

### 30 The Sins of a Father

From the mist she appeared and she took him by the hand and led him to the waterfall. She invited him to jump into the deep, dark pool below but he was scared. He had done this before and he just couldn't do it again. He pulled at her and led her away from the abyss and deeper into the gray fog. He felt chilled and the gray encapsulated him like a cocoon and he could no longer see but he was comforted by her hand snugly cradled into his own.

There was a hole, not in the physical world but in his very soul. It was dark and the darkness was blinding. He wanted desperately for her to show him the light, the place where the darkness would no longer suffocate him, drown him in the water of his discontent, and where he could see. He craved her warmth, her security, her strength but more than anything he wanted her youth for in her youth he may find his own and if he could find his own, he might find the way out of the darkness forever. Perhaps, he only wanted her innocence.

He pulled her close and enveloped her in his embrace. It was his *Wizard of Oz* moment where he should have clicked his heels and screamed out, *There's no place like home, there's no place like home!* He did not, however. Instead he allowed her warmth to infect him, to inoculate him against the darkness in his heart. He kissed her long and hard and she drew into him and he knew he loved her with all his heart. Abigail.

And then he opened his eyes. Scant light filtered in through the shaded opening and

he knew where he was. Another day, lost in paradise.

Whitte sat up in bed and stretched. He rubbed his face in his hands and got up, slipping his swimming trunks on and stumbled out to the back pier of his cabana. It was early and the sun still struggled to push above the horizon though the light was near. *La Araña* still menaced the bay and just beyond its bow was the floating dock and the daily boat tied up, men emptying the supplies for the resort. Closer to him was the other floating dock and he dove in, swam the 30 or so yards to it, flipped and headed back to his pier. He only completed ten laps before his arms began to quiver and so he rested on the edge of the pier before beginning to pull himself up.

Inara Fabre stood over him with a towel and handed it to him as he emerged from the water. For the briefest of moments she smiled at him and then turned and sat at the small table where there was a carafe of coffee and assortment of pastries and fruit. Her eyes glittered like the water around them and her smooth, soft olive skin held a mystery behind those eyes that Whitte could not fathom. She was beautiful, there was no doubt in White's mind but the affinity of lust was not there. Something different pulled him to her, an almost paternalistic desire to see her safe. For some reason, he felt she was in danger but he could not understand why he thought that.

“So good of you to make a cameo Inara.”

She nodded. “Your new haircut suits you.” She smiled. “I take it that you have made yourself at home.”

“As much a home as any prison could provide.”

“You are not held against your will.”

“Can I leave on that boat over there?”

She didn't respond to the question, instead she said, “Mr. McIntosh sends his greetings.”

“I suppose he does with the amount of money I paid him. I'm guessing there has been no headway in my case.” He ran the towel over the bristle on his head, still not used to his lost hair.

As reflex, she pushed her hand through her short brunet hair and her eyes twinkled as she spoke. “There actually has been some movement. There were rumors that a local was intoxicated and took it too far with Ms. Spencer but a new twist has emerged. A custodian said she had seen Spencer get off the elevator with a white man wearing sunglasses around two or three that morning.”

There was a twinge behind Whitte's eyes when she mentioned a man with sunglasses. He wasn't sure why it was important but there was something there; something he would have to think about.

“Of course,” Inara continued, “she thought it odd but didn't realize, until just yesterday, that the girl was the same one that was murdered. Seems she had a couple of days off after that night and went to Freeport on the ferry to visit her daughter.”

“So, what do the police say?”

“Nothing. Until there is absolute proof that you were nowhere near the murder scene and some other witness collaborates what the custodian saw, they will continue to hunt you. I'm afraid you are still in a lot of danger.”

Whitte lit a cigarette. “Even here?”

Inara leaned forward. “Yes, even here. Señor Cordero may have been foolish to allow you wander the grounds. Any one of his guests could say something once they return to their homes tomorrow after the conference.”

“I was assured that they would not.” Whitte ran his hand over the stubble on his face and poured himself a cup of coffee. “I felt like I was being recruited.”

“You were. I told them it was a waste of time. You aren’t one to volunteer.”

“And how would you know that?”

“I’ve had over 48 hours to research you, Mr. Whitte.”

“And what does that mean?”

“Cowboy Jack?” she announced with a giggