels the same,” said Beth. “Maybe his family is worried that you might be trying to sue for damages.”

“It’s not worth the effort,” said Jirra.

“Do you want one of the foundation’s lawyers to contact this lawyer and let him know your feelings?” asked Celeste.

Jirra shook her head. “No. I just want to move on.”

## Chapter 57

Nina Vasquez drove out to Devon, Pennsylvania the following day. She had called ahead to arrange a meeting with Deb Ellis, the woman who had once filed charges against Bryon Longwell.

They met at a coffeehouse near the campus of Villanova.

Deb was a short, attractive woman with wireframe glasses. She was sitting at a table working on a laptop when Nina arrived.

“Excuse me, are you Deb Ellis? I’m Nina Vasquez, we talked on the phone.”

Deb smiled as she looked up. “Pleased to meet you.”

Nina sat down across from her.

“Thank you for agreeing to meet me,” said Nina.

“What do you want to know?” asked Deb. “I don’t mean to act rude, but I only have thirty minutes until I have to be at my next class.”

“Okay, why did you drop your complaint against Bryan Longwell?”

“Right to the point,” said Deb. “I was told that it would largely be my word against his. I was also given a large financial settlement.”

Nina stared back without replying.

“I know what you must think of me. But back then I was working in a club as a barmaid and could barely afford to go to night school. I would have had to testify at the trial and I was told how awful

it would have been. When they made an offer to compensate me, I jumped at it. Thanks to what happened I can afford to go to school here.”

“Did you know that he attacked others?” asked Nina.

“No,” she replied tentatively. “What happened?”

“He drugged and raped a young woman,” said Nina.

Deb stared back without emotion.

“I’m sorry to hear that...I assume he was caught.”

Nina shook her head. “No, he’s dead. He died trying to escape,” said Nina.

Deb nodded. “Best news I’ve heard all day. Couldn’t happen to a nicer guy. When did this happen?”

“Last month,” replied Nina. She then told Deb the short version of what had happened in Boston.

“So what do you want to know?”

“Who paid you?” asked Nina.

“The settlement came via a lawyer. I had to sign some paperwork not to talk about it.”

“I don’t want to know the details. However, do you remember the name of the lawyer who gave you the...settlement?” asked Nina.

“Neil Sanders,” she replied. “The guy was a real jerk. Look, I wasn’t happy about how it all went down...and I’m still angry about what that bastard Longwell did to me...but when I was handed the payment...it felt like a repeat of the initial attack. I wish I had been stronger...but I’m determined to make some good out of this.”

Nina nodded.

“I really wish I could have been stronger back then...but Bryan had money and power...and I was just a barmaid.”

“You don’t have anything to apologize for. Thank you for talking to me,” said Nina.

“You’re welcome,” said Deb as she returned to computer.

Nina got up and decided to get a cup of coffee before heading back to Philly.

On her way out of the shop Deb looked up from her computer.

“Did he really fall over twenty floors?” she asked.

"I wasn't there, but that's what I was told," said Nina.

"I hope he screamed the whole way down," said Deb who then went back to work.

## Chapter 58

"I really can't blame her," said Nina as she talked to Max.

"I have to agree. Carla sent me a copy of the case and it would have been tough on her," said Max.

"So where do you want to go from here?" asked Nina.

"Let's see what else we can turn up on Mr. Bryan Longwell. I suspect that he has been bailed out other times," said Max.

"I'll get our research department on it. It'll take time, I mean he doesn't have any convictions," said Nina.

"If detective work was easy everyone would do it," said Max.

Nina laughed.

"I should have a copy of his resume soon from the production company. You can start cross-referencing his jobs to court cases," said Max.

"We can also hack into that lawyer's computer," said Nina.

"Not yet," said Max. "I also want someone to keep an eye on Jirra."

"Do you think that Sanders will get someone else?" asked Nina.

"And probably better. Sanders made a mistake of getting someone cheap. Next time he'll hire someone better."

"Beck told him that he was hassled by a security guard at the condo," said Nina. "That's what he said in his last email to Sanders."

"Security guard, huh," said Max.

"I know, I'm so insulted, I feel like going back there and roughing him up."

"Did he tell Sanders what you looked like?" asked Max.

"Not unless he called and talked to him," said Nina.

"Okay, but be careful," said Max.

"I will. Are you going to call and talk to Jirra's friend Beth?"

"Of course," he replied.

"She's pretty sharp," said Nina.

"I know," replied Max.

## Chapter 59

Beth gave Jirra, Cat, and Celeste an update following her conversation with Max.

"If Nina or any of the others from Boudicca detect someone else following me, will they tell me?" asked Jirra.

"Absolutely," said Beth.

"I'm also upgrading the security in the building," said Celeste. "I'm adding security cameras in the parking area."

"So should I have my car checked for a GPS tracking device?" asked Jirra.

"No need, Max said that your car is clean and will be checked regularly until we figure this out," replied Beth. "Oh, and he's going to run a check on the phones here, just to make sure they haven't been bugged either."

Jirra shook her head in disgust.

"I'm sorry that you have to go through this," said Beth. "However you have a lot of people on your side."

"I know," replied Jirra. "I suppose I better call Alexis and my mom and tell them about this."

"That would be good. Max has already talked to the production company about upgrading security. What sort of security does the spa have?" asked Beth.

"I'm not sure, I know it's been improved since the discovery of the canyon," said Jirra. "Can you have Max call Judy?"

Beth nodded.

"Thanks," replied Jirra.

## Chapter 60

It was mid-morning on Saturday when Jirra's phone rang. She picked it up and looked at the phone number. It took her a moment to realize who was calling her.

"Hi Erika," greeted Jirra.

"Hi," replied Erika Walters.

"Thanks for calling," said Jirra.

"I'm sorry I didn't call sooner," apologized Erika.

"It's okay. Things have been a little crazy lately," said Jirra. "Did Cat tell you all the details?"

"Yes she did. I'm glad to hear that you're in a support group," said Erika. "I'm also glad that you won't have to deal with a trial...I wouldn't wish that on anyone, especially someone who's transgendered."

Jirra paused.

"You okay?" asked Erika.

"Yes...um, Erika, Cat said you would be trusted...I need to tell you something, but I need you to promise not to tell anyone," said Jirra.

Judging by Jirra's tone, Erika could tell that whatever Jirra was concerned about was very serious.

"You have my word," said Erika.

Jirra took a deep breath. "I'm not exactly transgendered...I mean not in the traditional sense...I was born male...but my transformation wasn't exactly conventional."

"What do you mean? Were you abducted and changed like Celeste?" asked Erika.

"No...it's much different," said Jirra.

She then told Erika what happened back at the spa that fateful afternoon.

"Wow...so you're like that actress Jennifer Stevens?" asked Erika.

"Not exactly...but there're some similarities. I've talked with her...she's a good friend of Alexis."

"Of course. So, unlike her, your transformation wasn't publicized," said Erika.

"That's right. We came up with the cover story about being transgendered," said Jirra. "I'm sorry I didn't tell you sooner."

"Nothing to apologize for...I can't imagine how difficult it has been," said Erika.

“For the most part it hasn’t been that bad. I have a group of wonderful friends who know about me,” said Jirra.

“Including Cat?”

“Yes. I told her a while ago...”

“She’s a great friend,” said Erika. “So was the transformation complete?”

“Yes...unfortunately,” said Jirra.

Erika paused. “Um, does that mean what I think it means?”

“Yes...I’m pregnant...and it’s from the assault.”

“God, I’m so sorry. I wish I was there to hug you,” said Erika.

“Thanks,” replied Jirra.

“So what are you going to do?”

“Alexis and I have decided to have the baby...and then put it up for adoption...we already have a couple in mind,” said Jirra.

“Wow,” said Erika. “I mean, I would love to be whole like you...but I don’t know if I could have carried a baby from the bastard who attacked me.”

“It wasn’t an easy decision. I debated getting an abortion...several times. I guess it’s because I was unconscious when it happened.”

“That makes sense,” said Erika. “In that way you were lucky.”

“I know. It’s so weird, I know I was violated, but I have no memory of the actual act. When I woke up in the hospital I had no idea what had happened.”

“So how are you handling the pregnancy? I mean, how are you explaining it?”

Jirra then told Erika how she was going to move up to Boston to live with Alexis.

“That’s good to hear that you have someone to be with for this. I’m also glad that you’re not giving up on your education.”

“That was never an option,” said Jirra with a laugh.

They talked for another thirty minutes.

“Jirra, you can call me any time if you need to talk,” said Erika.

“Thanks,” replied Jirra.

"Thank you for trusting me. You can count on me to protect your secret," said Erika.

"You're welcome. I appreciate being able to talk to someone about what happened to me up in Boston. Oh, Beth & Celeste know all about me too."

"You're right; you have some wonderful friends who are obviously very protective of you."

"I know you and Cat talk often...I don't mind if you talk about me."

"Thank you, I won't abuse the privilege," said Erika.

"I know that Erika," said Jirra.

"Feel free to call me anytime you need to talk," said Erika. "Even late at night...if that's necessary."

"Thanks," said Jirra.

## Chapter 61

Dr. Caroline Stewart walked into the clinic's examination room and sat down across from Jirra.

"How're you feeling today?" asked Dr. Stewart as she opened up Jirra's chart.

"I've been a bit nauseous, just as you said I might," said Jirra.

"It's not that uncommon at this stage. You're now in your seventh week so it's not that unusual."

"I guess the only good thing about what happened is that we know the exact date I became pregnant...I still have a hard time saying that," said Jirra.

"That's understandable," said Dr. Stewart. "Anything else?"

"I now know where all the bathrooms are on campus," said Jirra.

Dr. Stewart nodded. "Again, very normal."

"Oh, I called Dr. Lennox up in Boston and she's agreed to take me on. Thank you very much for referring me," said Jirra.

"She's not only an excellent doctor, but she's an old and very dear friend," said Dr. Stewart.

"I haven't met her in person, but we have had talked on the phone. I feel that I can trust her. My partner Alexis was able to meet her in person and was equally impressed."

“As was Dr. Lennox,” said Dr. Stewart. “She’s a big fan of The Erin Flynn Show...as am I. Don’t worry, we’ll both respect your privacy.”

“Thanks,” said Jirra. “The couple who is going to adopt the baby also had a chance to meet Dr. Lennox and they also like her.”

“I’m glad to hear that.”

“We’re working on the legal paperwork so this goes as smoothly as possible,” continued Jirra.

“I’m glad that you found someone to take the baby so quickly.”

Jirra nodded. “It’s not the baby’s fault that this happened...it deserves a good life with loving parents right from the start. I mean, I want to have a family someday...”

Jirra’s voice tailed off and she lowered her head.

“Jirra, it’s okay. I think you’re doing the right thing and turning a bad event into something wonderful.”

“Thanks,” replied Jirra.

“So do you still plan on moving up to Boston in January?”

Jirra nodded. “That’s right. Finals are right before Christmas and after that Alexis and I are going to spend the holidays in New Mexico at the spa.”

Dr. Stewart looked at her chart. “That shouldn’t be a problem. You’ll be just starting your second trimester so travelling shouldn’t be a problem.”

“That’s good to hear,” said Jirra.

“Okay Jirra, do you have any other questions for me?”

Jirra shook her head.

“Let’s see, why don’t we meet next the week after Thanksgiving?”

“Sound good to me,” said Jirra. “I want to thank you for being so understanding.”

“It’s my pleasure Jirra,” said Dr. Stewart.

## Chapter 62

Nina watched Jirra’s car pull out of the parking garage of the clinic.

At first she didn't see anything out of the ordinary, but then she noticed the woman standing across the street from the garage. Nina recognized the woman. It took her a few seconds to place where she had seen the woman, and then it hit her. The woman had been jogging past Jirra's building the previous day.

The woman was talking on a cell phone and was looking around as if to see if anyone was trailing Jirra's car.

Nina sat in her car and observed the woman, memorizing every detail possible. She also called Max and told him what she had seen.

"Did you see another car?" asked Max.

"No, but it wouldn't surprise me if they had one up the street," said Nina.

"Okay, stay and observe the woman," said Max.

"Will do," said Nina.

The woman, who appeared to be in her mid-twenties, stopped talking on her cell phone and headed into the clinic. She came out ten minutes later and pulled out her phone. Ten minutes later a nondescript dark blue sedan drove up and the woman got in.

Nina followed at a safe distance. She was able to get the license plate number and a good look at the driver.

Nina followed the car as it worked its way through the city streets. Twenty minutes later it pulled into a parking lot. Nina watched as the driver and the woman left the parking lot and entered a building two blocks away. As she drove by the building, Nina noticed a sign for a company called Dragon Securities Inc.

## Chapter 63

On the Friday before Thanksgiving, Jirra, Celeste, and Beth took Amtrak from Philadelphia up to New York City.

"Did Andrea give you any hint about her idea?" asked Jirra.

Beth shook her head. "No, nothing at all."

"Well, it must be good," said Celeste.

Three days earlier Andrea had called Beth and asked if she could come up and would she bring Jirra along. Celeste came along for the ride. They planned on spending the weekend in Manhattan at Celeste's apartment.

"I really hope that she's come up with something," said Jirra.

Beth nodded as she casually looked around the train. Max had called her a few nights earlier and told her what Nina had seen.

Dragon Securities was a private investigation company that provided surveillance and protection services for corporations. Max was checking to see if there were any connections between Dragon and Neil Sanders.

In the meantime, he had several members of Boudicca watching Jirra. In the past few days they had identified three different people who were taking turns tracking Jirra's moves.

Beth received a text-message that stated that no one had seen them leave the condo or get on the train. According to Nina, it appeared that the Dragon agent still thought that Jirra was at home in the condo. She showed the others the message.

"This is really starting to bug me," said Jirra.

"Well, we fooled them this time," said Beth. "They apparently don't know that we're onto them."

Jirra nodded. "Yes, but why are they following me?"

"Max has a theory, but he wants to confirm it first before he shares it with you," said Beth.

Jirra sighed. "You know, I wouldn't make it in your line of work, I don't have the patience for it."

"Just imagine how pissed off they'll be when they realize they've been watching an empty apartment all weekend," said Beth.

Jirra smiled. "Okay, I can get into that."

## Chapter 64

The weather in Manhattan was cloudy and brisk. Thankfully Celeste had a car waiting for them.

"Good Morning Mrs. Farnsworth," greeted Michael, Celeste's chauffeur.

"Hello, Michael," replied Celeste. "Thank you so much for driving into the city to pick us up."

"It's always a pleasure," he replied.

"You remember my friends Beth and Jirra," said Celeste.

He smiled. "Always a pleasure to see you two again."

Jirra and Beth smiled back.

“Michael, as we talked about, I need you to take an indirect route to the apartment,” said Celeste.

“Of course, Mrs. Farnsworth,” he replied.

One of Boudicca’s agents was watching to see if they were followed.

After twenty minutes of driving, Beth received a text message.

“It’s good,” she replied.

“Michael, you can head to the apartment now,” said Celeste.

“Yes Mrs. Farnsworth,” he replied.

## Chapter 65

After a quick stop at Celeste’s apartment they headed over to see Andrea. As before they were followed by one of Boudicca’s detectives.

“This has got to be expensive,” said Jirra.

“I’m paying for it, Jirra,” said Celeste.

“Thank you...I wish this wasn’t necessary,” she replied.

“So do I, but until we clear this up I want to help,” replied Celeste.

Paula greeted them at the door and escorted them to Andrea’s room.

Beth immediately noticed that Andrea had lost more weight, but she didn’t say anything.

“Hi, Gran,” she greeted as she gave Andrea a gentle hug.

“Hello, Beth,” replied Andrea cheerfully.

“Gran, you know my roommate Celeste, and this is Jirra Reid,” said Beth.

“It’s always a pleasure to see you Celeste...and it’s a long overdue welcome to you Jirra,” said Andrea. “And before you say anything, please call me Andrea.”

Celeste and Jirra both smiled and gave Andrea a hug.

“Please sit down,” said Andrea. “Would you like some tea?”

“That would be nice, Gran,” said Beth.

“Yes, please,” said Jirra.

“Tea sounds lovely, Andrea,” added Celeste.

“Excellent. Paula would you please make some tea for us?”

“Of course, Mrs. Carlson,” replied Paula.

## Chapter 66

After the tea was served Andrea turned to Jirra and smiled.

“So how are you my dear?” she asked.

“Pretty good...all things considered,” said Jirra as she took a sip of the tea.

“Any problems so far?” asked Andrea.

“A little morning sickness...nothing too serious. Thank you for asking,” said Jirra.

Andrea nodded. “As you know, Beth has told me of your concerns and identity issues. She has told me that you’ve been passing yourself as transgendered, is that correct?”

“Yes, Andrea. It seemed to be the logical thing to do after I was changed,” said Jirra. “But now, with the pregnancy....well you know...it’s making my life difficult.”

Andrea smiled softly. “I fully understand about maintaining a false identity.”

“Beth has told us about your experiences during World War II in Denmark,” said Jirra. “I feel honored to finally meet you in person.”

“We all did what we had to,” replied Andrea. “When Beth told me your predicament, I thought about my days in the resistance...and afterwards in intelligence and I think I may have a solution.”

“What is it?” asked Jirra anxiously.

“I’ll explain. In intelligence one of the major problems is keeping secrets. Sir Winston Churchill famously stated that in wartime, truth is so precious that she should always be attended by a bodyguard of lies,” explained Andrea.

“That’s what I did,” said Jirra.

Andrea shook her head. “True, but you did it the wrong way. You stated that you were transgendered to hide the fact that you were transformed. You couldn’t hide the truth that you were born male.”

Jirra nodded. “Exactly.”

“But what if you turn it around?” asked Andrea.

Jirra looked confused. "I don't get it?"

"What if the truth is that you weren't born as a male...and that your parents lied about your true gender to protect you?"

"What do you mean?"

"What if you had been born intersexed?" asked Andrea. "Your parents brought you up as male, but when you got older you realized that you were really female. I've read of many cases like that."

Jirra nodded. "But that still wouldn't explain my getting pregnant."

"It could. Let's say that you had surgery to correct your female genitalia and it was discovered that you have female reproduction organs..."

"No offense Andrea, but who would believe that...it's so ridiculous that no one would make up such a story," interrupted Jirra.

"Exactly. It's so wild and unbelievable that no one would make up a story like that...so it would have to be true. I have been in contact with several doctors who say that while very unlikely, it's possible. These doctors are also old friends and they would support and provide documentation should it be necessary," explained Andrea.

Jirra stared back and a slight smile appeared on her face. "Do you really think it would work?"

"Why not?" asked Andrea. "Your mother is a doctor, I can put these experts in contact with her, and they can create the proper medical records."

Jirra looked at Beth and Celeste.

"What do you think?" asked Jirra.

"It just might work," said Celeste. "In a way it's actually more believable than the truth...I mean who would believe that someone could be transformed in a mud bath?"

"Beth would you please hand Jirra that folder on my dresser?" asked Andrea.

"Sure thing, Gran," said Beth.

"The folder is filled with cases of intersexed people shifting from the gender they were assigned at birth," said Andrea. "In some of the cases the person had female reproductive organs. I can have these files sent to your mother."

Jirra nodded as she scanned the files.

"In a way what I'm suggesting is a play on Sir Winston's quote; a deception is protected by a bodyguard of truths. This is a common technique that is used in the intelligence community," said Andrea.

"It still seems a stretch," said Jirra.

"Maybe...but think about it Jirra, haven't people who think you're transgendered mentioned that you look so naturally feminine?" asked Beth.

Jirra nodded.

"Jirra, if anyone questions how you can be pregnant you can state that you were born intersexed and raised as a male; however you realized that you were actually female and you transitioned. During a physical examination doctors determined that you had a functional female reproductive system. They recommended that you don't get pregnant, which you agreed was the right thing to do, however you had no idea that you would be sexually assaulted," said Andrea.

"That almost makes sense," said Jirra. "Do you mind if I call my mom?"

"Go right ahead," said Andrea.

## Chapter 67

To Jirra's surprise, her mom found Andrea's plan workable.

Liz then talked to Andrea for thirty minutes discussing the plan.

"I have to admit that I'm a little embarrassed that I didn't consider this plan first," said Liz to Andrea.

"That's because you're a doctor...and I used to be in espionage," replied Andrea with a laugh.

Liz laughed. "I look forward to both seeing the files you had compiled and to talking to your experts. Thank you for doing this, Andrea."

"It was my pleasure. It has been a while since I had the chance to put my old skills to use," replied Andrea. "Besides I like helping a pleasant young woman like Jirra. You must be very proud of her."

"Yes I am," replied Liz. "Thank you."

"My pleasure. Please call me if you have any questions," said Andrea as she handed the phone back to Jirra.

"So do you think it will work, Mom?" asked Jirra.

"It just might, Roo," said Liz.

"Wow...if it does, it could really change my life," said Jirra.

## Chapter 68

The girls stayed with Andrea for another hour before leaving. They promised to stop by the next morning.

"She's amazing," said Jirra as they rode in Celeste's limo.

"I know," said Beth. "I'm so happy she was able to help you, Jirra."

"Changing the subject, what do you feel like doing for dinner?" asked Celeste. "How about Chinese?"

Both Beth and Jirra nodded in agreement.

"Michael, would you please head to Chinatown," said Celeste.

"My pleasure Mrs. Farnsworth," he replied.

As they headed through the city traffic Jirra thought about Andrea's idea.

"I think I have a way to find out if Andrea's idea will work," she stated.

"How?" asked Beth.

"I think it's time to seek out an old friend," she replied.

## Chapter 69

Jirra sat cross-legged on a comforter in one of the bedrooms of Celeste's apartment. She concentrated on her spirit guide Killara and hoped that she could make contact. The only thing she was wearing was her kangaroo charm that she always wore around her neck.

Over the past few years, Jirra learned that it wasn't always possible to reach Killara, but that in times of true need he was always there for her.

Jirra was almost ready to give up when she heard a familiar voice behind her.

"I've been expecting you for some time," said Killara.

She opened her eyes and found herself sitting under a large oak tree on a warm sunny day. The warmth of the sun felt good on her naked body.

Killara hopped up next to her. He was in his usual form of a kangaroo rat.

"Hello, Killara," she greeted.

“It has been a long time, Jirra, it is good to see you,” he stated.

“I know I don’t have to update you on what has been happening,” she said.

“I’m pleased with the way you have handled this crisis. I’m very proud of you,” he said.

Jirra smiled. “Thank you...that means a lot coming from you.”

He scratched his head with his hind foot.

“What do you think of Andrea’s idea? Will it work?” asked Jirra.

“Yes, it is a very plausible plan. She is a wise woman...I’m pleased that she was able to help you,” he said. “The important thing is that your secret will remain just that.”

Jirra broke out in a huge smile.

“You have no idea how relieved I am to hear you say that,” she replied joyfully.

“I’m pleased to hear that...but I must warn you that you will face a new dilemma,” he said.

“The people who have been following me?” asked Jirra.

“They are no direct threat to you...it is the person they work for that will trouble you,” he said.

“Who hired them?” she asked.

“I cannot say, but even though it will be difficult, fear not, your friends will protect you,” he said.

Jirra nodded. She knew that he wouldn’t disclose the person in question. “I have one more question...and please no riddles Killara.”

He looked up at her and made a motion that looked like a nod.

“Am I doing the right thing by giving up the baby?” she asked nervously.

“You’re turning a horrible act of violence into something wonderful. You are bringing life into the world...and you are helping two people who dearly want a child to raise...yes my dear you are doing the right thing.”

Jirra felt tears rolling down her cheeks and as she spoke to say thank you... she woke up.

## Chapter 70

Over breakfast Jirra told Beth and Celeste about her latest spirit journey.

“Jirra, how hard is it to first meet your spirit guide?” asked Celeste.

"It's hard to say, it often depends if the guide wants the meeting to take place, why?" replied Jirra.

"I was thinking of using this to help the girls at the foundation. Most come around with conventional treatment, but there are a few that need special help," she replied.

"I'm really not an expert on this...I can have Tara & Cari contact you, they were the ones who taught me how to do it."

"Great, thank you," said Celeste.

A short time later they arrived at Andrea's place.

To their surprise, Andrea was sitting in her living room.

"I was sick of sitting in bed all the time," she explained. Then she asked Beth if she would accompany Paula to the store. "You know the ingredients for my special cookies better than anyone."

Beth smiled back. "Okay, I'll step out so you can talk about me."

She then leaned down and kissed Andrea goodbye.

After Beth and Paula left, Andrea couldn't help but laugh.

"She's definitely going into the right profession," said Andrea. "She was right; I did want to talk to you two in private."

Jirra and Celeste nodded.

"Celeste, I need a favor from you," said Andrea.

"What is it?" asked Celeste.

"I'm concerned about Paula. Oh, she will be compensated in my will, but she will need a job. I know you have connections," said Andrea.

"What do you have in mind?" asked Celeste.

"I need to give you some background information first. Paula has a criminal record...granted it back when she was a teenager, but that is enough for some people not to give her a chance," said Andrea.

"What did she do?" asked Celeste.

"She did time for theft, but it was because she was homeless...her mother abandoned her when she was twelve," said Andrea. "Paula basically grew up on the streets and she did what she had to do to survive."

“And her father?”

“She never met him,” said Andrea. “Anyway, back when I was able, I worked with several charities here in the city. I met Paula at a homeless shelter and well, we just hit it off. Over the next six months we developed a very close relationship...I guess it was because I was the first person to really care about her.”

Celeste and Jirra listened intently.

“Over time I began to support her, I took her shopping, bought her clothes, things like that. Then Paula told me that she didn’t want charity, and asked if there was something she could do to for me. At first she just ran errands, but over time her duties expanded and she became my fulltime employee. In the time I have known her; I have grown to trust her completely.”

“What’s her education level?” asked Celeste.

“She has her GED and has been taking college classes,” said Andrea.

“And how far along in her transition is she?” asked Celeste.

Andrea smiled back. “I knew you’d notice. She’s been on hormones for several years. I have also helped her change her identity legally.”

“That’s good to hear,” said Celeste. “Does she want to stay in the city or would she consider a move to Connecticut?”

“What do you have in mind?” asked Andrea.

“We’re always looking for good people to work at the foundation. I’m very picky about our staff and we screen them very carefully,” said Celeste. “My goal is to have a staff member in charge of each of the dorms; I think that Paula would be an excellent choice.”

Andrea nodded.

“We offer excellent salaries, and benefits, including payments for college,” continued Celeste.

“And would you have an opening in...say the next three months?” asked Andrea

Celeste did her best not to gasp. “We can always find a job for someone like Paula.”

“Excellent, that’s one less thing for me to worry about,” said Andrea. “This leads me into my next issue...as I just alluded to...I only have a short time left. I’ve accepted this and am at peace with the world. However, I am worried about Beth...and that’s where you two come in.”

Andrea took a sip of water.

“She’s a wonderful girl...intelligent and strong, but I know how this must be tearing her apart. I’m the only tie to her original family. Yes, she has a family now. Maggie and Steve are wonderful

people, but in her previous life she was very close to her family and the separation has been the most difficult thing she has had to deal with. I know that both of you have had similar experiences. I know that you're her friend and that you are deeply for her. I also know that you will be there for her, but just keep an eye on her for me. Grief can cause people to make rash decisions."

Andrea took another drink of water.

"You know about my request for my ashes, right?"

Both girls nodded.

"It will hard for her...when she sees all her old family there...just be there for her."

"Of course," said Celeste.

Jirra nodded in agreement. "She's one of my best friends in the world."

"I know both of you have a lot on your mind...especially you Jirra...I hate to put more things on your plate," said Andrea.

Jirra smiled back. "I would do anything for Beth."

"Thank you, I know that I can count on you," replied Andrea as she took another sip of water. "I have one more request for you Jirra."

"Sure, what is it?"

"You will be receiving a package. It contains copies of my diaries and personal papers. I would like you to write a fictionalized account my life. I'm sure that in the right hands it will make an entertaining story," she stated.

Jirra stared back in shock.

"Um, I'm not sure that I'm up to that sort of request," said Jirra.

"I think you're perfect. First you're an excellent writer. I'm a huge fan of that show you write for and I've watched every episode you're written. Second, you have insight into the gender and identity issues than a more conventional writer would. You also have connections in the entertainment world, who knows if it might even end up as a movie!"

Jirra thought about it and then nodded. "Okay, I would be honored Andrea."

"Good. I've known for some time that I could never publish my true life story...but I came to the conclusion that it would be a rousing fictional story."

Jirra looked over at Celeste.

"Maybe Jen would be interested in making it into a movie," she said.

“There’s an idea. I can’t think of a better person to do something like that,” said Celeste.

Jirra turned back and looked at Andrea.

“I’ll do my best, Andrea.”

“No one can ask more than that. Now, Beth and Paula should be back soon with the ingredients for the cookies. I hope you girls like to bake!” stated Andrea.

## Chapter 71

Beth, Jirra, and Celeste arrived back in Philadelphia on Sunday afternoon. Jirra was tempted to wave to the dark sedan that parked across the street from the condo, but didn’t. Instead she glowed in the satisfaction that whoever was in the car was fuming.

Jirra was right. Inside the car was Stephanie Kettner and she was furious. They were being paid a lot of money to track the every move of Jirra Reid and it wouldn’t look good and would be very hard to explain.

How could three college coeds outsmart a trained detective? It was infuriating and Stephanie was worried about the consequences. The only good thing was that she hadn’t been on duty when the girls disappeared.

She couldn’t figure out how the three girls had managed to slip away unseen. More importantly, she had no idea where they had gone. She picked up her phone and called her boss and told him they had returned.

“Any idea where they went?” demanded Michael Macdonald.

“No, but I can find out. I can slip into the building tomorrow when they are at school. I’m sure that I can turn something up.”

“No. Our job is to just observe. The client doesn’t want the target to know she’s being watched,” he stated.

“Mac, do you think she knows?” asked Stephanie cautiously. “I mean, how did they just disappear for a weekend without us seeing them leave?”

“I think Larry was sleeping,” said Mac, referring to the detective who had been watching the condo on Friday morning.

“Maybe,” replied Stephanie. “I just have the feeling that there’s more to these girls than we know.”

“Nonsense,” he replied. “The Farnsworth girl is rich...and she used to be a guy. She’s living off the money her deceased husband left her and she spends most of her time working on her foundation and going to class. Beth Williams is a normal coed. Her parents are paper-pushers for government, nothing strange about that.”

“What about the report that Williams is a fed?” asked Stephanie.

“Please! She hasn’t even finished college yet!”

“Okay, but what about Jirra Reid? I mean there are rumors on campus that’s she’s also transgendered,” said Stephanie.

“Sounds like bullshit to me. I mean if she’s a freak why has she been going to see an OB/GYN?”

“Do you really think she’s pregnant?” asked Stephanie.

“It looks like it. Look, our job is to follow the target. So we lost track of her for a few days, what could she have done that was all that important?” asked Mac.

“I guess you’re right,” replied Stephanie.

“Look, we’re the best in the business and as long as we track her and not be detected then we’re earning our paycheck,” he stated.

“You’re right,” said Stephanie.

Nina listened to the tapped conversation and couldn’t help but laugh to herself.

“Whoever is paying you is owed a refund,” she said aloud.

She then picked up her own phone and called Max to give him an update.

## Chapter 72

As Jirra settled in for the evening she called Alexis and told her of Andrea’s plan.

“It’s so...so simple...well not exactly simple, but why didn’t we think of it?” asked Alexis.

“We weren’t spies,” said Jirra.

Alexis laughed.

“So what are you doing for Thanksgiving?” asked Jirra.

“Working, we had some delays in shooting up here due to the weather and we’re behind schedule,” said Alexis. “I’m sorry, I was hoping to come down and see you...but the good thing is that we’ll be done before Christmas.”

“Good,” said Jirra. “I’m really looking forward to moving up with you.”

“So am I. How’re you feeling?”

“I’m tired. I don’t know if it’s due to the trip or the baby, probably a combination of the two,” said Jirra.

“Anything else? Have your breasts grown?” asked Alexis. “See, I’ve been doing my homework.”

Jirra laughed. “Glad to hear it. Yes, they’re getting a little larger...I didn’t think that was possible.”

“Oh, I talked to Max, he’s going to have security systems installed in both the condo in Boston and the house out on the Cape,” said Alexis.

Jirra then told Alexis about her latest visit with Killara.

“I wish we knew who was responsible for all this,” said Jirra.

“As soon as we do they’re going to wish they left us alone,” replied Alexis. “Oh that reminds me, Jen wants you to give her a call when you get the chance.”

“Where’s she these days?”

“Out in LA, busy as usual with all her business interests,” replied Alexis. “But she’s never too busy for you.”

“Thanks,” said Jirra as she glanced at her watch. “I guess I can try her tonight. But let’s talk some more first...I miss you so badly.”

“I love you too Roo.”

## Chapter 73

An hour later Jirra called Jen.

“I was hoping you would call,” said Jen.

Jirra told her about the trip up to New York. She then described Andrea’s idea.

“So what do you think?” asked Jirra.

There was a long pause before Jen replied.

“You still there?” asked Jirra.

“Yes...it’s just that it’s such a great idea...I was shocked that we didn’t think of it ourselves,” said Jen. “This Andrea must be incredible.”

“You don’t know the half of it. Incredible doesn’t even start to describe her. So, do you really think that people will believe it?”

“Absolutely, it has just enough truth in it to be believable,” replied Jen.

Jirra then brought up Andrea’s request to have a fictionalized version of her life written.

“I would like to have the first look at it,” said Jen.

“I was hoping you’d say that,” said Jirra.

“Seriously, if done right it could be a best seller and a great movie,” said Jen.

“I haven’t written it yet...I haven’t even seen the notes,” said Jirra.

“Ah, but you’re already thinking about it, aren’t you?” asked Jen.

“Yes,” confessed Jirra.

“See you are a writer. It will give you something to do while you’re up in Boston,” said Jen.

“Will you be up there at all?”

“When I can sneak out of Tinsel Town,” she replied. “Besides, the Erin Flynn show wants me to do the waitress thing again. Alexis has perfected her puppy dog eyes look and it seems to work on me every time, even over the phone. I also have to admit that it is one of my favorite roles.”

Jirra laughed.

“Oh, Alexis has been keeping me informed on the other thing. If anything happens and you need help, don’t hesitate to call me,” said Jen.

“I won’t,” replied Jirra.

## Chapter 74

Nina picked up her phone and called Max.

“Thought it was time for an update,” she said.

“What do you have?” he asked.

“The surveillance continues,” she replied. “It’s the same three detectives.”

“Anything else?” asked Max.

“The woman has been walking past the condo when Jirra’s at school. If I didn’t know better I would say she’s looking for a way to break in,” said Nina.

“Really? Why do you think that?”

“Because it’s what I would have done when I was younger and stupid,” replied Nina.

Max laughed. “So have you got her on video?”

“Yes. Yesterday she acted as if she was going to try and sneak in the garage,” she replied. “Her boss told her not to break in, but I think she’s trying to make some points.”

“Of course,” replied Max.

“What do you want us to do if she does?” asked Nina.

“Call the Philly PD and let them arrest her. That way they don’t know about us.”

“Okay. Should I talk to Celeste and Beth about this?”

“Yes, in fact let them be the ones who call the cops,” said Max.

Nina laughed. “I hope I’m here to see it. Oh, any luck on finding out who’s behind this?”

“I know who it is...I just don’t have all the proof...yet,” replied Max.

“And you’re not going to share your theory with me?” asked Nina.

“Not yet...even someone of my vast years of experience has made a mistake,” he replied.

“Really? I’m shocked that you made a mistake!”

“I didn’t say I have...I just said that it’s possible,” he replied with a laugh.

Nina chuckled. “Okay.”

“As soon as I have the proof I’ll clue you in,” he replied.

“I’m looking forward to it.”

## Chapter 75

When Jirra arrived back at her apartment, there was a note from Cat on the door. Jirra walked across the hall and knocked on the door.

“Hi, Jirra,” said Cat.

"I got your note, what's up?"

"I wanted to invite you and the others to a Thanksgiving feast," said Cat.

"Really, where?"

"You've met Carla; well she's invited us over. My Mom and stepfather are also going to be there," said Cat.

"I'd like that," said Jirra. "Have you talked to Celeste and Beth?"

"No, but Rebecca, Jill, and TC have accepted the invitation," said Cat.

Jirra pulled out her phone and called Beth and Celeste. Both immediately accepted.

"We're in. Is there anything we can bring?" asked Jirra.

"Just your appetites. I've been over for a few family dinners and there's usually enough food for a small army. Carla always ensures that there's extra food so that the cops on duty can stop by for dinner."

"Wow, so how many people will be there?" asked Jirra.

"Last Thanksgiving there were over thirty...not including the dozen or so police officers who stopped in for a bite," replied Cat.

"It sounds like fun," said Jirra. "I can't wait to meet your family."

"Great," said Cat.

"I'd still like to bring something," said Jirra.

"I'll call Carla and see if she needs anything, okay?"

"Great, thanks," said Jirra.

## Chapter 76

Cat called Jirra that evening and said that Carla could use some extra desserts. Jirra immediately called Celeste and the others. Ten minutes they were all gathered in Celeste's apartment.

"I talked to Cat and she said that a few apple pies would go well with the rest of the menu. Cat said that Carla insists on making the pumpkin pies," said Celeste.

"So how many pies do they need?" asked TC.

"How about six, one from each of us?" suggested Jill.

“Perfect,” said Celeste. “Rebecca and Beth, can you go to the store and get the ingredients?”

Beth and Rebecca nodded. “Just tell us what you need.”

“I have a great family recipe for apple pie,” said TC. “I’ll go with them and get everything we need.”

Celeste nodded. “We’re going to need pans. Do any of you own one?”

They all shook their heads.

“No problem, I’ll stop by that kitchen supply store over on Ninth,” said Jill.

“Fante’s?” asked Jirra.

Jill nodded.

“How do you know about Fante’s? I mean they don’t deliver food,” replied Jill with a smile.

“Very funny. Actually my friend Lindsey loves the place. She took me there the last time she was out this way,” said Jirra. “Why don’t we go there tomorrow?”

“Sounds good,” said Jill. “There’re some things that I’ve wanted to get for our kitchen.”

## Chapter 77

Nina took the Thanksgiving shift. Celeste loaned her the guest apartment which was now outfitted with several security monitors and recorders so Nina could observe everything going on around the condo without being outside in the cold. The girls promised to bring her back a complete dinner.

Nina watched as they drove away for the party. She watched a car pull out to follow them and she broke out in a huge smile. She wished she could see the look on the face of the investigator when he realized that Jirra and the others were going to the house of one of the assistant DAs.

But she was currently more interested in the gray sedan parked across the street. She knew the car by heart as it was one that had often tailed Jirra off to college.

Six hours later Nina saw the door open and the female investigator got out.

Stephanie looked around and then slowly walked across the street unaware that she was being observed.

Nina watched as the woman tried the security pad for the parking garage. After three attempts the woman pulled a small electronic device out of her coat and attached it to the keypad. She pressed a

few buttons and the security gate opened up. The woman slipped the device into her coat and walked into the garage.

Nina watched as the woman headed straight for the elevator and pressed the button to go up.

Stephanie exited on Jirra's floor and walked down the hall to Jirra's front door. She looked around as she bent down to inspect the lock.

Nina zoomed the hidden camera so that she could record the woman as she picked the lock.

As soon as the woman entered Jirra's apartment, Nina picked up the phone and called the police to report a break in. She identified herself as an employee at a security company.

Officer Jake O'Donnell received the call and immediately drove to the location. He was the first officer on the scene, but he was quickly joined by three other officers. They entered the building with the access code provided by Nina who watched the entire scene from her seat in the apartment up the hall. It was far more entertaining than the football game that was on the TV.

Stephanie was unaware of what going on as she searched Jirra's apartment. It was a disappointing search as she didn't uncover anything related to the previous weekend.

She glanced at her watch and decided that it was time to go. As she stepped out into the hall she was shocked to see several Philadelphia police officers standing just outside the door.

"Freeze!" shouted Jake as he pointed his gun at her. "Put your hands up!"

Stephanie mumbled a curse as she lifted her arms. There would be hell to pay for this screw up she thought.

Nina cracked a large smile as she called Max and updated him on what had happened. Then she called Celeste and Jirra.

## Chapter 78

Following Stephanie's arrest and his initial statement to the detectives, Officer O'Donnell was ordered to drive over to Carla's home. He was more than a little nervous as he pulled his cruiser in front of her home. He had only been on the force for a couple of years and he was still anxious whenever he was around one of the district attorneys.

He was surprised to see a half dozen other officers mingling with the guests.

"Hey Jake isn't this a little out of your territory?" asked one of the cops.

"I'm working, Jerry" he replied.

"So am I, but this is a tradition around here. Ms. Warren always invites us over," said Jerry.

Before Jake could reply Carla walked up and greeted him.

“Officer O’Donnell?” she asked.

He turned and nodded. “Yes Ma’am.”

“They called and said you were on the way here. Excellent job,” she stated.

“It was pretty simple, Ma’am, the security company detected the break-in and called us. The suspect walked out into our hands,” he replied.

“Still, it was handled perfectly,” replied Carla. “I’ll let your sergeant know how much I appreciate your prompt actions. Now, have you had something to eat?”

She then pointed to the tables that were loaded with food.

He glanced over at the other cops who all nodded.

“Thank you,” he replied.

“Great, why don’t you help yourself and I’ll round up the young woman whose apartment the suspect broke into,” said Carla.

“If it’s okay with you, I’ll talk to her first and then eat,” he replied.

Carla smiled back. “Of course, but I want you to have a good meal before you leave.”

## Chapter 79

Jake briefed Jirra and Celeste on what happened.

“You have an excellent security company,” he stated.

Celeste nodded. “The best.”

“Nothing appeared to be taken from your apartment Ms. Reid,” said Jake. “But I recommend that you go back and check.”

“Thank you... and please call me Jirra,” she replied.

Jake smiled back. “Pretty name.”

He then realized what he had said and he lowered his head to hide his embarrassment.

“Thanks,” she replied holding back a smile. “So why did she break into my place?”

"We're not sure. She claims to be a PI and that she thought she was entering the apartment of someone related to a divorce case she's working on," replied Jake.

"Sounds fishy to me," said Carla.

"That's what Detective West said," said Jake. "Although that's not the exact phrase he used."

"I'm sure it wasn't! He's one of the best. I'm sure he'll figure out what happened," said Carla.

"I better head back to my place," said Jirra.

"I can give you a ride," said Jake.

Jirra smiled and shook her head. "That's okay, why don't you get something to eat...and try the apple pie, I helped bake them."

Jake nodded.

"I'll drive you back home," said Beth.

"Thanks," replied Jirra. "But I hate to pull you away from the party."

"It's okay, I have to get up early tomorrow anyway, Jim and I are going out to his parent's for the weekend," she replied.

"Okay," said Jirra. She then turned to Carla. "I better say goodnight, thank you for the wonderful time."

Carla hugged Jirra. "You're always welcome here, dear."

"Oh, and thank you Officer O'Donnell," said Jirra.

He nodded back.

## Chapter 80

Later that evening Stephanie was bailed out by her boss.

"That was a fucking stupid thing to do," he grumbled as they got in the car outside Police Headquarters.

"I know...but how was I to know they had a security system," she replied.

"You should have suspected they did, that's why I pay you," he snapped. "Damn rookie mistake!"

"I'm sorry," she replied.

“At least you didn’t compromise the case,” he replied. “But as of now you’re off the case...and you’re on two weeks unpaid leave.”

Stephanie was furious, but she didn’t argue, at least she still had her job.

“And one more thing, stay away from the building and the girl,” he added. “If you fuck up again no one is coming to your aid.”

“Okay, you have my word,” she replied.

“Your word? Next time I’ll have your ass,” he countered.

“Okay,” she replied. “Still something doesn’t seem right about this.”

“You’re just pissed that you screwed up,” he stated.

“I’m pissed I admit that, but don’t you find it strange that they have such an elaborate security system?”

He glanced over at her.

“Maybe you’re right. I think we’ll switch to a more covert form of surveillance for the time being,” he stated.

## Chapter 81

Jirra walked up to Diana’s office and knocked on the door.

“Come on in,” said Diana.

Jirra entered the office.

“Good afternoon, Jirra,” said Diana.

“Hi,” replied Jirra.

“Please have a seat,” said Diana.

Jirra sat down across from Diana.

“First, how’re you feeling?” asked Diana.

“Mostly tired,” replied Jirra.

Diana nodded. “I guess that’s normal.”

“That’s what my doctor says,” replied Jirra.

“Well, I have good news for you. The university has approved your plan to take next semester off,” said Diana. “They also agreed to give you credit for the work you’ll be doing.”

“Really? That’s great,” said Jirra. “To be honest I didn’t think that they would approve it.”

“You have a lot of people going to bat for you. Faith wrote the administration a long letter that laid out what you would be doing. Also your friend Jen Stevens made a sizable donation.”

Jirra shook her head in disbelief.

“They took a bribe?” she asked.

“A donation...Ivy League schools don’t take bribes,” replied Diana with a smile. “But do me a favor and don’t tell Jen that I told you about it.”

“I promise,” said Jirra. “Thank you for everything you’ve done for me.”

“I’m glad to help,” said Diana.

“Oh, what do you think about the cover story?” asked Jirra.

“It’s good,” said Diana.

“I hope that I don’t have to use it, but it’s nice to know that it’ll be in place if it’s needed,” said Jirra.

She then explained how her mom was making the appropriate additions to her medical record.

“Sounds good. So how’s Andrea doing?” asked Diana.

Jirra shook her head.

“Beth talked to her the other night and she had a bit of a downturn. Her doctor wanted to admit her back into the hospital but Andrea refused,” said Jirra.

“I’m sorry to hear that,” said Diana.

Jirra nodded.

“Please give Beth my best wishes and let her know that Kari and I are thinking about her...and if there’s anything please let us know,” said Diana.

“I will, thanks,” said Jirra.

“So when do you head up to Boston?”

“After finals. I was going to try and head back to New Mexico for Christmas, but Mom talked me out of that. She’s going to fly out here and spend a few days with us,” said Jirra.

“That’s good to hear. Now, I know you’ll be in good hands up there with Alexis...and Faith and Max will also be close, but don’t hesitate to call me.”

“Thanks Diana,” said Jirra. “I really appreciate everything you’ve done for me.”

“We have to stick together, if you know what I mean,” said Diana.

## Chapter 82

“Are you sure?” asked Max.

“Yes, it’s located under the rear bumper,” replied Nina.

“Have you told Jirra yet?” he asked.

“No, I wanted to check with you first,” replied Nina.

“You can tell her,” he said.

“What do you want me to do about it?” she asked.

“Nothing for now. If you take it off they’ll just plant another tracking device. We’ll wait until she’s ready to leave for Boston and then we’ll have some fun,” he replied.

“What do you have in mind?” asked Nina.

“On the day that Jirra plans on leaving, take it off and find a car...better yet a truck that’s heading cross-country...that will keep them busy for a while,” he said. “Unfortunately it will tip them off, but it will be worth it.”

Nina laughed. “That’s incredibly devious! I love working for you, Max.”

## Chapter 83

“Thank God finals are over,” said Beth as she prepared a salad.

“I know what you mean, I’m looking forward to some time off too,” replied Celeste.

“Are you going to spend time with Sean?” asked Beth referring to the man that Celeste was dating.

“Yes, he’s coming with me up to Connecticut,” she replied.

“That’s good to hear,” said Beth.

“Are you going up to see Andrea?”

Beth nodded. "I'm going up tomorrow. Depending on how she's doing I will then head down to DC to be with the family...and then spend some time with Jim and his family. It's tough to act so cheerful when I don't feel all that much in the holiday spirit."

"I wish I could do something for both of you," said Celeste.

"You've done so much already," said Beth who then let out a long sigh.

"You okay?" asked Celeste.

Beth nodded. "It's just that the last time I was up there I saw my parents...my original parents entering Andrea's building as I left...I thought I was over it...I mean, I've had a great life since I was changed...but seeing them...and seeing Andrea slowly fading away...it's just too much. I should be stronger and ..."

"Beth, don't beat yourself up," said Celeste. "Please don't hesitate to call me...I mean it."

Beth smiled back. "Thanks."

"No problem, that's what sisters are for," replied Celeste.

"So speaking of sisters, have you heard from Jirra?" asked Beth.

"No. She should be arriving in Boston soon, depending on the traffic," replied Celeste. "Don't get me wrong, I fully agree with her decision to go up there to have the baby, but I'm going to miss her."

"Me too," said Beth. "I suppose we can always head up for a weekend visit."

"I'd like that," said Celeste. "Beth, have you ever thought about it...getting pregnant?"

"I didn't until this happened," replied Beth. "Jim and I have talked about...well starting a family, but neither of us is in a rush."

"How do you feel about the possibility of having a baby?"

Beth shrugged. "I'm okay about it. I guess that's because my transformation affected my mind too so that I accepted my feminine status. What about you, do you wish you could get pregnant?"

Celeste nodded. "I know it's impossible...but it would be wonderful."

Beth nodded. "It's tough."

"Still, in a way I guess I already have a huge family with all my girls at the foundation...still it would be nice to have a child of my own."

"Would you consider asking Iona to see if there's anything she can do?" asked Beth.

Celeste shook her head. "I think it's cool that I know magic exists, but I don't want to use it myself. I'm happy with who I am."

"I thought you'd say that," said Beth. "Well, dinner's ready, let's eat."

## Chapter 84

Jirra sat down on the couch next to Alexis.

"So how was the drive?" asked Alexis.

"Pretty easy...the only bad traffic I hit was when I entered the city," said Jirra.

"Nothing unusual about that," said Alexis. "I'm so glad you're here."

She then leaned over and kissed Jirra.

"How're you feeling, you hungry?"

Jirra nodded.

"I made some soup," said Alexis.

"You did what?" asked Jirra with a look of disbelief.

"Yes, you heard me right," replied Alexis.

"I'm impressed," said Jirra.

"Well, the character I play is supposed to be a decent cook so I have been taking some lessons," she replied.

"Cool," replied Jirra as she pulled her cell phone out of her purse. "Well, I better call Mom and then Beth to let them know I made it up here okay. Alexis, thank you for...well thank you for everything."

"It's my pleasure, Roo."

## Chapter 85

The next morning Mac logged onto his computer and checked the location of Jirra's car. He had been notified the previous afternoon that she had left the city.

"What the fuck?" he exclaimed as he looked at the screen.

“What’s the matter boss?” asked Vic Rodgers.

“Look at this,” stated Mac. “Why would the Reid girl be driving through Indianapolis?”

Vic shook his head as he leaned over and looked at the screen.

Mac clicked on the icon for tracker and the scratched his head.

“According to this, she drove all night, making only a short stop in Ohio,” said Mac.

Vic looked at the screen. “She’s on I-70 and heading towards St. Louis. I’ll call and have someone see if they can pick her up visually.”

Mac nodded. “Fine...I just had the sickening feeling that we’re being fucked with.”

## Chapter 86

Jirra looked out the window of Alexis’s condo at the snow falling down. It was the middle of January and there was already six inches of snow on the ground. Of course this didn’t affect the shooting of the show and Alexis was currently out filming some scenes around Boston Common.

Christmas had come and gone. It had actually been a wonderful time and Jirra had been glad that her mom had flown out to spend some time with them.

Jirra ran her hands across her belly. While it wasn’t drastic, she could see that she was getting larger. Thankfully she could still fit into most of her old clothes. She had noticed an increase in her appetite too. Thankfully her new doctor, Dr. Lennox, had given her some information on how to keep her weight under control.

She had only seen Dr. Lennox once, but she already knew that she could trust her. Dr. Lennox was in her early forties and was considered one of the best doctors in Boston. She was a tall athletic looking woman who had played volleyball in college. She was also an old friend of Aileen.

During the Christmas visit, Jirra, Alexis, and Liz had gone to see her together.

Jirra decided that it would best to be totally truthful and she told Dr. Lennox the truth about her gender. To Jirra’s surprise, Dr. Lennox wasn’t shocked.

“I suspected that there was something different about you,” stated Dr. Lennox. “I fully understand your concerns and I will do everything possible to protect your privacy.”

Liz then brought up the cover story.

“I think it’s workable,” said Dr. Lennox as she reviewed Jirra’s medical record. “Did you tell Dr. Garcia this?”

Jirra shook her head.

"I figured that if you're friends with Aileen Munro that you could be trusted," said Jirra.

Dr. Lennox smiled back. "Thank you. Thanks to Aileen my eyes have been opened up to a few...less than ordinary cases. In fact my niece is transgendered."

"There's one more thing," said Jirra. She then told Dr. Lennox about the people who had been following her down in Philly.

"I appreciate you telling me that," said Dr. Lennox. "This building has excellent security."

"A detective friend might stop by and talk to you," said Alexis. "His name is Max Bowie."

She then gave Dr. Lennox a description of Max.

"Well, the important thing is to ensure that you have a healthy baby," said Dr. Lennox. "So, far everything looks normal."

"Thanks," replied Jirra.

"I understand that you're going to put the baby up for adoption," continued Dr. Lennox.

Jirra nodded. "We're not ready to have a family."

Dr. Lennox smiled. "It's okay, Jirra. I just wanted to know if you've made arrangements."

Jirra nodded again. "Yes, we have a couple picked out."

"Are they local?" asked Dr. Lennox.

"Yes," replied Jirra.

"Excellent. First, I take it that they don't know your past," said Dr. Lennox.

"That's correct," said Jirra. "Do you think I should tell them?"

"I don't think that's necessary. The next question is, how involved do they want to be in your pregnancy? I've worked with several surrogates."

Jirra looked at Alexis.

"I'll talk to them and get back to you, okay?" said Alexis.

"That would be great, thank you," said Dr. Lennox.

Jirra was snapped out of her thoughts by the sound of her phone ringing.

"Hello?" she asked.

“Hi Jirra, this is Stella.”

“Oh, hi,” said Jirra.

“I just wanted to call and let you know that I would love to go with you when you go in to see your doctor,” said Stella.

Jirra smiled. “Cool. My next appointment is tomorrow at one.”

“Great, I’ll come by and pick you up if that works,” said Stella.

“I’d like that,” replied Jirra. “But don’t you have to work?”

“It’s okay, I know the star of the show,” replied Stella with a laugh.

## Chapter 87

Around the time that Jirra and Stella entered the office of Dr. Lennox, Beth got a call from Paula.

“Beth...um....she’s ...she’s fading quickly...I think you’d better get up here,” stammered Paula.

“I’ll be on the next train,” said Beth.

Beth rushed home and quickly packed a bag. She was almost out the door when Celeste came in.

“I got your call,” said Celeste.

Beth nodded. “Can you give me lift to 30<sup>th</sup> Street?”

“I can do better than that, I’m going up with you,” said Celeste.

“Really?” asked Beth.

“Of course. I already called Rebecca and she’s agreed to dog-sit Spirit.”

On the train up to New York, Beth called her parents in DC.

“Thanks for the update, dear,” said Maggie.

“I’ll call you as soon I know more,” said Beth.

“Okay, but just so you know we’re coming up,” said Maggie.

“Thanks Mom...um, who’ll look after Stevie?” asked Beth referring to her little brother.

“Donna and Ed have already agreed to take him,” said Maggie. “We’ll call you when we get into the city.”

"Thanks Mom," said Beth.

## Chapter 88

Celeste and Beth caught a cab and headed right to Andrea's apartment.

When they arrived they were greeted by Paula.

"Hi, thanks for coming up so quickly," said Paula.

Jirra could tell that the young woman had been crying.

"How's she doing?" asked Beth as she hugged Paula.

"The doctor is in with her now..." said Paula.

"We'll wait out here for now," said Beth.

Paula nodded. "Can I get you anything...it's no bother, I'd rather keep busy."

"Tea would be fine, thank you," said Beth.

Thirty minutes later the doctor came out.

"How's she doing?" asked Paula.

He shook his head.

"I've made her comfortable, but it's just a matter of time now," he said. He then looked at Beth and Celeste. "Are you family?"

Before they could answer Paula spoke. "Yes."

"Okay, then it's okay if you go in," he replied as he sat down. "But only ten minutes."

"The rest of her family should be here by tomorrow," said Paula.

The doctor didn't reply at first. "Um, I would tell them to try and get here sooner."

## Chapter 89

Beth and Celeste entered Andrea's room. A nurse was sitting in a chair next to the bed.

Andrea weakly smiled when she saw Beth and Celeste.

"Hello Gran," said Beth.

"Hello Beth," replied Andrea softly.

Beth leaned down and gently hugged her. As she did she began to cry.

"I'm sorry, I promised I wouldn't do that," said Beth.

"It's okay dear," comforted Andrea.

Beth smiled as she wiped away her tears.

"Hello Celeste," greeted Andrea.

"Hello Andrea, can I hug you too?"

"Absolutely," replied Andrea.

Celeste gave her a hug.

"Try not to look so sad, you've known this day was coming," said Andrea.

"That's easier said than done," said Beth.

"It's all part of life. Don't be sad...remember all the good times, okay?" said Andrea.

"Okay," replied Beth.

"You're a wonderful young woman and you have your whole life ahead of you...I'm so proud of you," continued Andrea.

"I've had a great role model," said Beth.

Andrea nodded and winced in pain.

The nurse got up and checked on her.

"It's okay," said Andrea.

"Do you want anything?" asked the nurse.

Andrea shook her head.

"No, I'm fine...it's better now," said Andrea. "Celeste, is everything set with Paula?"

Celeste nodded.

"Thank you," replied Andrea as she closed her eyes. "I think I'll take a nap now girls. I'll see you in the morning, okay?"

Beth did her best to contain her tears as she replied. "Okay, Gran."

She then leaned down and gave Andrea a kiss.

Andrea smiled back.

“See you tomorrow,” said Andrea.

## Chapter 90

Beth was able to hold back her tears until after she left the room.

Celeste comforted her as they returned to the living room.

The doctor got up and headed back to Andrea’s room.

Paula handed Beth a box of tissues.

“Thank you,” replied Beth as she blew her nose.

“I’m so happy that you came up here. You mean so much to her,” said Paula. “I don’t know everything about your connection to her, but then again much of her life is a mystery. I just know that she’s the first person who ever cared about me.”

“Well, you’re part of our family now,” said Celeste.

“I appreciate that,” said Paula.

“Please call us if there’s any change,” said Beth.

Paula nodded. “Oh, I just got a call from her family in Ohio; they’re at the airport and should be here tonight.”

“That’s good,” said Beth.

## Chapter 91

Steve and Maggie Williams arrived in New York later that evening. Beth and Celeste met them at the train station.

“How’re you doing Kiddo?” asked Maggie as she hugged her.

“As good as to be expected,” said Beth. “Thanks Mom.”

She then hugged Steve.

“Thanks for coming up Dad,” she said.

Steve just held onto her as she cried again.

"It's okay, Beth," he comforted.

They then greeted Celeste before heading over to their hotel.

"Do you feel like eating?" asked Maggie.

Beth shook her head.

"But I guess I better have something," she replied.

"Why don't we just call room service," suggested Steve.

Beth nodded.

## Chapter 92

The next morning Beth got up and immediately checked her cell phone for messages.

She then called Paula.

"Beth," replied Paula flatly.

Beth hesitated before asking.

"How's she doing?"

The pause in Paula's reply told Beth everything.

"She slipped away in her sleep last night," said Paula.

Beth gasped.

"It was very peaceful, she didn't suffer," continued Paula. "I swear she had the most content look on her face."

Tears began to roll down Beth's cheeks.

"Did...did her family make it in time?"

"Yes and she was able to talk to them," said Paula.

"That's good," said Beth.

"Um, there's no need for you to come here...I'll call you as soon as I know when the service will be," said Paula.

“Um, what will you do in the meantime?” asked Beth.

“I’m helping her lawyer and family,” said Paula. “The memorial service will be in a few days...and you know her funeral request.”

“I’ll be ready,” said Beth. “Call me if you need anything at all.”

“I will. You know, I thought I would feel worse about this...but in a way I’m happy that she’s no longer in pain. She was a remarkable woman,” said Paula.

“The best,” said Beth.

As soon as Beth hung up she told Celeste what had happened. Then she had a long cry.

### Chapter 93

Jirra and Alexis arrived in New York City the next day. They were met by Celeste at the train station.

“Thank you for coming down,” said Celeste.

“We wouldn’t miss it for the world,” said Jirra. “How’s Beth doing?”

“Better,” said Celeste. “The good thing is that her parents came up and have been here since Andrea passed.”

“Has she seen her...original family?” asked Jirra.

“Only in passing,” said Celeste. “The good thing is that The Agency has made Beth one of the official representatives at the memorial service. It’s not the same as being part of the family, but it’s close.”

“When’s the service?” asked Alexis.

“Tomorrow morning. It’s going to be huge, wait until you see the official guest list,” said Celeste. “The ambassadors of Denmark, Great Britain, Norway, and a half dozen other countries are coming along with a who’s who of the US government.”

“Wow,” said Jirra.

“I know, it’s pretty impressive,” said Celeste. “Andrea left very strict instructions that she wanted the service to be a celebration of her life and not...and these are her exact words ‘a morbid dreary sob story’. It’s so much like her.”

“I agree,” said Jirra. “So is Beth going to speak?”

Celeste shook her head. "No, The Director of the Agency is going to say a few words. Just as well, as I don't think Beth could get through it with her old family there."

"Makes sense," said Jirra.

#### Chapter 94

Celeste arranged for Jirra and Alexis to stay at the same hotel as Steve and Maggie.

"Are you staying at your apartment?" asked Jirra.

"No, I thought it would be best if Beth was surrounded by her friends and family," said Celeste.

"Makes sense," said Jirra.

"Besides I loaned my apartment to an old friend who's also here for the memorial service," said Celeste.

"Who's that?" asked Alexis.

"Margaret Torrey," replied Celeste. "She's almost as remarkable as Andrea...in fact they were great friends."

"Small world," said Alexis.

"Exactly," said Celeste.

A short time later Jirra and Alexis were hugging Beth.

"Thanks for coming down," said Beth.

"We're sisters," said Jirra.

Beth nodded.

"My parents are next door, and I know they'd love to meet you," said Beth.

#### Chapter 95

The memorial service was held two days later in one of the downtown cathedrals. Even though it was a harsh cold day with snow falling, the church was jammed with dignitaries. In addition to the numerous notable public figures, there were many regular people who wanted to celebrate the life of Andrea Carlson.

Jirra was pleased to see that the looks on their faces that their feelings they had for Andrea were genuine.

Jirra and Alexis sat with Beth and her parents. Beth was stoic and able to maintain her composure during the service.

As requested the guest speakers told stories that highlighted Andrea's life. There were several times that the crowd broke out in laughter. The ambassador from Denmark commented that Andrea would be pleased that her service occurred on such a nice Danish day.

Beth leaned over and whispered in Celeste's ear.

"Andrea would have liked this a lot."

Celeste nodded in agreement.

It was after the service that Beth really had to control her emotions when she met up with her original family. She had to pretend that she only had friendship for Andrea and it was the most difficult thing she had done in ages.

Her father, Jeff walked up and greeted her.

"It's Agent Williams, right?" he asked. "I remember meeting you once at Mom's apartment."

Beth nodded. "Yes Sir, I'm sorry for your loss. She was a wonderful woman."

"Thank you," he replied.

He then appeared to study her.

When Beth turned to walk away, he walked up and leaned close to speak to her."

"I'd like to talk to you in private later if it's possible," he stated.

"Of course," replied Beth. She then took out a business card and wrote down her cell phone number. "Please call me."

He smiled back. "Thank you."

## Chapter 96

"Did he say what he wanted to talk about?" asked Maggie.

Beth shook her head. "No, but he said it was important. I suspect it might be about the spreading of Gran's ashes. He'll be here shortly."

"Well, we'll be in the next room, should you need us" said Maggie as she gave Beth a hug.

"Thanks Mom," replied Beth.

Jeff Carlson arrived on time and knocked on the door.

Beth greeted him and invited him inside.

"Please sit down," she said.

He sat down on in a chair across from Beth.

"My mother and I had a long talk about you," he said. "Actually she did most of the talking."

Beth smiled in spite of herself.

"First off, she was extremely fond of you," he said.

"I thought the world of her too," said Beth.

"She told me of her plans to have you spread her ashes," said Jeff. "I think it's wonderful and very fitting."

"I'm glad to hear that," said Beth.

"I'm sure the significance will be wasted on the others, I'm the only one in the family who knows her past...including her life as a male," he continued.

Beth just nodded.

"I wish the others knew, but it's not easy for everyone to be open-minded," he continued.

"I'm sure that some of the guests were more than a little curious about the dignitaries at the service," said Beth.

He smiled back at her.

"My family couldn't figure out why a general in the Canadian Air Force was there," he said.

Beth nodded.

Jeff then ran his fingers through his hair. Beth immediately remembered it was something that he did whenever he was about to say something important.

"She also asked me to do one last thing...and it concerned you," he said.

Beth stared back in silence.

"Beth, she also told me an incredible story about you..." he said as he voice cracked as he looked deep into her eyes. "Beth...are...are you Ben...are you my son?"

Beth gasped and then nodded slowly. "Yes... Dad."

"My god..." he exclaimed.

Beth stared back not knowing what to do, she tried to speak, but nothing came out. She reached up to wipe away the tears that were rolling down her cheeks.

He then got up and embraced her.

"I can't believe you're alive! Part of me died that day when the Navy said you had been killed," he cried as he wrapped his arms gently around her.

"I've missed you too, Dad," sobbed Beth as she hugged him back.

## Chapter 97

They talked for nearly an hour about what had happened.

"I wanted to tell you sooner...but well, you can understand why I didn't," she said.

"Of course, it must have been awful for you," he said.

"The good thing was that I wasn't alone," said Beth.

She then told them about Maggie and Steve.

"Would you like to meet them?" she asked.

Jeff smiled. "I'd like that a lot, Beth."

Beth picked up her phone and called Maggie. A few minutes later she was introducing them to her birth father.

To her relief they all got along famously.

"It was karma that Gran came back into my life," said Beth. "She kept me informed about all of you."

"She was a remarkable woman," said Jeff. "I guess her last gift to us was to reunite us."

"I think we should make a toast to her," said Beth.

"I have just the thing," said Jeff. "I have something in my car."

He got up and left the room. He returned ten minutes later with a very old bottle of single malt.

“This was in her collection. It was given to her by an old friend in the RAF and she only brought it out for special toasts. I can’t think of a more fitting way to salute her,” he said as he filled four glasses.

They all stood up and held their glasses.

“To Andrea Carlson...flyer...fighter pilot...escape artist...resistance fighter...heroine...spy...wife...mother...grandmother...great-grandmother...the world’s a bit darker without her,” toasted Jeff as he held up his glass.

The others reached up and touched glasses and then drank the dark liquid.

Beth closed her eyes as she drank.

“Thank you Gran,” she whispered.

“Thank you, Jeff,” said Steve as he shook hands with him.

Maggie gave him a hug as did Beth.

“I need to get going soon. But I just want to say that I’m so happy to see that Beth has such a wonderful family,” said Jeff.

“We’re glad that she still has contact with someone in her original family,” said Maggie.

Jeff nodded.

“I wish I could tell the others, but they...they’re not so open-minded towards things like this. You can count on me to keep quiet about this to others, but I would like to stay in touch with you Beth,” he said.

“I’d like that too,” said Beth. “It’s nice to have a connection with my previous life.”

“I’m just happy that you’re doing so well,” he said. “I’m also glad that Mom gave me one last gift.”

Beth nodded. “Me too.”

They hugged one last time and then he left.

## Chapter 98

That night Beth had dinner with her parents. Celeste, Alexis, and Jirra went out by themselves.

“I just want you to know that nothing has changed between us,” said Beth. “You’re my family and you always will be. You’re my mom and dad.”

“We know that Beth,” said Maggie.

"I'm glad we had a chance to meet him," said Steve. "I can see why you think so highly of him."

Beth nodded.

"It's a shame that the others don't know Andrea's full story," said Beth.

"It's rather amazing," said Steve.

Beth then told them about Andrea having Jirra write a fictionalized version of her life.

"I can't wait to read it," said Steve.

"Speaking of Jirra, how's she doing?" asked Maggie. "It must be frightening for her to be pregnant."

Beth gave her an update. She then brought up the private investigators in Philadelphia.

"Well, she can't do better than have Max looking after her," said Steve.

"Have there been any incidents since she moved to Boston?" asked Maggie.

Beth shook her head. "None that I'm aware of. In fact, I don't think they know she moved."

"Has Max shared his theory on who ordered the surveillance?" asked Steve.

"No, but I think he knows, it's just that he doesn't have proof yet," replied Beth.

"The next time you talk to him, tell him to give me a call, I might be able to assist," said Steve.

"Thanks Dad," she replied.

## Chapter 99

A week after Jirra returned to Boston a bonded courier delivered a large box to her. It was the size of a microwave oven and he set it down on the coffee table in the living room.

"It wasn't easy tracking you down," he stated. "I went to your home in Philadelphia first and they sent me here."

"You took it to Philly personally?" asked Jirra as she signed for the box.

"It's my job. The lawyer in charge of Mrs. Carlson's estate stipulated that I hand this to you personally," he said.

"Thank you," she replied.

"Have a nice day," he stated and then he left.

Jirra closed the door and then opened the box. She found it filled with documents, both paper and electronic.

The records went all the way back to when Andrea, then Andrew, joined the RCAF and covered her life up until she retired from The Agency.

Jirra immediately realized that it would be quite a task to do justice to Andrea's life. She picked up her phone and called Faith Collins.

"Good morning Jirra, how're you doing?" asked Faith.

"Good thanks. Did you get the email I sent you regarding the script?" asked Jirra.

"Yes, I did a preliminary read through your notes and it was excellent, just what I was looking for. I should have it back to you in a few days," replied Faith.

"Great, I want to get started on the script this week," said Jirra.

"I wish all the writers on the show were as diligent," replied Faith.

"It keeps my mind off other things," said Jirra.

"Of course. Anything else?"

"Yes, I have a question for you," said Jirra. She then told her what Andrea had tasked her to do.

"Sounds like a wonderful challenge," said Faith.

"I've never done anything like this before...where do I start?"

"How much information is there?"

"Lots," replied Jirra with a laugh. She then described amount of information.

"Some of it is in diaries and other files are electronic," continued Jirra.

"And she wants it to be a fictionalized account of her life?" asked Faith.

"Yes," replied Jirra.

"The first thing you need to do is organize the materials," said Faith. "This will take a while as you'll need to read through the material."

"Okay," said Jirra.

"Then you have to decide what way you plan on telling the story...sequentially, through flashbacks, etc."

"Makes sense," said Jirra.

“Unlike the scripts you’re working on for me, there’s no deadline on this, so you can take your time and do a good job. This is a labor of love you’re working on and you must remember to treat it this way,” said Faith.

“Thanks, Faith,” said Jirra.

“Tell you what, I’ll be up in Boston next week, why don’t we do lunch and we can talk more about this, okay?”

“I’d like that a lot, thanks,” said Jirra.

“And when you’re finished with this, I would be glad to give you my opinion of it and if it’s good...which I have no doubt it will be, I will help you get it published.”

“Thanks again,” said Jirra.

“You’re a talented writer Jirra. I’m not just saying that because you’re a friend. I have very high standards for my show and you are one of a few writers that I trust to do justice to my characters. If you do it right this story will be a wonderful tale.”

## Chapter 100

Alexis arrived home later that day to find Jirra sorting through Andrea’s papers.

“Well it looks like you’ll be occupied for a while,” said Alexis as she gave Jirra a kiss.

“I don’t think that just one book will do her justice,” said Jirra. “I’m thinking a series.”

“Really?”

Jirra nodded.

“She was working for the Danish resistance for nearly three years alone,” said Jirra. “The only thing is that it could take years to write all these stories.”

“Well, Faith has made a career out of one character, and if you’re going to fictionalize this why can’t you do the same?” asked Alexis. “Sure people are going to figure out the main character, the fictionalized Andrea won’t be killed, but there are always the secondary characters...that’s the suspense in a series.”

Jirra nodded. “Makes sense.”

“Besides I think Andrea would get a kick out of being a heroine in a series.”

“You might be right,” said Jirra.

“Oh, I got some good news for you; Jen is coming to town next week.”

“Cool,” replied Jirra. “Is she filming a scene with you?”

Alexis nodded.

“So, you want to go out for dinner or stay in?” asked Alexis.

“Let’s go out,” said Jirra.

“Great, do you feel like Italian?”

Jirra nodded.

“Then we’ll go to the place up the street,” said Alexis. “They know me there and are really cool.”

## Chapter 101

“We found her,” stated Neil Sanders.

“Where is she?” asked Frank Longwell.

“In Boston, she’s living with Alexis Eden.”

“So, the rumors are true...she’s a lesbian,” stated Frank.

“It looks like it,” said Neil.

“And is she pregnant?”

“Yes,” replied Neil. “We confirmed she’s going to one of the top doctors in Boston...Dr. Jessie Lennox.”

“At least she’s looking after my grandchild,” said Frank. “Have you figured out those other rumors...that she used to be a guy?”

“That’s complicated. Her mother is a doctor and we hacked into the medical files. It turns out that Jirra is intersexed. They initially raised her as a boy.”

“How did she get pregnant?”

“Apparently she had a complete set of female reproductive organs. The mother took her to some specialists and they did some surgery...it’s well beyond my limited medical knowledge, but I ran the names of the doctors past some friends and they said that it’s possible.”

“Any issues with the pregnancy?” asked Frank.

"I don't know, but there doesn't appear to be," replied Neil.

"And any word on what she plans to do with the child...I don't like the idea of my grandchild being raised in sin," stated Frank barely holding back his disgust. "It's just not right!"

"She has contacted a lawyer who specializes in adoption procedures," said Neil.

"Does that mean her 'partner' is going to adopt the child?"

"Um, I don't think so."

"Why?"

"The lawyer specializes with setting up adoptions," he replied. "It looks like she's giving up the child. We're trying to figure out who it is."

"So the slut is going to give up the child? That figures! Goddamn degenerates!" Frank shouted angrily.

"How do you want to proceed?" asked Neil cautiously.

There was a long pause.

"Ten years ago I would just grab the kid...but I suppose I should try it the legal way first. Set up a meeting with her," he stated.

"Okay, do you want to be there?"

"No, not this time," replied Frank. "Offer her a large settlement to give up the child."

"How large?" asked Neil.

"Six figures...but remember it's my money."

"And if she says no?"

Frank hesitated before replying. The idea that someone would turn down his money was inconceivable.

"I don't see that happening, but if it does, call me immediately," replied Frank. "We will then look at...'other' options."

"Okay," said Neil.

"Oh and tell that detective company that I'm not pleased that it took them nearly two months to find her."

"Yes sir," replied Neil.

“When do you think you can set up the meeting?” asked Frank.

“I’ll call her tonight,” said Neil.

## Chapter 102

Alexis arrived back home that evening.

“Jirra, where are you?” she asked.

Jirra walked out of the back room that acted as an office.

“I was back reading Andrea’s notes,” replied Jirra.

“What about the script?”

“Finished it this morning, I wanted to have it ready for Faith when she arrives tomorrow,” said Jirra proudly.

Alexis nodded as she hugged Jirra and gave her a kiss.

“How’re you doing?” asked Alexis.

“The usual. Actually it hasn’t been that bad, I guess it’s due to my body’s ability to heal quickly,” said Jirra as she ran her hands over her belly. “I can’t believe how quickly I’m growing.”

“Any regrets?” asked Alexis.

“No,” replied Jirra. “I’m happy that Stella and Logan will have a family.”

Alexis nodded.

“Oh, Jen arrived and is coming over for dinner.”

“Cool.”

“I was thinking of having Chinese...again, how does that sound to you?”

“Oh, you just made my day. I’ve been craving Chinese all day!” stated Jirra.

“How’s that possible?” asked Alexis with a laugh.

“I’m just glad we have a good restaurant nearby.”

## Chapter 103

Jen insisted on picking up the food. She arrived a short time later with her arms full of bags of Chinese food.

"How many people are joining us for dinner? Maybe a small army?" she asked as she stepped inside. "I thought it was the wrong order when they brought it out. By the way, if you ordered some hot and sour soup could I get a bowl?"

"Sure, and no it won't go to waste," said Jirra.

"That's the truth," quipped Alexis.

Jen set the bags down and then gave Jirra a hug.

"Go on, say it, I look huge," said Jirra.

Jen shook her head. "You look great."

Jirra ran her hands over her belly. "The important thing is that everything is going well."

"Better than you can imagine," said Jen.

"What do you mean?" asked Jirra.

"I'll tell you as we eat," replied Jen.

"You two sit down I'll bring out the plates and bowls," said Alexis.

Jirra sat down slowly at dining room table.

"You okay?" asked Jen.

"Just clumsy...I have an ever-changing center of gravity," she replied. "So what's the good news?"

"Someone took the bait," said Jen.

"What do you mean?" asked Jirra as she reached into one of the bags and started pulling out small white cartons of food.

"I left a hole in the security system of your Mom's computer that allowed someone to get a look at your medical record...granted it's the fake record, but they didn't know that." Explained Jen.

"How did you know they were there?" asked Jirra.

"I have my ways. I was able to trace the person who did it back to that shyster lawyer back in Jersey," said Jen as she unpacked the other bag. "Are you really going to eat all this?"

"Just watch," said Alexis as she walked into the dining room and set down the plates and bowls. "She'll have the leftovers for breakfast."

"I thought that was all a myth," said Jen.

Jirra shook her head. "Wait until you get pregnant!"

Jen laughed. "I think I'll wait."

## Chapter 104

"That was impressive," said Jen after dinner.

"Well, I'm eating for two. Don't worry, I'm working out too," said Jirra.

"Obviously," said Jen.

"So I assume you passed the info about the lawyer to Max," said Alexis.

Jen nodded. "He didn't seem that surprised."

Alexis was about to ask if knew who was behind it when the phone rang.

"I'll get it," said Alexis.

"Sorry to call so late, but I'm trying to reach Ms. Jirra Reid," said the man.

"Who is this?" demanded Alexis.

"My name is Neil Sanders and I need to speak to Jirra Reid. I know she's living there, so please don't deny it."

Alexis put her hand over the receiver.

"It's the lawyer!" she said.

She then uncovered her hand.

"She's indisposed, how can I help you?"

"I need to see her at her earliest convenience; it concerns a very important issue," he stated.

"You're going to have to do better than that," said Alexis.

"I would prefer to discuss it with Ms. Reid," replied Neil.

"Tell me or I'm hanging up," snapped Alexis.

"Very well, it concerns the child she's carrying. I have a proposition to make. I would like to come over there and talk to her."

“Don’t even think of setting foot in my home,” growled Alexis. “Give me your number and we’ll call back and set up a time and location.”

“Very well,” he replied barely hiding his anger.

Neil then gave her his phone number.

“Good. I will call you back tomorrow,” said Alexis. “Oh, and I don’t know how you got this number, but do not ever call back.”

“Very well,” he said.

Alexis hung up without replying.

She then told the others about the conversation.

“What do we do?” asked Jirra

“I recommend you call Max,” said Jen.

Alexis nodded and immediately dialed the number.

## Chapter 105

“Max will come up with Faith tomorrow,” said Alexis. “He said that he would accompany us to the meeting.”

“When does it say we should do it?” asked Jirra.

“He said a few days...make him sweat,” said Alexis.

“Do you have a lawyer?” asked Jen.

“I use a local law firm for business issues, but I don’t have a personal lawyer,” replied Alexis.

“Well, I do. If you want him I can have him come out here,” said Jen.

“Thanks, but let’s wait until we hear what this guy wants,” said Alexis.

Jen nodded. “I’ll still call him and let him know to plan a trip out here.”

“I have a bad feeling about this,” said Jirra. “The fact that he specifically mentioned the baby scares me.”

“What do you want to do?” asked Alexis.

Jirra sighed. “It’s not the way I envisioned it, but let’s get married before we meet with him.”

Alexis smiled back. "You mean it?"

Jirra nodded. "Why put it off? We can go down to get the forms filed tomorrow and then when the three day waiting period is over we can have a quick civil ceremony. Jen would you be our witness?"

"Of course...but I also hope that you still plan on having a full blowout ceremony later," said Jen.

"Absolutely," said Jirra. "So is this okay with you Alexis?"

Alexis broke out in a huge smile and then kissed Jirra.

"I'll take that as a yes," replied Jirra.

## Chapter 106

"Thanks for understanding Mom," said Jirra.

"I totally agree with your decision to do this now. So the earliest you can have the ceremony is in three days after you file the paperwork?" asked Liz.

"That's correct," said Jirra.

"Great, that's gives me more than enough time to get a flight," said Liz.

"You mean it?" asked Jirra.

"Of course! I want to be there," said Liz.

"Alexis, Mom's coming out!" squealed Jirra.

"Cool," replied Alexis.

Jen motioned for the phone and Jirra handed it to her.

"Liz, this is Jen, don't worry about the flight. I'll arrange everything for you," said Jen.

"That's very thoughtful," replied Liz.

"My pleasure; besides, what's the fun of owning an airline if you can't put it to good personal use once in a while!"

## Chapter 107

"Of course we'll come up," said Beth.

"It's not going to be anything fancy, we're just doing a civil service so we can be legal," explained Jirra.

"Doesn't matter, we want to be there for you," said Beth.

"Of course we're still going to have a real ceremony during the summer so you're not out of the woods yet when it comes to being in my wedding party," said Jirra.

"No problem," said Beth.

"So, how're you doing?" asked Jirra.

"I'm fine, thanks for asking," said Beth. "Even though I knew it was coming it's still strange thinking that she's gone."

"I know," said Jirra. "Thanks again for coming up."

"Wouldn't miss it for the world."

Jirra hung up the phone.

"Celeste and Beth are coming up," said Jirra.

"Good," said Alexis. "I'm so happy that we're doing this...it really legitimizes our relationship."

"Not that we needed it, but it's nice to know that we're legal," said Jirra.

## Chapter 108

Faith and Max arrived mid-morning.

"So how far are you along now, Jirra?" asked Faith.

"This is my nineteenth week," said Jirra.

"Well you look great," said Faith. "Now, if you ever feel that I'm asking too much of you, just say so."

"I don't mind working. I would go crazy if I was just sitting around all day," said Jirra. "Do you want some coffee or tea?"

"Coffee please," said Faith.

"Same for me, Jirra," said Max.

"I thought you'd want some, I just made a fresh pot. I'm having tea as I'm supposed to minimize caffeine," said Jirra.

“That’s why I would never get pregnant,” said Max.

Jirra smiled as Faith rolled her eyes.

After they had their drinks Jirra updated them on their plans.

“We’re going to file our papers this afternoon,” said Jirra. “Then we’re having a small civil service in three days.”

“Congratulations,” said Faith and Max.

“Thanks. We’re going to have a bigger ceremony after all this is over this summer, but right now we want to go up against these jerks as a couple,” said Jirra. “So are you sure that the father of the bastard who attacked me is behind this?”

Max nodded. “We have proof, but not the legal kind.”

“What did you do, hack into his computer?” asked Jirra with a grin.

“Not me, one of the detectives at Boudicca.”

Jirra smiled. “Good.”

“From what I’ve learned about Longwell, your wedding will really cheese him off,” said Max.

Jirra laughed. “That’s not exactly the term I would use.”

“I’m getting mellow in my old age,” he said. “Let me educate you about Frank Longwell.”

Max pulled a file out of his case and opened it up.

“Bryan was his only child and Frank spent a lot of time and money to keep the kid out of jail,” said Max.

“So I wasn’t the first?” said Jirra.

Max shook his head. “We’ve tracked down at least eight. All of them dropped the charges.”

“I wouldn’t have,” said Jirra.

Max nodded.

“Now, Frank is a real piece of work. Outwardly he’s a legitimate businessman, but he’s not afraid to bend the law to get what he wants,” said Max.

“Just bend?” asked Jirra.

“The cops have watched him for years and have never been able to connect him directly to anything illegal. However, he has ties to organized crime figures in Boston,” said Max.

"Anything else?" asked Jirra.

"He's extremely conservative and has contributed a lot of money to groups to fight gay rights. He was one of the biggest opponents to same sex marriages in Mass."

"Great...bigoted too," said Jirra as she took a sip of water. "Go on."

"From what we've learned he wants custody of what he sees as his grandchild," continued Max.

Jirra's anger flashed in her eyes. "No... effin... way!"

"From what we've learned, if you had planned on keeping the baby he planned on fighting for visitation rights. Somehow he found out that you're putting the baby up for adoption and so he's going to push for full custody."

"There's no way that I'm turning this baby over to him!" stated Jirra.

"That's what I thought your response would be," said Max.

"So what do we do?" asked Jirra.

"Let's see how they play this," said Max. "With people like Longwell it's best that we meet them face-to-face."

"In person?" she asked.

Max nodded. "You won't be alone."

"Jen offered her lawyer," said Jirra.

"Good, we may need him. I have some ammo myself, but it might be best if we go at this from two different angles," said Max. "I would like to speak to this lawyer."

"I'll call Jen," said Jirra.

## Chapter 109

As Max talked to Jen, Jirra retrieved the script and gave it to Faith.

"You're done already?" asked Faith as she began to read the script.

"It didn't take long, I feel I know the character pretty well," said Jirra. "The hardest part isn't the plot; it's getting in the right sort of dialog for Erin."

Faith smiled. "I know, I have the same problem when I write a new book. The plots are sometimes secondary as I focus more on the dialog and interaction with the regular characters."

“Oh, I slipped in a surprise for you. I hope you like it,” said Jirra.

“What do you mean?”

“Go to page twenty-seven,” said Jirra.

Faith flipped the pages and then smiled. “Perfect. Thank you.”

“What did she do?” asked Max as he walked in the room.

“She put in a nice tribute to Robert Parker,” replied Faith.

Max read it and nodded. “Nice. So, you two ready for lunch?”

“Sounds good,” said Jirra. “I’m meeting Alexis downtown at two to file the papers. You want to come along?”

“We’d love to,” said Faith.

## Chapter 110

That night Alexis and Jirra snuggled together in bed.

“Just think, it just three days we’ll be married,” sighed Alexis.

“I know, it’s pretty cool,” replied Jirra. “What did your family say?”

“They wish they could be out here and they fully understand why we’re doing this now. They definitely will come out for the real ceremony this summer. In fact the whole family will come out.”

“Even your sister Trish?”

“Anything is possible!” said Alexis as she ran her hand over Jirra’s belly.

“I can’t believe that I’m only halfway through this...and look how huge I am,” bemoaned Jirra.

“You’re beautiful, Jirra,” said Alexis.

“Thanks. Are you worried about this guy Longwell?” she asked.

“No, not really. I talked to the production company’s lawyer today and she’s ready to go to bat for us if there are any problems. I mean, I’ve been out for a while now and the show hasn’t been hurt by it,” she said. “I also trust Max...and from Jen has said about her lawyer I think we’re going to come out of this okay.”

Jirra nodded. “The way Jen describes him it reminds me of the lawyer in True Grit...what was his name?”

“Oh, it was J. Noble Daggett...and the actor did the voice for Piglet in the Winnie the Pooh cartoons.”

“That’s quite a switch,” said Jirra.

“I know, but he had one of those really distinctive voices,” continued Alexis as she ran her hands over Jirra’s body.

“Do you think everything is going to work out?” asked Jirra.

“Yes,” replied Alexis. “It may not be easy but we’ll get through this.”

Jirra smiled back. “I feel so safe in your arms.”

“Then go to sleep, Roo,” said Alexis. “I won’t let anyone hurt you again.”

## Chapter 111

Liz arrived the next day and was picked up at Logan airport by Jen and Jirra.

“It’s good to see you Mom,” said Jirra as they hugged.

“I feel the same way,” said Liz. She then hugged Jen. “Thank you for setting up the flight, it was very thoughtful.”

“My pleasure,” said Jen.

“We got you a really nice hotel room, it’s just ten minutes from the condo,” said Jirra.

“Thank you,” said Liz.

“Oh, Max and Faith are staying there and so will Celeste and Beth,” continued Jirra.

“Good, I’ve wanted to meet both Faith and Max, I’ve heard so much about them,” said Liz. “How’s Beth doing?”

“She’s doing better,” said Jirra.

Liz nodded. “How have you been, Jen?”

“Keeping busy as usual,” she replied.

“Well we miss you out at the spa.”

“Hopefully I can take some time off soon to relax out there,” said Jen.

## Chapter 112

That evening they all met together for dinner.

"How was the train ride up?" asked Jirra.

"Not bad," replied Beth. "The best part was that it gave us time to catch up on our school work."

Jirra nodded as she took a sip of water.

"How did the lawyer take to the details of the meeting?" asked Jen.

"He wasn't happy; I think he wanted it sooner. I told him to take it or leave it," said Max.

"So what are the details?" asked Alexis.

"It will be in three days and it will be held at a hotel room that I will reserve. I told Sanders that he would be told the location the day of the meeting," said Max.

"Did he ask who you were?" asked Jirra.

"I told him I was a PI and my name was Spenser...he's obviously either clueless or culturally illiterate as he didn't get the joke," replied Max.

"So who gets to play Hawk?" asked Jen.

"I was thinking of Tessa, but she's out of town this week," replied Max with a wink.

"How do you think this will go down?" asked Alexis.

Max smiled. "You sound a lot like Erin Flynn, I like that. I suspect this meeting will to make an offer...which we'll decline. The next meeting will probably happen next week...and that one I suspect Frank Longwell will attend. It will be heated, and he will make some threats, but in the end he'll see it our way."

"And will you want my lawyer then?" asked Jen.

Max nodded. "Absolutely. We talked on the phone today and have been working out a war plan."

"And do you think it will be over then?" asked Jirra.

"Frank Longwell is a businessman. He thrives on making a profit. He also has learned that he can intimidate most people...the problem is that we're not most people. We'll make it very clear to him that it would be in his best interest to leave you alone," explained Max.

"What if he harasses Stella and Logan?" asked Alexis.

"I haven't forgotten about them, Alexis," said Max. "They're part of the deal."

“But what if this...jerk doesn’t back down,” said Jirra.

“Trust me Jirra, he will,” said Max. He then told them some of the information that he had turned up. “I also told Sanders that if anyone harassed us then the meeting is off permanently.”

### Chapter 113

The civil ceremony took place on the set of the Erin Flynn show. It was done for practical reasons as the show was behind schedule. It also provided a private location for the ceremony. The cast and crew of the show were ecstatic about being able to attend the ceremony.

“This seems strangely appropriate,” said Jirra who was wearing a sweater and skirt.

“You look lovely, Roo,” said Liz.

“It’s the best looking outfit I have left that I can get into,” she admitted.

“Well, we’ll have to do some shopping before I head back to New Mexico,” said Liz.

“Okay,” said Jirra.

Alexis was wearing her costume, which was a gray suit.

“Unfortunately I have some scenes to shoot right after this,” said Alexis.

“It’s fine,” said Jirra.

One of the crew set up a video camera to record the ceremony.

“I know your family couldn’t make it out here, but at least this way they can see it,” said Faith.

“Cool,” replied Alexis. “Just as long no copies make it to TMZ or YouTube.”

The ceremony was simple and to the point, with Jirra and Alexis exchanging vows and then kissing.

While the event only lasted a few minutes, both Jirra and Alexis knew that it would stay with them a lifetime.

Following a short reception the shooting started up again on the set.

“We’ll be done around six,” said Alexis.

“Cool, I want to have a special dinner ready for you,” said Jirra.

“I can’t wait,” said Alexis as she kissed Jirra.

There was a collective 'Ahhhh' from the cast and crew.

"Okay, back to work," said Alexis. "See you later Roo."

"Bye," said Jirra.

## Chapter 114

Alexis arrived home and at first was concerned because the lights appeared to be off. The only light was coming from the fireplace.

Jirra stepped into the living room dressed in a white lace nightie and kimono wrap.

"Wow," exclaimed Alexis.

"You had no idea how hard it was to find these in a style that both fit me and that I liked," said Jirra.

"You look beautiful," said Alexis as she walked over to Jirra.

"Thank you," she replied. "I just wish I wasn't so big."

Alexis kissed her. "I don't mind."

"I'm so happy that we're married now...I guess some good is coming out of this."

Alexis took Jirra by the hand and led her to the couch.

Jirra started to speak and Alexis shook her head as they sat down.

"No talking, let's just take this in together..." she said as she slipped her arm around Jirra's shoulders.

Jirra smiled back and leaned in close and wrapped her arms around Alexis.

"I love you," sighed Jirra.

"And I love you, Jirra," replied Alexis.

## Chapter 115

"You ready?" asked Alexis as they drove to the hotel for the meeting with Neil Sanders.

"No, but we need to get this over with," replied Jirra.

"By the way, I like the outfit," said Alexis.

Jirra was dressed in an oversized green and gray colored sweater with matching tights. She was also wearing a long gray overcoat.

"Thanks. Mom and I went shopping the other day," said Jirra. "It's so strange shopping for maternity clothing...I feel like I did the first time I went shopping for women's clothing."

"Well you look great," said Alexis.

"So where's Max?" asked Jirra.

"Behind us," replied Alexis. "He pulled out and has been following us since we left the house."

Jirra smiled. "I feel safe around him."

Alexis nodded. "So do I."

They pulled in front of the hotel and were greeted by the valet.

"Good morning, ladies," said Max.

"Hi Max," said Jirra with a smile.

"Good morning Max," said Alexis.

"Well let's head up to the room," he said.

On the way up he asked about Jen.

"I know she wanted to be here, but I want to keep this meeting short and to the point," said Max.

"She understands...but I know she wants to join in the fun," said Alexis. "So did Beth, but she had to head back down to Philly."

"When is Tessa back in town?" asked Jirra.

"Tomorrow," replied Max. "And she wants to help."

"Good," replied Jirra. "I still wish she was here now."

"Well it's best that we don't play all our hands at once," he said. He then pulled out his cell phone and read the text message.

"What's up?" asked Jirra.

"Sanders just arrived," he said.

"Who's following him?" asked Alexis.

“Nina, she insisted on being in on this,” said Max as he opened the door to the hotel room.

## Chapter 116

Ten minutes later Neil Sanders knocked on the door. He was slightly surprised to see a large older man answer the door.

“Please come in,” said Max.

“Who are you?” he asked. “Are you Mr. Spenser?”

“It’s just Spenser and I work for the production company,” replied Max holding back his smile. “I’m here to see that things stay civil.”

Neil nodded and walked inside.

He entered the living room area of the suite and sat down across from Jirra and Alexis.

“I wasn’t aware that you would have friends here with you Ms. Reid,” said Neil.

“Alexis isn’t a friend, we’re married,” replied Jirra as she held out her hand to show off her ring.

Neil’s eyes opened wide. Mr. Longwell wouldn’t like that.

Max sat down next to Jirra.

“Let’s get this started,” said Max. “And as time is of the essence why don’t you get right to the point, no games.”

Neil nodded. “I represented an interested party in your child, Ms. Reid.”

“You mean Frank Longwell,” said Jirra. It was happening just like Max said it would.

Neil glanced at Max who grinned.

“Very well, yes I represent Mr. Frank Longwell, the grandfather of your child,” said Neil.

Jirra put up her hand. “Stop right there. He’s not the grandfather...that would imply that his bastard son and I had a relationship...I was sexually assaulted...our only connection is that he was a criminal and I was his victim.”

Neil fidgeted nervously.

“Mr. Longwell is concerned about the upbringing of his...of the child.”

“It’s none of his business,” replied Jirra.

“We understand that you’re putting the child up for adoption...while we don’t know the details...it’s obvious that you don’t want the child. Mr. Longwell does and he’s prepared to be generous,” said Neil.

“Sure, to him money solves all problems,” said Alexis.

“I’m prepared to make a sizable offer,” said Neil ignoring Alexis.

“I don’t care what the amount is...there’s not going to be a deal, this is a waste of time,” said Jirra.

“Mr. Longwell is very wealthy and the child will lack for nothing,” said Neil.

“I disagree,” said Jirra. “Judging by your client’s parental skills he’s not qualified to raise a child.”

Neil looked at Max. “Mr. Spenser, I hope you can talk some sense into them.”

“Again, it’s just Spenser and I have no intention of interfering. In fact I agree with them.”

Neil sighed. “Mr. Longwell is going to be disappointed.”

“Tough,” said Alexis.

Neil glared back, flashing a shark-like sneer. “He’s used to getting his way. People don’t say no to him.”

“He better get used to it,” snapped Jirra.

“Do you mind if I call him right now?” asked Neil.

“Fine,” replied Jirra.

Neil pulled out his phone and called Frank Longwell. He told him what had happened. Neil listened for nearly thirty seconds and then hung up.

“He wants to talk to you in person. He feels if he can discuss this in person that you will see it his way,” said Neil.

“Anything is possible, but it’s a waste of time,” replied Jirra.

“Okay. How about tomorrow at his office?” suggested Neil.

Jirra shook her head.

“How about Monday afternoon and we’ll pick the location. Don’t worry it will be another hotel room...but not this one,” said Max.

“Don’t you trust me Spenser?” asked Neil.

Max laughed. "That's a good one."

Neil stared back without commenting.

"I'll call you Monday morning to give you the details," said Max.

Neil nodded and then stood up.

"I don't suppose that you'll change your mind. Mr. Longwell always gets what he wants...one way or another."

"Don't... threaten... me," replied Jirra as she barely contained her anger.

"I won't," said Neil. "Mr. Longwell won't threaten you either...he only makes promises."

"Now, I think it's time you scurried out of here...oh, and tell you boss not to have any contact with Jirra or anyone around her...I also know how to make promises too," said Max as he stood up and towered over the lawyer. "That also includes your detectives. I told you before this meeting to stay away and the rules haven't changed."

Neil froze and stared at Max.

"Did you really think that Jirra drove to St. Louis back in December?" asked Max as he tossed a file towards the lawyer.

Neil picked up the file and scanned the contents. He was shocked by what he saw, apparently they had known about the surveillance for the past few months.

"I think it's time that you should leave," said Max.

Neil nodded and headed out the door.

Max walked over and locked the door.

"How'd we do?" asked Jirra.

"You were both perfect," he replied.

"Do you think that Frank'll back off until the meeting?" asked Alexis.

Max nodded. "He doesn't want to hurt the baby."

"And what will he do after the meeting on Monday?" asked Jirra.

"If he's smart...nothing," said Max as he pulled out his phone.

He talked to Nina for a few minutes before hanging up.

"It's clear," said Max.

"Is Nina going to be watching us all weekend?" asked Jirra.

"Her or someone from Boudicca," replied Max.

Jirra nodded.

"Try and relax, Jirra. This will all be over soon," said Max.

"I hope so," she replied.

## Chapter 117

"I'm sorry that I couldn't work a deal with her," said Neil Sanders as he finished debriefing Frank Longwell.

Frank Longwell got up out of his office chair and walked over to the liquor cabinet in his office. He took out a decanter of Scotch and poured some into a crystal tumbler. He didn't offer any to Sanders.

"I'm not surprised," said Frank. "Tell me more about the man who was at the meeting."

"He said his name was Spenser, I'm not sure if it was his first or last name," said Neil. "He's a large man, fit, with short graying hair."

Frank sipped his Scotch without comment.

"I'm trying to trace him, but so far no luck," continued Neil.

"Nor will you if you look up that name," said Frank with disgust. "You idiot, he gave you the name of a fictional detective."

Neil reached up and took off his glasses and nervously cleaned them.

"I guess I have to do this myself," said Frank. "Okay, be back here Monday morning."

"And the surveillance?"

"Do as he says. Obviously he's better at this than those idiots you hired. We know where they are," said Frank.

"Yes Sir," said Neil as he departed.

Frank sat down in his office chair. This was becoming more complicated than he had anticipated, but it wasn't impossible.

The girl would break...they always did, but he was concerned about the man. He begrudgingly admired the fact that the man had used the name of Robert Parker's famous detective, but that wouldn't be enough to let the man get in his way.

Frank Longwell was a self-made millionaire who wasn't used to not getting his way. He put himself through college through hard work and by being an excellent poker player. In fact most of his higher education was paid for by winning at cards.

The added benefit of playing poker was that he met a lot of interesting people on both sides of the law. As he rose in his professional career these contacts had been very useful.

The door to upper management had been opened because he learned that the CEO was having an affair. Frank used this information to get a corner office. Later he acquired enough wealth to buy the old man out.

It was too bad that his only son had no desire to follow into the family business. Bryan wasn't really a bad kid, but he just had bad luck, thought Frank. It wasn't the fact that his son got in trouble that bothered Frank; it was that he constantly got caught.

If the kid hadn't tried that stupid escape attempt Frank knew he would have gotten him out of the charges, just like he had done many times before.

Frank got up and refilled his glass. When he had heard that Bryan had died Frank figured that everything that he had done was for nothing. But then his hunch paid off... the latest tramp that Bryan slept with was pregnant...with Frank's grandchild.

When he learned more about the girl he knew that there was no way that he could let her raise his grandchild. No, he would pay her for the child...and if she refused ...well she only had to live long enough to give birth.

He preferred the first option, but not because he was squeamish about ordering a murder. He'd done that several times before to take care of various business problems. Paying for the child was simply less risky. He had protection but he was smart enough to know that the authorities would only go so far to protect him if things went bad.

Frank was already working out the details for the second option. It would have to be perfect so that no one would suspect the truth. The fact that the girl had preexisting medical issues made it easier. She would die giving birth and he would step in...and take custody of the child. He wasn't worried about the adoption proceedings; he had enough lawyers who could put an end to that nonsense.

## Chapter 118

On Sunday evening Max called a meeting of everyone involved in the next day's meeting. They were seated around Alexis's living room having dinner. Per Jirra's request it was Chinese again.

Attending the planning meeting was Max, Jirra, Alexis, Tessa and Jonathan Barnard, Nina Vasquez, Jen and her lawyer Morris Pinsky. He'd introduced himself as the toughest little son of a bitch

that you'd ever want to have as a friend. Since he was barely five feet tall that got a big laugh from everyone. All Jen did was knowingly smile and nod in agreement.

Max went over the plan and then asked if there were any questions.

"Do you think this overkill?" asked Jirra.

"No, Frank Longwell has a well-earned reputation for being uncompromising. If we don't hit him with everything in our arsenal he won't back down," said Jonathan.

"I agree with Jonathan, we have to overwhelm him... so that he sees that he has no choice but to back down," said Max.

"And make it very clear that if he doesn't keep his word that life will get 'very complicated' for him," added Tessa. "Threats are pointless if the targeted person doesn't believe they'll be carried out."

Morris smiled. "Where did you get your negotiating skills, Tessa?"

"Somalia, Iraq, and Afghanistan," she replied without skipping a beat.

Morris laughed. "That's a good one."

"Um, Morris, she's not kidding," interjected Jen.

Morris kept smiling. "Oh the circles you run in. I must meet more of your friends, Jennifer."

"Do you think that he'll bring backup to this meeting?" asked Nina.

"He'll probably bring a bodyguard with him to. Tessa, that's your department," said Max.

Tessa nodded.

"Nina, he may have assistance waiting outside. Try and spot them," continued Max.

Nina nodded. "Try? Please! We'll do more than try!"

Max smiled. "My apologies."

"Accepted," she replied.

"Okay, everyone get a good night's sleep; tomorrow should be a very interesting day," said Max.

## Chapter 119

The next morning Max picked Jirra and Alexis up for the ride to the hotel.

"Everyone else is already at the hotel getting things set up," said Max.

Jirra nodded.

“By the way, you look very nice this morning,” he said.

Jirra smiled back. She was dressed in a dark red colored sweater, charcoal colored tights and black flats.

“Thank you,” she replied.

“Jirra, I promise that this will work,” he said.

“And what happens if he doesn’t go along with our plan,” said Jirra.

“He will...he’s a businessman...granted a crooked one, but he should understand when he’s out of options,” said Max.

“What if he doesn’t?” asked Alexis.

“Then we follow through with our threats,” replied Max.

They arrived at the Fairmont Copley Plaza Hotel ten minutes later.

“Nice place,” said Alexis.

Max nodded. “I reserved the Gold Suite as it comes with a living room.”

Max led Jirra and Alexis up to their suite.

“Are you sure we weren’t followed?” asked Alexis.

Max nodded. “If we were Nina would have called, she had our six the whole way here.”

“Our six?” asked Jirra.

“Fighter pilot term...meaning she covered our butts,” replied Max.

Inside the room Jen, Morris, Jonathan and Tessa were finishing setting up for the meeting.

A laptop computer and a large LCD monitor were set up on the coffee table and several thick folders were stacked neatly beside it.

“Everything ready?” asked Max as he walked over to the coffee maker.

“Absolutely,” said Jen. “I ran a test of the programs and the larger monitor just in case he has some trouble seeing it. Everything looks great.”

Max nodded. “Anyone else want coffee?”

“I’d love some...but I’m not allowed,” said Jirra.

"There's water and fruit juice," said Tessa.

"Water will be fine, thanks," said Jirra.

Tessa walked over and poured Jirra a glass.

"Alexis?" asked Max.

"Coffee would be great," she replied.

Max looked at Morris who was dressed in a perfectly tailored suit.

"You look dapper," said Max.

"I believe in looking good when I go for the jugular," he replied with a grin, which bore a disturbing resemblance to that of a great white shark about to chomp on its prey.

Max nodded. "Okay, it looks like we're ready. I'll call Longwell."

## Chapter 120

Twenty-five minutes later Nina called and told them that Frank Longwell had just arrived.

"Is he alone?" asked Max.

"No, Neil Sanders is with him...and a large man...probably security...yep, he's packing, most likely a semi-automatic on the left hip, his coat flared up when he got out of the car," said Nina.

"Okay, thanks," said Max.

He then looked at Tessa.

"When he comes in, disarm him...be firm...but polite," said Max.

"You're no fun," she replied.

Five minutes later there was a knock on the door. Max walked over and opened the door and greeted them.

"Good Morning," said Max.

"I assume you're the one who calls himself Spenser?" asked Frank.

Max grinned as he closed the door behind them.

"What's your real name?" asked Frank. "And don't use another alias."

"Max Bowie."

The bodyguard nodded knowingly.

“Impressive,” said Frank. “I’ve heard about you.”

Max nodded. “Then you know how thorough I am. My associate, Tessa, will have your bodyguard’s weapon. We want a nice cordial meeting today.”

The bodyguard smiled back. “I ain’t carrying nothing.”

The bodyguard’s name was Jimmy Davis and he had once worked for one of the organized crime families as a shooter. He had been hired by Frank three years earlier.

While Jimmy had never graduated high school that didn’t matter in his line of work. He was very proficient with all sorts of weapons. In his mind, there was no way that a mere woman would disarm him.

“Your move, babe,” he stated as he crossed his arms and grinned at her.

Tessa sighed and glanced at Max, who smiled slightly then nodded.

In a flash Tessa grabbed his right wrist and swung it around his back, which forced Jimmy up against the wall. She then reached under his coat and pulled out a Glock nine millimeter semi-automatic pistol.

“You were saying?” she asked as she unloaded it. “Oh, and never call me babe. The next time you do I’ll break your arm.”

Frank didn’t say anything.

“Now, I’m going to pat you down...just in case you forgot anything else,” she said.

Jimmy looked at Frank who nodded.

“Let her do it,” said Frank.

“That’s right, listen to your owner...but I would be searching you even if he didn’t give his permission,” whispered Tessa in Jimmy’s ear.

Tessa did a quick but thorough pat-down.

“He’s clean...now,” she announced.

Tessa walked over and placed handgun on the bar. She then turned and looked at Jimmy.

“Don’t worry; you’ll get your gun back when we’re done.”

“Nice work, Tessa,” said Max. “Now, escort the gentleman outside...he won’t be needed in here.”

Jimmy looked at Frank for orders.

"Jimmy, wait outside," said Frank.

Jimmy nodded and glared at Tessa as he left the room. Tessa flashed him a smile as she closed and then locked the door.

"Please sit down, we have much to talk about," said Max.

Frank and Neil sat down on the couch.

Jirra, Alexis, Jen, Morris, and Jonathan were seated across from them. Tessa sat down next to Jonathan.

"Do any of you want some coffee?" asked Max.

"Let's just get this underway," said Frank.

"Right to the point, I like that, Frank," said Max. "Why don't you go first?"

Frank nodded as he stared at Jirra.

"This is very simple, I want the child. I will compensate you handsomely for your troubles," he said.

"No," replied Jirra firmly.

"Don't you want to know how much I'm willing to offer?" he asked.

Jirra shook her head. "It doesn't matter."

"This is very important to me...my son died in a tragic accident and you're carrying his child...I just want to leave what I've accumulated to my own flesh and blood."

"I would rather die than give this baby to you. Your son didn't die in an accident. Your son raped me...and died trying to escape being arrested," replied Jirra.

Frank leaned back on the couch. "Rape? There was no rape. Bryan might have been a tad aggressive, but I understand that some girls like that."

"The bastard drugged me...the only good thing was that he used such a strong dose that I was unconscious and have no memory of the actual violation," snapped Jirra.

"I don't believe that," said Frank.

"Will you believe the Boston PD," interjected Max as he leaned over and picked up the first folder. "This is the police and the medical report. It has all the details in it."

Neil took the report and set it aside.

"I'm prepared to dispute those findings," said Frank. "Even if she was drugged, there's no proof that my son did it."

"Eeh! Sorry Hans, wrong guess. Would you like to go for Double Jeopardy where the scores can really change?" interjected Jen.

Frank turned suddenly and glared at Jen. She looked vaguely familiar, but he couldn't place her face.

"Hey, I've always wanted to use that line ever since I saw Die Hard," she replied with a grin. "Please turn your attention to the computer monitor."

Jen pressed a remote and the first program came up.

"As you can see, there were security cameras at the party. It took a little work, but I was able to find the exact moment when your son spiked Jirra's drink and blow it up," said Jen. "Please keep watching, in a few moments you'll see her start to pass out and then you'll see Bryan exiting the room with her. The transition to the next scene is sloppy, but it clearly shows him carrying Jirra into his room. Sorry it isn't really up to my directorial standards but I think you'll agree that the intent of your son was quite clear."

Frank stared at the screen in silent rage.

"So you were saying?" asked Max. "You covered up for your idiot son countless times. If you had acted like a real father he might have turned out better."

Frank shook his head. "I still want the child. You can't hold what Bryan did against me, I didn't do anything wrong."

"My turn," said Jonathan as he picked up the next folder and handed it to Frank.

As before Neil intercepted the folder.

"Who are you?" asked Frank.

"Jonathan Barnard," he replied.

Frank nodded. "Ah yes, the reporter."

"I prefer award winning investigative journalist and best selling author; it has a nicer ring to it. What your lawyer is holding is a summary of a series of articles that I am prepared to write. It has a lot of information concerning your business practices, mainly the illegal ones," said Jonathan.

"Try and get it published," sneered Frank.

Jonathan smiled back. "I already have several interested parties. As you may know I have a well earned reputation for getting my articles out on time."

Frank waved his hand. "Big deal, I've been 'exposed' before...nothing came of it."

Morris cleared his throat. "May I, Jonathan?"

Jonathan nodded. "With my pleasure."

Morris picked up the next file and tossed it onto Frank's lap.

The act of the heavy folder hitting his lap startled Frank.

"What the hell!" exclaimed Frank.

"That file summarizes the most recent criminal activities you've been involved in," said Morris. "You've been a very bad boy, Frankie. We've completely documented your past activities as well. That folder is several pounds heavier."

"Who are you? And the name is Mr. Longwell!"

"No one to take lightly, Frankie. Now, you'll see that should we make this information public the only question will be who presses charges first. My money is on either the IRS or the FBI, but who knows, the state or the local DA might go after you first," explained Morris. "Either way the line of government agencies wanting a piece of you is going to be very long indeed. I wouldn't make any future plans beyond the next few hours, Frankie."

"You have no idea who you're fucking with!" snapped Frank.

"And neither do you!" countered Morris.

"I have protection...powerful people who will crush you," growled Frank.

Morris shook his head. "Who are you talking about? The politicians and public officials you've been bribing? If, or should I say when, this becomes public they'll be too busy trying to save their own pathetic necks. The corrupt cops on your payroll? The same goes for them. And your buddies in organized crime? If you're extremely lucky all they'll do is ignore you. But it's more likely that they'll decide to terminate their problem at the source instead. I've heard that there are several construction projects with large concrete pours due in the next few weeks. I also hear it's a very effective way to dispose of a body. They haven't found Jimmy Hoffa yet have they?"

Frank gritted his teeth as he glared at Morris.

Morris picked up his coffee and took a sip. "Hmmm... good coffee. I must remember to ask where they got this blend. Now where was I? Oh, yes..."

"Get on with it," growled Frank.

"You only have the summary, Frankie. The complete files will be distributed before you leave here...unless you do exactly as we say," continued Morris.

Frank glared at Morris and it took all his composure not to punch the smug little man.

Morris then picked up the next file and tossed it at Neil who almost dropped it.

"We wouldn't want to leave you out of this. You're a very bad lawyer, Sanders," said Morris.

Neil opened the file and gasped. It contained a list of his illegal activities.

"You've been pretty busy yourself, Neil. Getting disbarred seems to be the least of your worries," said Morris. "Tax evasion and that Ponzi scheme, trying to be another Bernie Madoff are you? Blackmailing those judges on behalf of your clients was a nice touch too."

"Is this all?" interrupted Frank.

"No, there's one more thing," said Morris who nodded at Jen.

Jen pressed the remote and the next program popped up on the laptop and large monitor.

"Your security system is a joke," said Jen.

Frank gasped as he saw the file he had compiled on Jirra, including his plan to have her killed.

"When your 'hacker', and I use the term very loosely, broke into Dr. Reid's computer they failed to notice the trap that I set for them," explained Jen. "I planted a program that gave me access to their computer and of course to yours. You've been a very nasty boy, Frank."

He stared at the file and tried to think of a way out of this.

"If...if this is such strong evidence...why don't you use it?" he asked.

"If it didn't involve innocent people, you would have been arrested the moment you set foot in that door," said Morris as he handed Frank the last folder. "Inside this file is a contract, you will sign it or I will make it my life's mission to make your miserable life a hell on earth."

"I wouldn't tempt him, Frank. I've known him since we were both kids. He doesn't introduce himself as a tough little son of a bitch for nothing," commented Jen. "You're in deep shit already. Don't make it any worse for yourself than it already is."

Frank began to read the contract.

"You must be kidding...there's no fucking way I'm agreeing to this," said Frank.

"Fine," said Morris. "Max, please call the Feds; they can have first shot at him."

Max smiled as he pulled out his cell phone. "I've got their numbers on speed dial. One button push will start the process. Let's see... we'll start with the FBI then move on to the IRS next. Anyone want to make a bet on who will claim him first?"

"I'll put a twenty on the IRS, Max. The way the economy is they need the money that Frankie here is going to have to give up," said Jen. "At least the contract gives him something to live on. The IRS will very likely lock him up and take everything he's got."

Morris set his coffee cup back on the table. "Quite true, Jennifer but I suspect that the Feds have a stronger case. You see, Frankie has had several people... eliminated... in order to get whatever he wanted. If the Feds get him that's a death sentence for certain. I'll put a twenty on the Feds."

"Never thought of it like that. Good point." Jen turned toward Max. "If you'll place that call now, Max?"

Max's hand moved toward the buttons on the phone and hovered momentarily.

"Wait!" shouted Frank.

"Why?" asked Morris.

"Let's talk about this...can't we come to a compromise?" asked Frank.

"No. It's all or nothing," said Morris.

"This will ruin me!" exclaimed Frank.

"No, it won't. Yes, you will give up your position...and you'll have to relocate...but think of it as early retirement," said Morris.

Frank stared at the contract.

"We expect to see proof of your compliance...starting with your resignation to the board within the next twenty-four hours," said Morris.

"People will ask why I'm doing this," said Frank, his voice cracking.

"Make something up...say you're concerned about your health, that you suddenly found your soul...I don't care. But should anything happen to Jirra, or to anyone else in this room... even if it looks like an accident... the world will come down on you with a fury that few men have experienced. What's that line from that John Wayne movie you're always quoting?" said Morris as he looked at Jen.

"Now you understand. Anything goes wrong, anything at all... your fault, my fault, nobody's fault... it don't matter...," stated Jen with a grin. "No need to finish the line as I think you get the point. Oh, for the uneducated, that's John Wayne in Big Jake."

"We'll be watching you, Longwell," added Max. "You too, Sanders."

"This...this isn't fair," said Frank as he pulled out his pen.

"Life isn't fair," muttered Jirra.

"I only wanted the best for the child...my grandchild," said Frank.

Jirra shook her head. "No you didn't...you just wanted to leave your wealth so you could have your stupid legacy. The child doesn't deserve to get caught up in all this. It's not its fault that its father was a criminal."

"I have a right to have that child...," snapped Frank.

"No you don't!" interrupted Jirra angrily. "You just don't get it! You don't get everything you want and you definitely won't have a role in this child's life!"

Frank was about to open his mouth when Max spoke.

"Very well, time to start calling the authorities," interjected Max as his hand moved toward his cell phone.

"Wait," shouted Frank. "Can't we talk more?"

"No, either sign or be prepared to be ruined," added Morris. "I hope you don't sign, I will love destroying you."

Frank lowered his head and signed the contract.

"Anything else?" he demanded.

"No, just remember that you're getting off lightly. If you violate any of the stipulations of this contract we will bring you down," said Morris.

"You're making a big mistake," said Frank as he stood up. He then pointed at Jirra's extended belly. "You're denying that child a wonderful life."

"No, we're ensuring that the child has a fresh start," said Jirra.

Frank stomped angrily towards the door followed by Neil and Tessa. When the door opened Jimmy approached Tessa and held out his hand.

"No, not right now, your boss is a little too irate. I'll make sure it's returned to you," she said.

Jimmy looked at Frank who nodded.

Tessa then closed and locked the door.

## Chapter 121

"So, what do you think?" asked Jirra.

"He's not happy but he'll do what we want," said Max.

Alexis leaned over and gave Jirra a kiss.

“Thank you, thanks to all of you,” said Jirra.

“It was my pleasure, my dear,” said Morris as he took a bow. “I love to deflate egos like his.”

“It was enjoyable,” said Max. “Very well played, Morris. I doubt that you’ll have to remind anyone here to keep themselves on your good side.”

“But what if he changes his mind?” asked Jirra.

“We have one last card to play that should convince him that going against this deal would be a very bad idea,” said Max as he glanced at Tessa.

Tessa acknowledged with a single nod of the head.

## Chapter 122

Frank Longwell sat in his living room stewing in a silence fury. He had been bested and he didn’t like it one bit. It was bad enough that he lost his grandchild...but his job...his home...it was too much to bear.

He drained his glass of Scotch and picked up the bottle to get a refill. It was empty and he flung it into the fireplace. The shatter of glass sounded like an explosion in the quiet room.

Frank stood up and stormed off to his study. First he would get another bottle, and then he would place some phone calls. He would cash in all his favors tonight. The fucking little lawyer would be the first to die. Then he would have Max Bowie killed. Then that bitch that had been their computer expert, she was so fucking smug, she would pay for that. He hadn’t forgot about the woman who disarmed Jimmy, she would have to die too...and that reporter...and that dyke actress...all of them would die. One by one he thought of how they would all die and it made him smile. Of course he would save the slut with his grandchild until last...but she too would have to die, it was now a matter of honor. He would have preferred to keep her alive long enough to give birth to the child, but there was no time now. If his life was going to be ruined then their lives would end too.

He strutted into his study and punched in the security code to unlock the door. When he stepped inside he immediately froze as he was shocked to see that the desk light was on. No one was ever allowed in this room without his expressed permission.

Frank walked over to his desk and gasped. Lying on his desk was Jimmy’s Glock.

He sat down stared at the gun, all the while trying to figure out how it got into his home. He looked over at the security system panel and it showed that the security system still on and there was no indication of a break-in. Whoever had left the gun here was obviously an expert.

Frank carefully reached down and picked up the gun. He immediately noticed that not only was it loaded, but that the hammer was cocked.

He then noticed his computer. On the monitor was a video of John Wayne. He reached over to close the image and instead he saw The Duke stating the line that the computer bitch had quoted; only this time it was the complete quote.

“Now you understand. Anything goes wrong, anything at all... your fault, my fault, nobody's fault... it don't matter - I'm gonna blow your head off. It's as simple as that. No matter what else happens, no matter who gets killed I'm gonna blow your head off,” warned John Wayne.

Then the screen changed and that computer bitch appeared. “Don't worry about cleaning up the computer. I've already taken care of that. I've made a complete off-site backup of all your data for you. All you need to do is follow the contract you signed to prevent all that incriminating evidence from getting into the right hands. Oh, by the way, these messages will disappear so don't bother having someone check for any evidence of what we've done. Have a nice day, Frank.”

The computer beeped then the monitor cleared and the words “Game Over, Frank” flashed in big white letters filling the screen.

All the color went out of Frank's face as the meaning sank in. The message was very clear. He realized that these people weren't playing around either. It then hit him that he was about to lose everything that he worked for so hard. The money wasn't important; it was the loss of power that infuriated him so much.

“They fucking beat me!” he stated.

He stared at the gun in his hand and as he did his rage exploded. He fired three shots into his computer monitor. He then fired several more shots into his computer.

“I fucking lost!” he screamed.

Jimmy was downstairs when he heard the shots fired and he immediately ran upstairs. He drew his other gun and carefully approached Frank's office. He was just outside the door when there was another shot.

## **Chapter 123**

Jirra and Alexis were eating breakfast the next morning when Alexis's cell phone rang.

“It's Jen, I know the ring tone,” said Alexis. “Jen's a big 'Rumpole of the Bailey' fan so I use the first few notes of the Rumpole theme for her.”

“Good morning,” said Alexis. “I thought you were heading back west today?”

“Have you seen the news?” asked Jen.

“No, why? What happened?”

“Just turn on the news,” said Jen.

Alexis turned on the TV and switched to the morning news.

“In a shocking development, well known entrepreneur and businessman Frank Longwell apparently committed suicide last night,” said the reporter.

Jirra and Alexis froze.

“A family spokesman stated that Mr. Longwell had been suffering from depression following the death of his only son last September,” continued the reporter.

“Hello...you still there?” asked Jen.

Alexis held the phone closer. “Yes...what happened?”

“Max is coming by and he’ll explain everything,” said Jen. “The good news is that we don’t have to worry about Longwell anymore.”

Ten minutes later Max arrived. He immediately hugged both of them.

“Do you want some coffee?” asked Jirra.

“Please,” he said. “I take it you heard.”

Jirra and Alexis nodded.

“What happened?” asked Jirra as she handed Max his coffee.

“Tessa broke into his house last night and left the gun that she had taken off his bodyguard in his office,” said Max.

He then told them about the message left on the computer.

“The Big Jake part was Jen’s idea,” said Max. “She set it up on his computer, it was a nice touch.”

“This was the last card you were talking about, right?” asked Jirra.

Max nodded. “It was a sign to Longwell that we were serious and that he was not safe anywhere if he double-crossed us. Apparently he shot up his office and then killed himself. According to the police, the bodyguard was right outside the office when the fatal shot was fired, so there’s no doubt that it was a suicide.”

“So, does this mean it’s over?” asked Jirra.

“It should be,” said Max. “The lawyer won’t say anything about the deal as he’s in deep himself.”

“What about the bodyguard?” asked Alexis.

“I doubt he’ll do anything,” replied Max. “If he ever expects to get another job with any of the mobs he’ll keep his mouth shut about what happened.”

Jirra let out a long breath of relief.

“It’s really over,” she sighed. “I wish I could say I was sorry...but I’m really glad he’s dead. I just know that as long as he lived we were in danger.”

Alexis then hugged her. Then they both got up and kissed Max.

“Thank you so much,” said Jirra as she wiped away tears. “I can never thank you enough.”

Max just smiled back. “It was my pleasure.”

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Across town Jimmy was debating his options. He could go to the police and tell them how that bitch had disarmed him and that was the last time he saw his weapon. But going to the police went against all of Jimmy’s upbringing.

The fact that his gun was used in the suicide bothered him and he wondered how his gun was returned. No one had come into the house and the security system was working perfectly...he had checked it himself, both before and after his boss had killed himself. It would be very difficult to get another job if he raised a lot of questions...questions that could and would be used against him. A guard who allows his boss to be murdered was useless.

He debated seeking revenge against the people in the meeting, but quickly dismissed that idea too. No, that wasn’t up to him. Mr. Longwell had killed himself, there’s no denying that, he had been right outside the door and heard the shot.

Yes, Mr. Longwell was angry over the way the meeting went, but that wasn’t Jimmy’s problem. A professional security guard can’t kill people just because they upset their employer, at least not without orders. No, Jimmy would forget what happened and look for another job. Besides, if someone could sneak into the house and not be detected, then they might be too dangerous for him to take on. Jimmy decided that it would be best if he just put it all behind him.

## Chapter 124

On her way to the airport Jen smiled to herself about how things had worked out. It was so rewarding helping to take down a thug like Longwell. Oh, he was rich and cultured, but he was a thug nevertheless and she felt no remorse over his end. She would have been quite content if he had simply

stuck to the terms of their agreement. Someone like Frank Longwell had the potential to be a long term liability and his suicide helped to put her mind at ease that this threat to Jirra and her friends was finally over.

Still she thought there was one more thing she could do. She pulled her laptop out of its case and logged on. She was pleased to see that she still had access to Sander's files. She had spent several hours last night deleting anything related to Jirra. This trip was to gather some evidence related to Neil's other illegal activities. She cherry picked the best information and then sent it to the IRS and the SEC.

While they might not be able to use the information that was to arrive both anonymously and untraceable, it would raise a lot of questions and would immediately start investigations of the dishonest lawyer.

Jen shut down her computer and replaced it in her case. Even though no one else would know what she had just done, it didn't matter. To Jen the satisfaction she got out of putting Sanders away was worth more than any public thanks.

## Chapter 125

The next day Tessa stopped by to see Jirra.

"I thought I'd see how're you're doing," said Tessa.

"Much better thanks, please come in," said Jirra.

Tessa came in and took off her coat.

"I was going to offer to take you to lunch, but it's miserable out there today," said Tessa.

"I saw the weather forecast, the freezing rain is due to turn to snow later today," said Jirra. "I have plenty of food, I'm sure we can throw something together."

"Sounds like a plan," said Tessa.

They sat down in the living room.

"Where's Lisa?" asked Jirra referring to Tessa and Jonathan's daughter.

"At home with her daddy," said Tessa. "Today's his day to work at home and he loves to babysit."

"That's nice," said Jirra. "May I ask you a few questions?"

Tessa nodded.

"What's it like, I mean giving birth, is it as painful as they say?" asked Jirra.

Tessa nodded. "It was painful, but in a very satisfying way...it's hard to put in words."

"That's what my mom said," said Jirra.

"How soon after you give birth are you giving the baby up?" asked Tessa.

"We're planning on having them in the delivery room," said Jirra. "I don't mind, in fact I prefer it this way. I'm not happy about all this...but I don't hold it against the baby. I'm just happy that the baby will have a wonderful family."

"I understand," said Tessa. "I also want you to know that I'm very impressed by the way you handled yourself the other day. That wasn't an easy thing to go through."

"Thank you," replied Jirra. "I know that having all of you there helped."

Tessa nodded. "Jen's lawyer was a trip! To quote a great man 'I pity the fool' who takes on Morris."

Jirra laughed.

"You know, if we didn't already have careers we would make one heck of a security company. Jen is probably one of the most accomplished computer hackers I've ever known...and Max, well Max is Max."

"I know...and don't sell yourself short. Was it hard breaking into Longwell's house?"

"Breaking in is easy, doing it without being detected is the hard part. However, Longwell made it easy for me. He was an arrogant man and he figured that no one would dare break into his home. His security system was twenty years old; I really didn't have much trouble getting in or out."

"Tessa, I hope you don't mind me asking this, but what do you do for a living?" asked Jirra.

"I don't mind. I started a small security company and I do freelance work. I don't need the money, it's more something to do... and it allows me to help people. I get to pick and choose who I help...and it keeps my skills sharp."

"Do you think that Athena will use you again?" asked Jirra.

"I wouldn't be surprised," said Tessa.

"Does that bother you at all?"

Tessa shook her head. "No. I know Athena's a virtuous being, and therefore any task she gives me is on the side of good. I know that sounds simplistic, but I'm convinced that there's a war going on between good and evil, not in the terms of country verses country, but in man verses man. Frank Longwell was evil; any good there was in his soul long passed away."

"Did you think he would kill himself?"

Tessa shook her head.

“No, that caught me by surprise. But it did save us from having to get further involved,” said Tessa.

“So you think he wouldn’t have just walked away either?”

“That’s right,” she replied.

“Then I’m glad that he did it himself,” said Jirra.

“Me too,” said Tessa.

“Well, I’m getting hungry, you want to join me in the kitchen and see what we can find?”

“Absolutely,” said Tessa.

## Chapter 126

“That was wonderful,” said Jirra.

“Thank you,” said Tessa. “One of my specialties is spaghetti with meat sauce. In the navy we learned to use whatever was available. I doubt I’ve ever made it the same way twice.”

“Well, I’m glad you made a lot of sauce, as I’m sure that Alexis will love it.”

Tessa smiled back. “You two are a great couple. I’m glad that you were able to get married.”

“It’s one good thing that came out of this,” said Jirra.

“So since we’re asking personal questions, do you only like women?” asked Tessa.

Jirra nodded. “I guess it’s because my transformation was initially only physical. It’s taken me some time to be comfortable as a woman. What about you?”

“My change was pretty much instantaneous. I woke up as Tessa in mind and body. Oh, I kept my warrior skills...and acquired a few more...along with some other things.”

“Like what?” asked Jirra.

“I’m now fluent in Spanish, Greek, French, German...and a few other languages. Before my change I knew some phrases in a few languages,” she replied.

“That’s pretty cool,” said Jirra.

“It comes in handy,” said Tessa. “But back to the other things, I found that I was sexually attracted to men. There was no strangeness to it, it’s like I have always been this way,” explained Tessa.

“So you have no attraction to other women?”

Tessa shook her head. “Well, that’s not completely true; I still have deep feelings for Lisa, the woman I was going to marry.”

“And Jonathan is her brother?”

Tessa nodded. “Yes, strange world isn’t it?”

“That’s for sure. So how did you meet?”

“That’s right, I’ve never told you all the details,” said Tessa.

“I’d love to hear it,” said Jirra.

“Sure, but first let’s go into the living room, I think you’ll be more comfortable when you fall asleep,” said Tessa.

Jirra laughed. “I won’t fall asleep; besides I love a good story.”

## Chapter 127

“Have you heard anything from Jirra?” asked Cat.

Beth nodded as they walked through Fairmount Park with Spirit. She told Cat what had happened.

“I’m glad to hear she’s okay,” said Cat.

“Me too,” said Beth.

“And how’re you doing?”

“Better,” replied Beth. “I can’t wait until spring so I can restart my flying lessons. This isn’t exactly biplane weather.”

“I know,” said Cat as she looked up at the gray sky. “I don’t think spring is ever going to get here.”

“That stupid groundhog is the one to blame,” said Beth.

Cat laughed.

“So how’s Matt doing?”

“He’s finishing up his special weapons class next week and then he’ll be up here, I can’t wait,” said Cat.

"It's pretty cool that he got assigned to the Philadelphia region," said Beth.

"I know, so where do you want to be assigned when you graduate?"

"Career wise I would prefer DC and the main office, but a lot depends on where Jim is assigned."

"Any idea where that might be?" asked Cat.

"He wants the main office too, but he said that he'll take anything on the East Coast," replied Beth.

Spirit froze for a second and then began to whimper.

Beth looked up and saw the squirrel.

"Spirit, you know that it will just run away from you," said Beth. "She just wants to play, but I doubt that the squirrel is as open-minded."

Spirit let out a playful bark and the squirrel scrambled up a tree.

"I thought they hibernated all winter," said Beth.

Cat shook her head. "Not if there's a lot of food available."

"Well, I'm ready to hibernate; let's go home."

## Chapter 128

Jirra and Stella arrived at Dr. Lennox's office on a rainy Tuesday in the middle of February.

"Well, everything looks great Jirra," said Dr. Lennox. "Both you and the baby appear to be progressing nicely."

"That's good to hear," said Jirra.

"So Stella, will you and Logan be staying in the Boston area?" asked Dr. Lennox.

"Yes, we bought a condo downtown," said Stella. "We'd like to keep seeing you."

"I'm pleased to hear that," said Dr. Lennox.

"So when do I need to be back?" asked Jirra.

"Two to three weeks," said Dr. Lennox.

"Okay, I'll make the appointment on the way out, thanks Dr. Lennox."

"You're welcome," said Dr. Lennox.

After Jirra made her next appointment she turned to Stella. "Do you want to get lunch, I'm famished."

Stella nodded. "I'd like that."

They stopped at a small restaurant a few blocks up from Dr. Lennox's office.

"This is a good place, Logan and I eat here often," said Stella.

"Cool," said Jirra as they entered. "How did you meet Logan, though the show?"

Stella shook her head as she took off her coat.

"Not exactly; we've known each other for the past twenty years; we originally met in high school. We were both in theater together," said Stella.

"You're an actress?"

Stella laughed. "I tried, but I quickly found I preferred being behind the scenes as did Logan."

Jirra sat down and picked up the menu. "Oh good, they serve breakfast all the time."

"Cravings?"

Jirra nodded. "I've been on a breakfast binge the past few weeks...ever since we cleared up that problem with...well you know who."

Stella smiled back.

"Did you and Logan stay in touch after you left school?"

"No, but our paths kept crossing. When I was hired to do the Erin Flynn Show I was pleasantly surprised to hear that so had Logan. We started dating then... we figured it was Karma."

After they placed their orders Stella and Jirra went back to talking.

"I'm happy that you're going to raise the baby," said Jirra. "It's nice to know that it'll have good parents."

"Jirra, Logan and I have a question for you, when the time comes, what do you want us to tell the baby?"

"You mean about...everything?" asked Jirra.

Stella nodded as she cleaned her glasses with a napkin.

"We want to honor your privacy," said Stella.

"I don't mind if you tell the truth. I'm not ready to be a mother right now...it's not due to being in college or anything like that...rather I'm just not ready for this sort of responsibility...I mean some day I want to raise a family with Alexis...but now isn't the time."

"Is that all?" asked Stella.

"No, not really. I'm still a little creeped out by what happened. The fact that I was unconscious throughout it all makes it worse in some way...at least then I would know what happened. I cringe at the thought of not knowing who did this to me," she said. "Does that make sense?"

"Yes, it does," said Stella. "Are you still getting support?"

"I go to a group occasionally and I have a therapist down in Pennsylvania," said Jirra.

"That's a good start...any thing else?"

Jirra cracked a small smile. "Okay, what's your idea?"

"Well, you wrote your first script based on those attacks back at Penn, right?"

Jirra nodded. "So you think I should turn this into a script for the show?"

"Why not? Even if it's not used by Faith, just writing it might do you some good."

Jirra thought about it. "Not a bad idea...it could be my own version of a Law & Order plot...ripped from the headlines and all that."

"Give it a try. I know Logan will be more than happy to give you his opinion when you're done...and then you can decide if you want to give it to Faith for approval."

The waitress walked up and set down their food.

"Will there be anything else?" asked the waitress.

"No, everything looks great, thank you," said Jirra.

Stella nodded in agreement.

"Thanks for the great idea," said Jirra and she picked up a piece of bacon.

"By the way, Logan thinks you're a great writer...he really hopes that they hire you fulltime," added Stella as she took a bite out of her BLT.

"I appreciate that," said Jirra.

Much to Jirra and Alexis's relief the next few months passed without further incidents. Jirra focused on her writing and shuffled between writing scripts for the show and working on writing of Andrea's story.

As it was to be a fictionalized version of Andrea's life, Jirra had to change the names of the major characters and to adjust dates. Thankfully between the internet and the public library, Jirra was able to accomplish all her historical research.

She also made the decision to make Andrea's story into a series of books as there was just too much information to compress into one story. The first one would focus on World War 2 from the time Andrea, then Andy Baker, joined the RCAF to the escape from Stalag Luft One and end when he made the decision to become a woman. The second book would focus on her days in the Danish Resistance.

As Jirra read the files she was amazed that Andrea survived the war. She had numerous close calls with both the Germans and the Danish traitors. Jirra shuttered to think what would have happened to Andrea if she had been caught. And as she read the files she understood why Andrea had given her this task, it was to show her no matter how bad things looks, there was always hope.

Jirra told this theory to Beth who agreed.

"It sounds like her to do something like that. I bet she didn't care if the stories got published," said Beth.

"Well, I'm going to do my best to see that they do, even if there are just copies for us," said Jirra.

"I'm glad to hear that," replied Beth.

"So how're things down in Philly?"

"Nice now that it's spring. This was a rough winter...for more than one reason," said Beth.

"I know what you mean. So when will you start flying again?"

"I have my next lesson in a couple of weeks, the first weekend in May to be exact," replied Beth. "I can't wait."

"So do you have a date set to spread the ashes?"

"I'd like to do it close to the Summer Solstice. Not just because it's the longest day of the year, but it's a significant holiday in Scandinavia," said Beth. "Considering Andrea's ties to Denmark that seems appropriate."

"I hope that I will able to attend," said Jirra.

"So when is the baby due?"

"We're hoping for early to mid-June," said Jirra. "Trust me; I hope it isn't much beyond that, you can't believe how big I am!"

"What week are you in now?" asked Beth.

The 30<sup>th</sup>," replied Jirra. "I know that I'll get even bigger in the next few weeks."

"How're you doing?"

"I have my good days and bad ones. Alexis has been a saint, because some days I'm a total wreck," said Jirra.

"What do you mean?"

"Mood swings, my hormones are going crazy," replied Jirra. "Thankfully everyone around me is very understanding. My emotions are very loose...it's not pleasant."

"Anything else?"

"I'm a regular bull in a china shop...you can't believe how this throws off your center of gravity."

"Don't you mean cow?" asked Beth with a laugh.

"Oh yeah, cow, that makes it sound so much better!" replied Jirra as she started to giggle.

"Do you think you'll want to do this again?"

"Yes," replied Jirra immediately. "Alexis and I want to have a family...not anytime soon mind you. I may complain at times, but it's been an incredible experience so far. I have no regrets about having her."

"So you gave in and asked the doctor the baby's gender?"

"Stella and Logan wanted to know so they could plan for the baby," said Jirra.

"What're they like?"

"Really nice people, I know they'll be wonderful parents. I'm glad that I know who will be raising the baby."

"I'm glad to hear that Jirra," said Beth.

"And how have you been?"

"Better. I still miss Andrea a lot...but I talk to my old father every other week now. I'm amazed how easily he had adapted to the fact that I'm a woman. He was in DC for a meeting last week and spent the weekend with my parents."

"How'd that go?"

“They got along great from what I heard. I wish I could have been there, but I was jammed academically,” said Beth.

“I’m glad you still have a connection to your old life,” said Jirra.

“Things do work out,” she replied. “So is your mom coming out for the birth?”

“Yes, she’s coming out here the beginning of June,” said Jirra. “I love Dr. Lennox, but I feel more comfortable knowing that Mom will be in hospital with me.”

“Celeste and I would like to come up and see you as soon as school is over,” said Beth.

“I’d like to see you too,” said Jirra. “So, how’s Celeste?”

“She’s getting serious with Sean,” said Beth. “I’m so happy for her as it’s good to see her have someone in her life. I mean she gives so much to everyone else.”

“I agree,” said Jirra.

“Anyway, they’re flying to Europe this summer. They’re going to spend all of July and most of August there.”

“That’s wonderful,” said Jirra. “But who’ll babysit Spirit?”

“They’re taking her with them. Apparently it’s not that difficult to take dogs to most countries on the continent,” said Beth. “So Spirit can try and make friends with European squirrels.”

“That’s cool,” said Jirra.

“I think the only one upset about Sprit not being around is Rebecca, she’s become really attached to the furball,” said Beth.

“Like you’re not?”

Beth laughed. “True. Anyway Celeste has talked to Rebecca and suggested that she adopt a pet.”

“That makes sense,” said Jirra. “I really do miss all of you.”

“It hasn’t been the same without you either,” said Beth.

“Well once you know when you can come up, give us a call,” said Jirra.

“We will, until then you take care...and give Alexis our love,” said Beth.

“I will,” said Jirra.

## Chapter 130

The next week Jirra joined Faith on the set.

"I thought you'd want to see how they shoot the scenes for the story you wrote," said Faith.

"I didn't know it was going to be used this season," said Jirra.

"It was so good that we moved it in the rotation," said Faith. "We decided to keep it a secret from you."

"I can't wait to see it," said Jirra. "Oh, I have a surprise for you."

"What's that dear?" asked Faith.

Jirra handed Faith a Flash drive.

"I took Stella's advice and wrote a script based on what happened to me...of course I changed some major sections of it...no one would believe the truth," said Jirra with a smile.

"I can't wait to read it," said Faith. "How much longer do you have at Penn?"

"One more year," said Jirra.

"I know you've been a contributing writer, but I want to hire you as soon as possible fulltime," said Faith. "You have excellent insight to my characters. Now, don't worry you can still freelance on the side. I think you have a great future as a writer and I don't mean just scripts. I also want to make one thing very clear, you're getting this offer because of your writing ability and it has nothing to do with your marriage to Alexis."

"Thank you, I appreciate that," said Jirra. "I would love to work on the show fulltime."

"The show is going strong and the ratings are also excellent. The network has started preliminary talks about extending the contract," said Faith.

"I know, Alexis says that she wants to keep doing the show...in fact she says it's the only thing keeping her in the business."

Faith nodded. "I can't picture anyone else as Erin now...Alexis owns the character. So tell me about this script you just wrote."

## Chapter 131

The next day Jirra arrived on the set to watch the shooting. They had actually started filming scenes much earlier that morning, but Jirra was not about to get up at 5 AM.

She took her seat and watched Alexis in scene where Erin was talking to a suspect in the extortion of a local businesswoman.

Faith came in and motioned for Jirra to follow her.

They quietly walked off the set.

“Good morning,” said Jirra.

“Good morning to you, Jirra, I just wanted to tell you that I loved your new script. Considering how much of it is based on what actually happened to you it’s even more remarkable.”

In the script a young neighbor of Erin is drugged and raped. Erin chases the rapist but he is killed trying to escape. The woman is now pregnant with the child of the rapist and she’s being followed and harassed. Erin takes on the case and discovers that the father of the dead rapist is behind it. It was a very close to what had happened to Jirra. One of the main differences is that Erin kills the father when he tries to abduct the baby from the hospital.

“I’m glad you liked it,” said Jirra. “I hope I made enough changes from real life.”

“Liked it? I loved it! In fact we’re going to get it shot in time to be considered for this year’s Emmys,” replied Faith. “And yes you made enough changes.”

“I’m glad you liked it, but it’s not that good,” said Jirra.

Faith shook her head. “I disagree. I would be shocked if it wasn’t nominated. The show is getting a lot of attention and I wouldn’t be surprised if Alexis is also nominated for best actress in a dramatic role. You could be at the show together as dual nominees. Jen Stevens might even get a nomination for one of the episodes she directed.”

“That would be pretty cool,” said Jirra.

“We’re having a meeting this afternoon to discuss this story, I’d like you to be there, if you’re up to it.”

“I’ll be there,” said Jirra.

## Chapter 132

That night Alexis and Jirra had an early dinner together as Alexis had an early shoot the following morning.

“You’re really going to work at two in the morning?” asked Jirra.

Alexis nodded. “We’re filming some shots downtown and we want to be done before the morning rush hour. I’ll try not to wake you when I get up.”

“Don’t worry about that, I’m up so often at night now I’m debating moving a mattress to the bathroom,” joked Jirra.

“Well, the good news is that we only have a few shows left to shoot for this season,” said Alexis. “We’re also going to be off for six weeks starting in mid-June.”

“That’s great,” said Jirra.

“I figure that we can stop in Ohio to see Beth’s flight and see my family and then head out to New Mexico and relax,” said Alexis. “I figure you’ll need some time to recover from having the baby.”

“I’d love that,” said Jirra.

“Also, how do you feel about buying a cottage out there?”

A large smile broke out on Jirra’s face. “You mean it?”

“Absolutely. I mean we both love it out there and we could probably get a good deal from Judy,” said Alexis. “Besides as much time as we’ll be out there we might as well have our own place.”

“That’s so cool,” said Jirra.

“How’d the meeting go with Faith and the production team?”

“Really good. They all can’t wait to do the story,” said Jirra.

“I know, there’s a real buzz over the script. Jen’s even offered to direct it for free.”

“Is it really that good?” asked Jirra.

Alexis nodded. “Yes it is. And you know Jen, she won’t get involved in a project unless it’s top notch all the way. I’m impressed that you were able to put so much of yourself into it.”

“It was Stella’s idea,” admitted Jirra. “I doubt I would have done it otherwise.”

Alexis shook her head. “No, I think you would have...it might have taken you a bit longer to get around to it, but I still think you would have done it. I’m very proud of you.”

“Thanks,” said Jirra.

### **Chapter 133**

Celeste was working on a paper when her phone rang.

“This is Celeste,” she greeted.

There was a slight pause.

“Um, I’m trying to reach Celeste Farnsworth,” said the man.

“Yes, how can I help you?” she replied.

“I got a strange call at my office...my name is Jim Rousch and...well to be honest, is this some kind of joke Miss Farnsworth?”

Celeste smiled as she recognized the name. “No Mr. Rousch this isn’t a joke. I’m very serious about my offer and please call me Celeste.”

“It’s just that you sound rather young...and this is an expensive proposition,” he said.

“Understandably so, you own one of the few restored flying Spitfires in the United States,” said Celeste. “I also know how much you receive to appear at an air show and I’m willing to pay the going rate for an entire weekend even though your services will only be needed for an hour. If you agree, I can have my accountant send you the down payment today.”

“You’re serious,” he stated fighting back shock.

“Yes I am. I need you and your aircraft to participate in a memorial service in Ohio.”

“For who?” he asked.

“A woman named Andrea Carlson. She was an American who served in the RAF during the Second World War.”

“What did she do, I mean women didn’t fly back then,” he said.

If only you knew, thought Celeste.

“No, she was in intelligence, she later volunteered and worked with the Danish Resistance in occupied Europe,” said Celeste.

“Very interesting, but why do you need my plane?”

“She was also an accomplished pilot and she once was given the opportunity to take a flight in a Spitfire, all very illegal at the time, but she said it was one of her greatest thrills,” lied Celeste.

“And so you want a flyover?”

“Exactly,” said Celeste. “You’ll be following a biplane that will be spreading her ashes over an area where she first learned to fly.”

There was another long stretch of silence.

“Are you still there?” asked Celeste.

“Yes,” he replied.

“The biplane is set and I was trying to add a special touch to the event.”

“May I ask what your connection is to this woman?”

“Yes, she was a friend and I know members of her family,” replied Celeste.

“Well, my schedule is open for that weekend,” he said. “And I will be in the area.”

“Excellent, so will you do it?” asked Celeste.

“Of course,” he replied. “But you only have to pay me for the actually flying time. I’m not about to profit from doing something like this, it wouldn’t be right.”

“Thank you very much,” said Celeste. “It will mean a lot to her family.”

“I’m sure...how long was she in occupied territory?”

“From 1943 to the end of the war,” replied Celeste.

“Damn, that took guts,” he said. “I wish I could have met her.”

“She was a very remarkable woman, Mr. Rousch.”

“She sounds like it...and please call me Jack.”

### **Chapter 134**

“You actually got a Spitfire for a flyover?” asked Beth.

“Yes, it’s a restored model, granted not fully authentic, but close enough,” explained Celeste.

“That’s so cool!” exclaimed Beth. “Does he know why you’re asking him to do this?”

“I told him the truth...more or less,” said Celeste. She then told Beth what she has told Jack.

Beth smiled. “Andrea would be so proud of you.”

“Thank you. I’m usually a very honest person, but it felt good to stretch the truth.”

Beth laughed. “Do you mind if I tell my Dad? I just want to give him time to come up with an equally plausible story for the rest of the family. Don’t worry he won’t tell them until after the flyover.”

“No that’s fine,” said Celeste.

“Thank you so much for doing this,” said Beth as she hugged Celeste.

“It’s my pleasure,” said Celeste. “Besides, Andrea deserves this sort of tribute.”

## Chapter 135

“What’re you doing?” asked Alexis.

Jirra looked up from her desk. “I’m just putting together my final status report for Diana. It has to be in this week for me to get credit for this semester.”

Alexis nodded. “Are you getting credit for our meeting with Longwell?”

Jirra shook her head. “Penn doesn’t give credit for dealing with thugs...for that I’d have to go to Harvard or Yale.”

Alexis laughed and then gave Jirra a kiss.

“How’d your appointment with Dr. Lennox go today?”

“Everything is fine. She says I’m a perfectly healthy pregnant woman who’s about to enter her 39<sup>th</sup> week,” replied Jirra.

“That’s good to hear,” said Alexis.

“Afterwards I went back to Stella’s home and saw the baby’s room,” replied Jirra. “It’s lovely.”

“I would be shocked if it wasn’t,” said Alexis.

Jirra swung around in her office chair. “Can you give me a hand getting up?”

Alexis reached down and helped Jirra get up.

“I can’t imagine what it was like for Cailin with twins, one is bad enough,” said Jirra as she regained her balance.

“I think you’d do fine,” said Alexis.

Jirra nodded. “All things considered I’m glad that we decided to have the baby.”

“You hungry?”

Jirra smiled. “Always.”

## Chapter 136

“We start shooting your latest script next week,” said Alexis as she prepared dinner.

“Cool, I hope I can manage to get down and watch some of the shooting,” replied Jirra.

“You sure that’s smart?” asked Alexis.

“No, but I want to at least watch the scenes with you and Jen. She always manages to make you screw up your lines,” replied Jirra with a laugh. “I’ve noticed that the editors tend to use some of those scenes instead of the scripted stuff if it’s especially funny.”

“I feel like Harvey Korman must have felt when Tim Conway was appearing in a skit with him on the old Carol Burnett show. At least after all the years we’ve been friends I know Jen well enough to see where her mind is going when she goes off the script. Speaking of the devil, she arrives in town this weekend,” said Alexis.

“That’s great,” said Jirra. “My mom gets here next week.”

Jirra shook her head. “No she doesn’t.”

Alexis cocked her head. “Yes she does.”

“Jen is stopping in New Mexico and is bringing her in early,” replied Alexis. “It was supposed to be a surprise, but I don’t think that shocking you too much right now is a good idea.”

“I have to agree,” said Jirra. “Are Beth and Celeste still coming up as planned or are they coming early too?”

“Not that I’m aware of,” said Alexis.

“I really hope that we’re able to be at the memorial service,” said Jirra.

“Well, if everything goes as planned then it shouldn’t be a problem,” said Alexis.

“Well then there’s nothing to worry about is there? I mean if there’s one thing that I’m known for it’s having things going according to plans!” quipped Jirra.

Alexis rolled her eyes and laughed.

## Chapter 137

Liz gave Jirra a long gentle hug.

“You look wonderful, Roo,” she said.

“Thanks Mom,” said Jirra.

“Wow,” exclaimed Jen as she greeted Jirra.

“I know, I’m huge,” replied Jirra.

“No that’s not what I mean,” said Jen. “I’m just thinking how happy you look.”

Jirra nodded. "I do feel good right now."

"Are you nervous about giving birth?" asked Jen.

"I'd be lying if I said that I wasn't, but Dr. Lennox says that everything is fine," said Jirra. "She says that I need to be ready as there's always the possibility of going into labor early."

They sat down in the living room.

"Oh, Alexis will be home in a few hours, they had to reshoot a few scenes," explained Jirra.

"I know, we talked on the way over here," said Jen.

"So have you decided if you're going to request an epidural?" asked Liz.

Jirra nodded. "Yes on both counts."

"How far away is the hospital?" asked Jen.

"Three miles, so depending on what time of day it is, it could take ten to sixty minutes," replied Jirra.

"Do you have a copy of the directions?" asked Jen.

Jirra nodded. "Alexis has everything in a folder for both of you. Both our cars have the directions programmed into the navigation systems."

"You seem to have thought of everything," said Liz.

"Good upbringing," said Jirra with a smile. "And I was a boy scout."

"Did they have a pregnancy merit badge?" asked Jen.

Jirra laughed. "That's bad even for you!"

### **Chapter 138**

Alexis arrived two hours later just as Liz was preparing dinner.

"How'd everything go?" asked Jirra.

"Fine," replied Alexis. "The last scene took six takes."

"It always seems to go that way," said Jen.

Alexis turned to Liz. "Can I give you a hand?"

Liz shook her head. "Not necessary, everything is almost done."

"It smells wonderful," said Alexis.

"It's chicken with rice," said Liz. "One of Jirra's favorites."

"Excuse me, I need to use the restroom," said Jirra as she struggled to get up from the chair.

"Here, let me give you a hand," said Alexis.

Once Jirra was up on her feet she gave Alexis a kiss and headed to the bathroom.

"So when do I get to meet Stella and Logan?" asked Liz.

"They're coming over tomorrow," said Alexis.

"They sound like wonderful people," said Liz as she peeked in the oven.

Alexis nodded. "They'll be wonderful parents."

Liz was about to reply when they heard Jirra yell.

Jen, Alexis and Liz rushed to the restroom.

"What's wrong?" asked Alexis.

"I...I think my water just broke," replied Jirra.

### **Chapter 139**

"I just talked to Dr. Lennox and she said that she'll meet us at the hospital," said Alexis.

"Good," replied Jirra. "How am I doing Mom?"

"You're doing great Roo. The contractions are just over ten minutes apart," said Liz.

Jirra nodded.

"We have plenty of time, Roo," said Liz.

"Jen, could you grab that green bag, it has Jirra's things in it," said Alexis.

"Sure, do you want me to drive?" asked Jen.

"I better do it, I know the streets better than you," said Alexis.

"Have you called Stella and Logan yet?" asked Jirra.

"Yes, and they're heading to the hospital," said Alexis.

“Okay, dear, you ready to get up?” asked Liz.

Jirra nodded. “Okay.”

Liz and Jen helped Jirra out to the car.

“Do we have everything?” asked Alexis.

“Did you turn off the oven?” asked Jirra nervously.

“Yes, Roo,” replied Alexis.

“Okay, let’s go,” said Jirra.

### **Chapter 140**

Dr. Lennox greeted them as they arrived at the hospital.

“How’re doing Jirra?” she asked.

“Fine...I guess,” said Jirra as she sat down on the gurney.

“Hello, Caroline,” said Liz. “Her contractions are nine minutes apart now.”

“I’m pleased to see that you’re here Liz. Would you like to assist me?” replied Dr. Lennox.

Jirra looked up and nodded.

“Of course,” replied Liz.

“Are Stella and Logan here yet?” asked Jirra.

“Yes, they just got here and are changing,” replied Dr. Lennox. “Alexis, the nurse will show you where to change.”

“Okay,” replied Alexis.

“Where should Jen go?” asked Jirra.

Dr. Lennox looked over at Jen and smiled. “The waiting area just up the hall. I would love to talk more, I’m a hug fan, but duty calls.”

“I understand,” replied Jen. “See you later, Roo.”

Jirra winced as another contraction hit. “Okay, thanks for being here.”

“No problem Roo. See you in a while.”

## Chapter 141

"How does it look?" asked Liz.

"Everything looks normal, but as you know, it's not unusual for labor to last a long time, especially for the first time," replied Dr. Lennox.

Liz nodded.

"As there don't appear to be any complications I don't see any reason to induce labor, we'll let nature take its course," said Dr. Lennox.

"I agree," said Liz.

Jirra looked up from the gurney. "So it may take a while?"

"Yes, you're definitely in labor, but it may take a while. Do you want some water?"

Jirra nodded.

She then looked over at Alexis, Stella and Logan.

"Sorry for the delay," she said.

"Nothing to apologize for," said Alexis as she reached down and took Jirra's hand into her own.

Jirra let out a sigh.

"It's okay, we're just glad that everything is normal," said Stella.

## Chapter 142

Jen was drinking a cup of coffee when her phone went off.

"Any update?" asked Beth.

"No," replied Jen. "The doctor said that everything is okay, just that the baby is taking its time."

"Well we're at Logan and Celeste is getting the rental car as we speak, we should be there soon," replied Beth.

"Okay, I'm in the waiting area. The good news is that they have a decent coffee stand here," said Jen.

"Great," said Beth. "Call us if there's any change."

"I will," replied Jen.

### Chapter 143

"How long have I been in here?" asked Jirra.

"Seven hours," replied Liz as she looked up at the clock.

Jirra sighed. "I don't like to do something that I enjoy for seven straight hours. Is everything okay?"

Dr Lennox nodded. "Yes, but sometimes it just takes longer; after all it's up to the baby. But it looks like the baby has made up her mind and is on the way."

"About time," grumbled Jirra.

"Hang in there Jirra," said Liz. "You can't rush Mother Nature."

Jirra nodded.

"Okay Jirra, just follow my instructions and most importantly listen to your body," said Dr. Lennox.

"Is everything still normal?" asked Jirra.

Dr. Lennox nodded.

Jirra winced as another contraction hit.

"They're definitely getting stronger," she said.

"Hang in there Roo, it will all be over soon," said Liz.

Jirra looked up at her mom and tried to smile.

### Chapter 144

Beth stood up and stretched.

"I was hoping that she would have a quick and simple labor," said Beth.

Jen looked up from her book and nodded.

"The important thing is that both Jirra and the baby are healthy," said Faith.

Max was asleep next to her.

Beth nodded. "I know."

A nurse stepped out into the waiting area.

"Excuse me," she said. "Are you friends of Jirra Reid-Eden?"

Faith nudged Max awake and they all stood up.

"Yes we are," replied Celeste.

The nurse smiled. "She just had the baby and everything is fine."

"Really?" asked Beth excitedly.

"Yes, it's a girl, six pounds, ten ounces," said the nurse.

"Thank you for letting us know," said Faith.

The nurse nodded.

"Um, as it was a long delivery you won't be able to see her until later today, so you might as well go home," said the nurse.

Beth looked at her watch. "Wow, it's after two in the morning."

"What time will we be allowed to see her?" asked Faith.

"I wouldn't come back until after ten," said the nurse. "She's pretty exhausted and will probably want to sleep for a while."

"Thank you," said Faith. "Um is there a decent place to eat around here?"

The nurse nodded. "There's a great diner just around the block, they're open twenty-four hours and they serve breakfast all the time."

"Sounds perfect, thank you," said Faith. "Anyone want to join Max and me?"

Beth, Celeste and Jen all nodded.

Jen turned to the nurse. "Um, would you tell Alexis or Dr. Reid to call Jen when they get a chance?"

"I will," said the nurse.

## Chapter 145

Jen and the others shared a booth at the dinner and were looking over the menus when Jen's phone rang.

"Hello Liz, how's everything?" asked Jen.

"Jirra's asleep as is the baby," said Liz. "It was a long one, but thankfully both are healthy and none the worse for the experience."

"That's great to hear. Well, I'm with Beth, Celeste, Faith, and Max. We're around the corner from the hospital at a diner. Do you want us to come get you?"

"Not necessary, I'm not hungry. Alexis is asleep next to Jirra, as are Stella and Logan. Dr. Lennox is bringing in a cot for me," said Liz.

"Okay, we'll back later this morning," said Jen. "Do you need anything?"

"Just some sleep," replied Liz as she yawned. "I'm glad that so many of Jirra's friends came up here. I know she'll be glad to see you."

"Okay Liz, you get some sleep and we'll see you later today," said Jen.

Jen set her phone down.

"Well, it's too bad that this place doesn't serve drinks as I would love to make a toast to Jirra," said Jen.

The night manager walked over to their table.

"I couldn't help but overhear your conversation, is there a reason to celebrate?" he asked.

"A good friend of ours just had a baby," said Beth.

The manager nodded. "Excuse me, I'll be right back."

He returned a few minutes later with a bottle of red wine and a tray of juice glasses.

"We keep a few bottles in the back for just these sort of events," he said. "Don't worry, it's on the house. Sorry about the glasses, but we don't have a liquor license here."

"This will do nicely! Thank you so much," said Jen.

"No problem, I just ask one...make that two small favors," asked the manager.

"What are they?" asked Beth.

"If you're Jennifer Stevens the actress, I would love an autograph," asked the manager.

"Sure," she replied. "What do you want me to sign?"

He handed her a menu and a Sharpie.

“Great, and what’s your name?” asked Jen.

“George,” he replied.

Jen signed the menu and handed it back to him.

“Thanks a lot,” he said.

“What’s the second request?” asked Jen as she handed Max the bottle to open.

George turned to Faith. “Are you Faith Collins the writer?”

Faith nodded.

George smiled and ran over to the front counter and retrieved a hardback edition of Faith’s latest Erin Flynn mystery.

“Could you please sign it? I’ve read every one of your books,” he said.

“Of course,” replied Faith as she took out a pen. She then handed the book back to him.

“Thank you so much,” said George. “Your food will be out here shortly.”

Max opened the bottle and filled everyone’s glass.

“To Jirra,” he stated as he stood up.

The others followed suit and touched glasses.

## Chapter 146

Jirra woke up later that morning. She was sore and a bit groggy from the drugs but she couldn’t help but smile as she saw Stella and Logan holding the baby.

“Well look who finally woke up,” said Alexis as she placed a kiss on Jirra’s forehead.

“Hi,” said Jirra weakly.

“How’re you feeling?” asked Alexis.

“All things considered, not bad,” replied Jirra as she looked around the room. “Hi Mom.”

“Good morning,” said Liz. “You were wonderful, Roo.”

“Thanks Mom,” said Jirra. “Um, how’s the baby?”

“She’s perfect,” said Stella. “Do you want to hold her?”

Jirra nodded as she sat up.

Stella carefully placed the infant in Jirra’s arms.

“Wow, she was in me?” asked Jirra.

“It’s pretty amazing isn’t it?” said Alexis.

“What’s her name?” asked Jirra.

“We decided on Andrea... after your friend,” said Stella.

“Really?” asked Jirra. “That’s very nice of you.”

Dr. Lennox walked in and greeted everyone.

“I see that you’re doing well. How do you feel?” asked Dr. Lennox.

“Wore out and a bit sore, but overall not bad,” said Jirra.

“I’m pleased to hear that,” said Dr. Lennox. “That was a long labor you went through.”

“So when do I get to go home?”

“Baring any complications, tomorrow,” said Dr. Lennox.

“That’s fine,” said Jirra. “I don’t feel like doing much right now anyway.”

“You have a bunch of friends out in the waiting area, I don’t mind you seeing them, but let’s keep it short, you need your rest,” said Dr. Lennox.

“Okay, and thanks for everything,” said Jirra.

“It was my pleasure,” said Dr. Lennox.

## Chapter 147

Beth and the others came into Jirra’s room a few minutes later.

“Hi,” said Jirra.

“Dr. Lennox was right, you do look exhausted,” said Beth.

“It was a long night,” replied Jirra as she pointed towards Logan and Stella who was holding Andrea. “But it was worth it.”

“Oh my god, she’s gorgeous,” said Beth.

Jirra nodded.

Celeste walked over and gave Jirra a hug.

“We won’t stay long...we promised Dr. Lennox,” said Celeste.

“It’s okay,” said Jirra. “Just don’t think of me as rude if I fall asleep on you.”

Jen, Faith and Max came over next.

“She’s a lovely baby,” said Faith.

“Stella, have you and Logan picked a name for her?” asked Jen.

When Stella told them, Beth began to cry.

“You okay?” asked Celeste.

“These are tears of joy,” said Beth. “You couldn’t have given her a greater honor, thank you Stella.”

“You’re welcome,” said Stella.

As they talked Jirra drifted back to sleep.

## Chapter 148

When Jirra awoke the only people in her room were Alexis and Liz.

“Where did everyone go? I closed my eyes for a moment and they all disappeared,” said Jirra.

“You’ve been a sleep for three hours,” said Liz.

Jirra nodded as she sat up.

“How’re you feeling?” asked Alexis.

“Better,” said Jirra. “Also hungry.”

“We can take care of that, do you have any preferences?” asked Liz.

“Believe it or not, I’d love a hot dog,” admitted Jirra.

“I’ll go down to the cafeteria and see what I can turn up,” said Liz.

“Thanks Mom. Oh, where are Logan, Stella, and Andrea?”

“They’re back in their room,” said Liz.

“Oh, that makes sense,” said Jirra.

“I’ll be back shortly. Do you want anything Alexis?”

“Just a cup of coffee please,” she replied.

Liz nodded and departed the room.

Alexis leaned down and gave Jirra a kiss.

“You did the right thing,” said Alexis as she held Jirra’s hands.

“I know...but there’s a small part of me that wishes we had kept her,” admitted Jirra.

“I know, I saw it in your eyes when you held her,” said Alexis. “It’s only natural.”

Jirra nodded. “But when I saw Stella and Logan with her I know they’ll be a great family. Maybe some day when she’s older we can talk.”

“Of course,” said Alexis.

“Are the others still around?”

“They went back to their hotel. They’ll see you tomorrow,” said Alexis.

“Okay,” said Jirra as she yawned.

“Ready for another nap?”

“Not until I eat,” replied Jirra with a wink. “I can’t wait to go home with you, I love you so much.”

“And I love you Roo,” replied Alexis as she kissed Jirra again.

## Chapter 149

“It feels good to be home,” said Jirra as she sat down on the couch.

“Yes it does,” said Alexis.

“What’s the wonderful aroma?” asked Jirra as she looked around.

“That would be Max cooking chicken on the grill,” said Alexis.

Jirra looked up to see Beth and Celeste walking in from the back deck.

“Hey, what’s going on?” asked Jirra.

“We’re just putting together a little welcome home feast for you,” said Beth.

“Max, Faith and your mom are out the deck cooking the chicken,” said Celeste.

“Well I hope it’s ready soon, I’m starving,” said Jirra as she stood up.

“Why don’t you stay there and rest,” suggested Jen who was setting the table.

“I’m fine,” replied Jirra as she walked over to help Jen set the table. “Actually I feel great.”

Jen nodded knowingly.

“Still, take it easy, you’re treading on new ground here,” said Jen.

“I know,” replied Jirra. “But it feels good to be able to move around again.”

“Later when you’ve had some time to adjust I’d like to talk to you about all this,” said Jen.

“You mean having a baby?” asked Jirra.

Jen nodded. “Not that I’m about to do it, but I am curious.”

“Sure, but I will tell you this, it was a very rewarding experience...I truly feel like a woman now.”

## Chapter 150

Over the next two weeks Jirra began to work out to get her body back into shape. When she wasn’t at the gym she was on the set of Alexis’s show watching them shoot the episode that she wrote.

During breaks she worked on Andrea’s story on her laptop. She wanted to have the first book done by the memorial service. In addition to the fictionalized version, she was also writing the true account. Of course this adaptation would only be seen by Beth and her father. Jirra was surprised by how easy it was to write the stories. She also noticed how much she enjoyed doing it. When she finished her put the stories on a set of flash drives.

There was one more bit of good news as Max called and told her that Neil Sanders had been arrested and arraigned for a variety of financial fraud charges. A mysterious tip had led to evidence that was solid and the more the investigators looked the more they found.

The show finished the last scenes on the Wednesday before the memorial service.

They hit the road early the next morning.

“We have plenty of time to get there,” said Alexis. “After the memorial service we can stop and see my family...and now your family.”

Jirra smiled back. "I like hearing that. I can't wait to see them; they've all been so nice."

"I know, even my less than open-minded sister Trish has been slowly coming around," said Alexis.

"Do you think that they believe the cover story about my gender?" asked Jirra.

"More or less. But I know that you can tell my parents the truth, also Sue, Rick, and Harry. I wouldn't tell Trish, she's just getting used to the fact that I'm married to another woman," said Alexis. "No rush, but we should tell them before we start our own family."

"Okay," said Jirra.

"I'm so looking forward to this break," said Alexis.

"I'm sure you are," said Jirra. "So have you decided about extending?"

"I'm thinking about it. I love doing the show...but it isn't just my decision," she said.

"I think you should do it until you get tired of it. I mean you're the perfect Erin Flynn and there's no end to good stories."

"Especially when I'm sleeping with one of the writers," said Alexis with a grin.

"Who's that?" countered Jirra.

Alexis reached over and gently gave Jirra a punch in the arm that was more of a tap.

"I'm so happy that you're going to work on the show...but I still want you to finish college. I can't wait to see you graduate," said Alexis.

"What about you? I mean aren't you a few credits shy of your degree?"

Alexis nodded. "Nine to be exact."

"I thought it was fifteen?"

"It was," said Alexis. "I've been taking a class a semester at Boston University. They've been very understanding. It was going to be a surprise."

"So when will you be done?" asked Jirra.

"Next spring. I figure we can alternate going to each other's graduation ceremonies," said Alexis.

"It's a deal," replied Jirra. "BU huh, good school. But why not go to Harvard?"

"I figured one Ivy League snob in the family is enough," quipped Alexis.

Jirra gave her a playful punch.

“Wow, you even punch like an elitist snob!”

“Just wait until we stop for the night, I’ll show you what an Ivy Leaguer can do!”

Alexis glanced over and blew a kiss. “I can’t wait.”

## Chapter 151

Beth brought the Stearman Model 75 biplane in for a smooth landing. She then glanced over at the plane’s owner who nodded approvingly.

Tom Anderson motioned for her to taxi the plane over to its parking position.

“You handled her well,” he stated as she got out of the cockpit. “Very impressive, you have a real feel for her.”

“It’s a dream to fly,” she replied.

“I have to admit that I was wrong,” said Tom.

“Why, because I’m a girl?” asked Beth with a smile as she pulled off her helmet.

“That’s part of it, but more due to your age. I don’t see many college coeds, especially Ivy Leaguers, who are interested in flying an old training biplane,” he said. “No offense.”

“None taken,” she replied. “I was getting my license when I was asked to learn how to fly a biplane.”

“Why?”

“A family friend recently passed away. She grew up around here and learned to fly before she was twelve,” explained Beth. “She asked me to spread her ashes over the field where she first soloed.”

“Where?”

Beth pulled out her chart and showed him.

“I know that the field is gone,” said Beth. “It reverted back to farm land during World War II.”

Tom nodded.

“Anyway her family will be there to watch,” said Beth.

“What was her name?” he asked.

“Andrea Carlson,” replied Beth.

He nodded. "I hope you don't plan on trying to spread the ashes yourself."

Beth shook her head. "My boyfriend is going to do that. Her son was her first choice but he decided to keep his feet on the ground."

"Okay," he replied.

"We have the permission of the farmer who owns the land...and the local authorities," continued Beth.

"How'd you manage that? Most of the time I just do it and hope no one finds out," he said with a grin.

"She was a very remarkable woman and she had a lot of powerful friends."

"That'll do it," he said.

"Would you like to watch?" asked Beth. "There's going to be a special surprise for the family."

"What's that?" "You're not going to try some stupid stunt with my plane?" he asked.

"Of course not. No, there will be another aircraft flying over the field after I make the pass," said Beth.

"What kind?" asked Tom.

"Show up on Saturday and you'll see," said Beth with a wink.

## Chapter 152

Jirra and Alexis arrived at the General Denver in Wilmington Ohio.

"Apparently Celeste arranged for rooms for everyone. There's going to be a special dinner in Andrea's honor Saturday night," said Jirra. "The question is who was General Denver?"

"So much for an Ivy league education," quipped Alexis as they walked into the hotel. "He has a little city named after him in Colorado, you may have heard of it."

"Really, this is the same guy?" asked Jirra.

Alexis nodded.

"So why is there a hotel in Ohio named after him?" asked Jirra.

"He grew up around here and I believe he's buried here," said Alexis.

"He's over in the Sugar Grove Cemetery," said the young woman behind the front desk.

"I was just educating her on Ohio history," said Alexis.

The woman smiled. "And we appreciate that Ms. Eden. By the way, I love your show."

"Thank you, Carol," replied Alexis as she read the woman's nametag.

"Are you here with the Carlson event?" asked Carol who was a short pleasant looking woman with dark brown hair.

"Yes we are," replied Alexis.

Carol typed into the computer and printed out the room information.

"We have your suite as requested," said Carol.

"Thank you," replied Alexis.

"Um, if it isn't too much of a bother, can I get a photo with you?" asked Carol.

Alexis nodded. "Of course."

"Thank you," said Carol. "Oh, by the way, I think it's so cool that you two got married. Don't worry about the people around here, most are pretty decent about these things."

### Chapter 153

The next morning Jirra and Alexis caught up with Celeste, Sean, Jim, and Beth at breakfast.

Alexis turned to Beth "Excited?"

"Absolutely," she replied. "Especially because Jim is going to ride with me."

Jim nodded. "It's pretty cool."

"I can't wait to see it," said Jirra.

"It should be a pretty good show," said Beth. "I just hope we get into a good position to video the Spitfire when it passes over. Jim is taking up a camcorder."

"Well, we'll do our best to get some good shots from ground level," said Celeste.

Beth looked around. "Where's Jen? I thought she was coming."

"She promised that she'd be here," said Alexis.

Beth glanced at her watch. "Well, I need to get out to the airport and do my preflight checks. You ready Jim?"

He stood up and saluted her.

“Carry on,” she replied with a laugh.

## Chapter 154

The location of the old airfield was twenty minutes away and Jeff Carlson had arranged for vans to take everyone out there.

As they got into the vans Jirra was pleased to see that over sixty members of Andrea’s family had showed up for the service.

Jirra and Alexis were just about to get into the van with Celeste and Sean when a Hummer pulled up into the parking lot.

“That can only be one person,” said Alexis.

Jen stepped out of the rented Hummer and waved.

“I have a surprise,” said Jen as she greeted them.

“What?” asked Jirra.

Out of the Hummer stepped Faith, Max, Diana, Margaret Torrey, and Paula.

Celeste jumped out of the van and hugged Margaret.

“Surprised to see me?” asked Margaret.

“Absolutely,” said Celeste.

“Well, Andrea was a dear friend and I wouldn’t miss this for the world,” said Margaret.

“I’m glad that you could make it too, Paula,” said Celeste.

“It’s the least I can do for her,” replied Paula.

“Well we better get in the van or we’ll be left behind,” said Alexis.

Once inside the van Diana turned to Jirra.

“You look great,” she said.

“I’ve been working out daily to get rid of the extra weight I picked up,” replied Jirra.

“Well I think you look super. I was pleased to hear that everything went well,” said Diana.

“It was an incredible experience,” replied Jirra. “I’m pleased that baby Andrea has such loving parents.”

“Still it couldn’t have been easy to give her up.”

“It wasn’t, but it was the right thing to do,” said Jirra.

“The right thing is always the hardest thing to do,” said Diana.

## Chapter 155

Tom greeted Beth and Jim at the airport. It was a beautiful June day, warm with just a few high puffy clouds.

“Everything is ready to go. My crewman will assist you,” said Tom. “You couldn’t have asked for better weather.”

Beth smiled back. “Thanks for everything. This is my fiancé, Jim.”

Tom shook hands with Jim.

“Pleased to meet you,” said Tom. “Looking forward to the flight?”

Jim nodded. “This will be my first time up with her.”

“You’ll be in good hands,” said Tom. “She’s a damn fine pilot.”

“Among other things,” said Jim.

Beth smiled at him.

“Beth, you have me curious about what this surprise is that you have planned,” said Tom.

“So are you going to watch?” asked Beth.

“If only to make sure you don’t abuse my baby,” he replied with a grin.

“I’ll treat her like the fine lady she is,” said Beth.

“I know you will. Oh, I have something for you,” he said as he walked over to his car. He reached inside the trunk and pulled out a flight bag. “This is for you.”

Beth cocked her head in curiosity as she unzipped the flight bag.

Inside was a leather flight jacket with her name embroidered on it. There was a patch of the plane on the opposite side. There was also an old leather flight helmet with a set of goggles.

“It might be a bit warm for the jacket, but it will look great,” he said.

“This is wonderful, thank you,” she stammered as he gave him a hug.

“So is what you’re doing for your family friend...I talked to a friend who was a spook and he told me a little bit about Andrea Carlson,” he replied. “Now try on the coat and see if it’s the right size.”

Beth slipped on the coat, it was a perfect fit.

“Try on the helmet,” he said. “It’s been adapted with a modern headset.”

Beth put it on, tucking her hair underneath.

“Not bad, but you’re missing one thing,” he said as he handed her a white silk scarf.

“Wow, thanks again,” she said as he wrapped it around her neck.

“I got into this business because I loved flying and I loved the history...it’s rewarding to meet someone like you that also cares for honoring a heroine like Andrea Carlson,” he said. “Enjoy the flight, but don’t do anything stupid! That crate is my girl!”

Beth smiled and hugged him again.

“See you later,” he said.

## Chapter 156

Andrea’s family and guests were scanning the sky from the designated observation area. A few curious neighbors had also joined them.

“What direction is she supposed to come from?” asked Max.

“I’m not sure,” said Celeste. “But that man with the radio might know.”

Max walked over to Tom and introduced himself. Jeff joined them and they talked for a few minutes and then Max returned.

“You were right, he’s the owner and he’s in contact with Beth. Jeff is going to make an announcement,” explained Max.

Jeff then picked up bullhorn.

“May I have your attention please? The aircraft that Beth Williams is flying will be arriving shortly. It’s a Stearman Model 75 biplane and is painted bright yellow with US Navy markings on it so it will be easy to spot. The owner of the aircraft, Mr. Tom Anderson said that Beth had just taken off and should be approaching from the east in ten minutes,” said Jeff.

Everyone began to take out cameras and binoculars.

“Beth will make three passes before she releases Andrea’s ashes,” continued Jeff. “Then she will loiter to the right and a second aircraft will make a series of passes to honor Andrea.”

The minutes slowly ticked down until Tom pointed towards the horizon.

The crowd watched as the yellow biplane slowly approached.

“What a great looking plane,” commented Max.

From the moment she had taken off Beth felt nervous. It was so important to her to properly honor Andrea and the last thing she wanted to do was mess up. However as soon as she approached the field she felt a sensation of calmness sweep through her body. It was as if Andrea was there watching over her.

“This is for you Gran,” she whispered to herself.

Beth made a slow pass over the crowd and then did a large looping turn. Her silk scarf was fluttering in the wind.

“She looks like a World War I flying ace,” noted Jirra.

“How cool,” said Alexis.

“Now that’s flying in style,” commented Jen.

“Very classy,” added Celeste.

Even though Beth was still concentrating on her flying she was also enjoying herself immensely. Looking down, she could see the crowd that had gathered to watch her fly to honor Andrea, which made it all worthwhile.

After two more passes she called Tom on the radio.

“Okay, this is the one,” she said.

“Roger; I’ll tell them,” he replied. “You’re doing great Kid.”

Beth slowly brought the old biplane around and when the time was right she signaled Jim who reached out and released Andrea’s ashes.

Jirra felt tears roll down her face as she watched. She glanced over and saw that many of Andrea’s family were also crying, including Jeff.

Beth momentarily glanced up and pointed to the sky. “I love you Gran.”

“Thank you, dear,” said a voice that only Beth heard.

Beth glanced around for a moment before smiling. As she headed to the waiting area she waggled her wings slowly.

Tom couldn't help but smile. He was very critical of anyone who flew his aircraft, but he could find few flaws with the way Beth handled it. She obviously had one of those natural touches in the air. He also liked the fact that he could see that she had a confident grin on her face.

"Nice job, Kid," he said into the radio.

"Thanks," she replied.

On the ground, Celeste contacted Jim Rousch.

"We're ready for you," said Celeste. "The other aircraft has cleared the area."

"Roger, I will be there in ten minutes," he replied. "I will be approaching from the east."

Celeste walked over and told Jeff.

"Excuse me," announced Jeff. "While all of you know that Andrea had a very interesting life, only a small number of you know that she was once a member of the Royal Canadian Air Force during the Second World War. The details of her duties are still classified, but we wanted to appropriately honor her service. Please keep your eyes to the right."

Tom heard the plane before the others did and he immediately recognized the sound of the Rolls Royce Merlin engine. He broke out in a huge smile. "Well I'll be damned, how'd they managed to pull this off!"

It is often said that the Supermarine Spitfire was one of the most beautiful warplanes ever built and few would argue that fact even today.

While the Stearman had gently passed over the field that had once been an airfield, the Spitfire screamed across it. Few in the crowd knew that the plane had been repainted especially for honoring Andrea. The Spitfire proudly wore the same markings as the Spitfire that Flying Officer Andrew Baker had last flown.

From her aerial observation point Beth broke out in a huge smile as she watched the sleek war bird streak across the Ohio sky.

"Please tell me you got that," she said to Jim.

"Don't worry Beth," he replied. "What a beautiful plane."

The Spitfire made several more passes before making a very low run across the field. As it passed by the crowd Jim Rousch waggled his wings before departing.

Beth waited for the fighter plane to depart the area and then she made one last pass, repeating the waggling of wings that the Spitfire had done. She also realized that Andrea had left her with a very special gift... the joy of flying.

## Chapter 157

That night Beth had to face something more difficult than flying and that was pretending not to know her own family. Thankfully her original father was there, giving her the occasional look of encouragement.

She also had Jim and her friends to fall back on for support.

At the dinner she sat at a table with Jim, Celeste, Sean, Jirra, Alexis, Margaret, Paula, Faith, Max, and Diana.

The hotel had set up a large monitor to show the videos of the ceremony. Jen had spent an hour editing the videos onto one continuous loop.

"That was incredible," said Celeste as she watched video of the biplane make a pass over the crowd.

"It was a fitting tribute to Andrea," said Beth. "It was really cool seeing the Spitfire fly over you."

"It was impressive," said Max. "Thank you for inviting us."

"It seemed fitting," said Beth.

"So when are you heading back?" asked Faith.

"Jim and I are leaving tomorrow and we're going to head to DC to spend some time with my family," said Beth.

"That's nice; what about you Celeste?" asked Faith.

"Sean and I are heading back to Philly and then we're flying to Europe for the summer," she replied.

"Just the two of you?" asked Max.

"Three, we're taking Spirit the wonder dog," said Sean.

"It only makes sense, she's always wanted to see Paris," added Celeste.

"Oh my god! Celeste told a joke!" exclaimed Beth.

The rest of the table laughed.

“Well, I know that Spirit will be an excellent ambassador,” added Margaret.

“We’re heading up to Toledo for a few days to spend some time with Alexis’s family and then we’re off to the spa for a few weeks,” said Jirra.

“We really need to go out there,” said Max.

Faith nodded.

“Just let me know when,” said Jirra.

“Call me before you do, I can let you use my cottage,” said Jen.

“Thank you, that’s very thoughtful,” said Faith.

“My pleasure,” replied Jen.

“So what’s on your plate this summer Jen?” asked Diana.

“I’ll be in LA subbing for Wayne Zachery on Around Midnight for a month or so while he’s on his vacation,” said Jen. “I might even be able to get back to my home in upstate New York for a little while.”

“So Paula, how do you like working at the foundation?” asked Jirra.

“It’s wonderful,” replied Paula. “Thank you so much, Celeste, for hiring me.”

“It was my pleasure,” replied Celeste.

“What about you Diana?” asked Alexis.

“Kari and I are renovating the living room this summer,” said Diana. “We’re bringing in some local contractors to do the big stuff, but Kari and I want to do the painting ourselves.”

“And that’s fun?” asked Celeste.

“Not really,” confessed Diana. “But it does mean that I get to spend more time with Kari...and that is very fun.”

“Oh, one more thing,” interjected Jirra. “Alexis and I are going to have a more formal ceremony in early September out at the house on the Cape. We would like all of you to be there.”

“We wouldn’t miss it for the world,” said Faith.

“When you say a more formal ceremony, what exactly do you mean?” asked Beth.

“Just what you think it means,” said Jirra. “Don’t worry the bridesmaid’s gowns won’t be that bad.”

## Chapter 158

As the party ended, Jeff Carlson approached Beth.

"I finally have a chance to talk to you in private," he stated. "You were wonderful today, Beth."

She smiled back and after glancing around to see if anyone was watching she hugged him. "Thanks, Dad," she whispered.

"I just wish that the others knew the significance of the markings on the Spitfire. How did Celeste pull that off?" he asked.

"The owner of the plane needed an overhaul and Celeste paid for it on the condition that he used the markings for Flying Officer Andrew Baker's plane," she said.

"And how did you find that out?" asked Jeff.

"It was all Celeste's doing," said Beth. "She said all it took was a few phone calls."

"You definitely have surrounded yourself with good people," he said. "Now, the important question, just how serious are you and your young man?"

Beth smiled back. "I think he's the one...um, that must be strange to hear me say that."

He shook his head. "Not at all, Beth. I know you have your own life now...and I'm glad that you have someone in it. I'm so proud of you and how you've overcome everything that has happened."

"Thanks again, Dad."

He nodded. "It was a good day; I think that Mom would have loved it."

"I know she did," said Beth. "I know it sounds weird, but I think she was up there with me today."

"I like to think that she was," he replied.

"Oh, I want to give you this," she said as she handed him the flash drive.

"What's this?" he asked.

"Gran asked Jirra to write her life story. This is the first book and covers her life in the RCAF, the POW camp, and the escape. There are two versions, one is fictionalized and will be published, and the second is the true story. From what I've read, it's excellent," said Beth. "The fictionalized version is very good, but I prefer the real story."

Jeff smiled back as he slipped the drive into his pocket. "I can't wait to read them."

“Jirra is going to start writing the next book soon and it will cover her years in the Danish Resistance,” said Beth.

“That’s great to hear,” he replied. “I’m so happy that I have you back in my life.”

“So am I,” replied Beth. “It was one more gift from Gran.”

They hugged once more before departing.

## Chapter 159

Jirra let out a contented sigh as she snuggled up against Alexis in bed.

“That was wonderful,” she said.

“I thought so,” replied Alexis. “In all it was a fantastic day.”

Jirra nodded.

“So are you nervous about seeing the family tomorrow?” asked Alexis.

“A little...I mean this will be the first time that they’ve seen us since we got married,” said Jirra. “But only a little...I mean after this past year I think I can take on anything.”

“It did have its rough spots...but a lot of good came out of it too,” said Alexis.

Jirra nodded. “I know. Stella and Logan finally have a family...and today was a wonderful tribute to Andrea.”

“I’m so proud of how you handled all this, Roo,” said Alexis as she kissed Jirra. “I’m so in love with you.”

“And I love you too,” replied Jirra.

Alexis pulled Jirra closer.

“Let’s hope that we can have a nice relaxing vacation...I think we’re owed that considering everything that has happened,” said Alexis.

“So do I, but I even if we do I have a feeling that it’ll just be a short reprieve. I’m getting used to the idea of having an unconventional life,” replied Jirra. “And to be honest, I can’t imagine it any other way.”

**The End  
(For Now)**

## List of Characters

Tessa Phoenix Barnard - was once a retired US Navy SEAL named Jason Blackthorn. Jason was killed and resurrected as a woman by the Goddess Athena to seek revenge against the killers. She is currently married to writer Jonathan Barnard. (Revenge of the Goddess: Athena's Assassin.)

Jonathan Barnard - Investigative reporter for the Boston Globe and writer of several bestselling books on crime and corruption. His wife is Tessa Phoenix Barnard, who was once a man named Jason Blackthorn. Jason was killed and resurrected as a woman by the goddess Athena to seek revenge against the killers. (Revenge of the Goddess: Athena's Assassin.)

Diana Bowie - As a teenage boy, Darren was abused and blackmailed into being a feminized sex slave. Fearing for his life, he ran away and was rescued by his aunt, the novelist, Faith Collins. Darren became Diana, and was raised by Faith and her husband Max Bowie, a detective and sometimes federal agent. Diana became a famous author and reporter, and is currently teaching journalism at University of PA. Diana currently lives with her lover Kari, a chef and restaurant owner in New Hope, PA. Kari's restaurant is called The Drunken Squirrel. (Corruption, Double Jeopardy, Coeds)

Max Bowie - Private detective and sometimes agent for the Agency. Married to Faith Collins in the 1980s and for all practical purposes is Diana's adopted father. (Corruption, Double Jeopardy, Band of Sisters)

Andrea Carlson - Born Andrew Baker of Cincinnati Ohio. When WWII broke but he crossed into Canada and joined the RCAF. Andy was assigned to a fighter squadron and was shot down. Selected to assist in an escape from a German POW camp, he took on the role of a young woman to assist a British agent. Andy stayed in Denmark to assist the resistance and became Andrea. Later, after SRS, she moved back to the states and became an agent in the CIA and later the Agency. She married and adopted several children. Ben Carlson/Beth Williams is her grandchild. She is currently in her 90s and living in her penthouse apartment in NYC. (A Different Kind of Freedom, The Protector Series)

Lindsey Dylan - Jirra's best friend back in New Mexico. Lindsey is currently studying to be a chef and follow in her mother Hannah's footsteps. Her father Cody runs the outdoor activities at the spa. (Fresh Start, Fresh Start 2, Coeds)

Alexis Eden - Onetime college student and currently movie and TV star. She is the star of the Erin Flynn series being filmed in Boston. While on vacation in New Mexico, she fell in love with Jirra. They are currently engaged. Her parents, Helen and Harold Finster live in Toledo Ohio. Her sister Sue is married to Rick, a chef and they have a little boy named Jimmy and an Irish setter named Marley. Sue and Rick are both very accepting of Alexis and Jirra. Her other sister Trish is less open-minded and is engaged to an insurance salesman named Bill. Alexis's younger brother Harry is a student at Ohio State. Alexis has two sisters and a younger brother. (Fresh Start & Coeds series)

Celeste Farnsworth - Originally Jeremy Green; was abducted and feminized by Margo Simon. Celeste was then sold to Sherman Farnsworth, a self-made millionaire. Instead of using her as a sex slave, Celeste became his wife. Sherman dies of a heart attack and Celeste used his wealth to create a foundation for abused transgendered teens. She currently attends Penn and lives with Beth Williams

and Spirit, her dog. She is dating a man named Sean McClain. (Combined Forces, Celestial Awakenings, Coeds)

Spirit Farnsworth - Mixed-breed dog (Labrador-Chesapeake) who was given to Celeste by her neighbor on Long Island, Margaret Torrey. (Celestial Awakenings, Coeds)

Rachel Greene- Born Richard Greene, he was abducted, transformed, and brainwashed by Max Prendergast, his old high school theater coach. Her transformation was further assisted by Heidi Walsh. Rachel's best friend in school, Ken Marcus helped track her down and she was rescued by The Agency. Ken Marcus's uncle is Steve Williams. (Mentor)

Cat Hawkins - Originally from Golden Hill, PA. Plans on joining the FBI following graduation from Penn. Her best friend in high school is a transgendered girl named Erika Walters. Cat is currently engaged to Matt. (The Scholarship, Coeds)

Aileen Munro- A cousin of Iona Beddau, Aileen lives in Rhode Island and works as a doctor. She is currently living with her lover, Cailin McGregor. Cailin was once a male who was willingly transformed into a woman so she could act as a surrogate mother for her sister (Twins)

Jirra Reid - Born Josh Reid and was transformed into a girl at age eighteen in a freak accident at a spa in New Mexico. Josh was taking a hot mud bath in a large copper caldron; a lightning strike transferred him physically into a female. Jirra is still trying to find balance as she adapts to being female. Her nickname is Roo, a take off on her new name which means kangaroo. (Fresh Start, Fresh Start 2, Coeds)

Dr. Liz Reid - Jirra's mother, she is currently working as the staff physician at The Caldera de Gaia Spa in New Mexico. Her husband and Jirra's father was an army officer killed in Afghanistan. Liz is currently engaged to Dr. Dan Montgomery, who is in charge of studying the Anasazi archeological sites located near the spa. (Fresh Start, Fresh Start 2, Coeds)

Erika Walters - TG friend of Cat and the heroine of The Scholarship. (The Scholarship, Coeds)

Carla Walters -Brown- Assistant DA in Philadelphia. One of her brothers Brett married Cat's mother. Her other brother, Sam married Erika's mother. (The Scholarship, Coeds)

Beth Williams- While serving in the navy, LT Ben Carlson was transformed into a teenage girl by Dr. Martz, through a DNA process. Beth was adopted by two federal agents, Maggie and Steve Williams. Beth has also served as an agent, although she is now currently a fulltime student. Beth is currently dating a fellow Penn student named Jim Buchwalter. (Change of Course I-IV, Combined Forces, The Protector Series, Coeds)

Nina Vasquez – Served in the marines and then as a police officer in Virginia, currently works for the Boudicca Detective Company. (Double Jeopardy, Coeds)

Special Guest

Jennifer "Jen" Stevens - Born Robert Stevens. Transformed by a lightning strike over a period of about three weeks while unconscious in the hospital. Her transformation was leaked to the public during her hospital stay. Jen left her old job and became a successful TV and movie star and is now producing movies. Substitute hosts the "Around Midnight" talk show. A friend and mentor to Jirra Reid after meeting her a few months after her transformation. Long time friend of Alexis Eden after meeting her while Jen was hosting the talk show. Jen Stevens adventures are chronicled in Bob Arnold's Zapped! series and she is used here with his permission.

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Spitfire [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Supermarine\\_Spitfire](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Supermarine_Spitfire)

Robert B. Parker <http://www.robertbparker.net/>

A great writer who passed away this earlier this year. I highly recommend that you read his books.

Big Jake <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0066831/>

#### **Semi Authentic but Damn Good Kinda Mexican Dinner**

##### **First Course:**

- **Chicken Tortilla Soup - Sopa Azteca**

##### **Dinner:**

- **Enchiladas Con Queso**
- **Red Rice**
- **Salad**

##### **Limeade & Beer**

##### **Chicken Tortilla Soup - Sopa Azteca**

1 large dried pasilla chili, stemmed and seeded

One 15-ounce can diced fire-roasted tomatoes in juice

4 cups chicken broth (low sodium)

1 medium white onion, sliced 1/4-inch thick

2 garlic cloves, peeled

2 whole boneless, skinless chicken breasts; cut into 1/2-inch cubes

2/3 cup + 2 tablespoons corn oil

12 6-inch diameter corn tortillas

#### Garnish

1-1/2 cups shredded **Chihuahua cheese** or mild cheddar

1 cup sour cream

1 large lime, cut into 6 wedges

1 large ripe avocado, pitted, flesh scooped from the skin and cut into 1/4-inch cubes

Fresh cilantro, chopped.

#### Directions

Toast the chili by turning it an inch or two above an open flame for a few seconds. Cool the **chili, break into pieces**, and put in a blender jar along with the canned tomatoes and their juice. Wash your hands!

Heat 2 tablespoons of the oil in a medium (4-quart) saucepan over medium. Add the onion and garlic and cook, stirring frequently, until golden, about 10 minutes. Scoop up the onion and garlic with a slotted spoon, pressing them against the side of the pan to leave behind as much oil as possible, and add to the blender. Process until smooth.

Return the pan to medium-high heat. When hot, add the chili/tomato puree and stir until thickened to the consistency of tomato paste, about 6 minutes. Add the chicken broth. Reduce the heat to medium-low and simmer for 15 minutes. Taste and season with salt.

Meanwhile, cut the tortillas into strips ¼ inch wide and about 1 inch long. Heat the 2/3 cup of oil in a heavy skillet until hot. Add the tortillas and toss until golden. Remove with slotted spoon and drain on paper towels.

Ten minutes before serving, add the chicken to the broth and simmer.

Ladle the soup into bowls, top with the toasted tortilla chips.

Pass the garnishes

## **Enchiladas Con Queso**

Favorite Enchilada Sauce

Canned green chills, chopped

Yellow onion, peeled and chopped

Salt & pepper

Corn Tortillas

Cooked and Shredded Chicken (or beef)

Grated Jack cheese

Cream Cheese

Pre Assembly:

Have your shredded chicken or beef ready to go, plan on about 3 T of meat per enchilada. Buying a rotisserie chicken is acceptable.

Sauté the onion in oil until softened. Add the chilies. Turn off heat and set aside.

Grate Jack Cheese

Have cream cheese at room temp, about 1 T per enchilada.

Preheat oven to 350

Assembly:

Place enough of your favorite enchilada sauce in the bottom of a baking dish to cover.

Heat a pan that is large enough to hold one tortilla

Add oil to pan.

Fry the tortillas until pliable

This is where a helper comes in handy:

Spread some cream cheese on the tortilla

Add some of the green chili/onion mixture

Add chicken or beef

Add some shredded Jack cheese

Roll up and place seam side down in prepared casserole

Repeat

When casserole is filled, top with more sauce and Jack cheese.

Bake for 15-20 minutes

Let rest 5 minutes before serving.

### **Red Rice**

1 1/2 cups long grain rice

1 1/2 tablespoons vegetable oil

1 1/2 teaspoons garlic powder

4 1/2-6 slices yellow onions

1 1/2 (8 ounce) cans diced tomatoes in sauce

1/2 teaspoon ground cumin

1/2 teaspoon chili powder

1/2 teaspoon oregano

1/2 cup each frozen corn and peas

salt & pepper

### **Directions**

Sauté rice and onion in frying pan with vegetable oil for about 5 minutes

Add the can of tomatoes and all of the seasonings.

Add 2 cups of water.

Stir gently and taste the broth to make sure spices and salt are enough for you.

Add corn and peas.

Cook on medium heat until mixture comes to a simmer. Cover and turn heat to low for about 15 minutes.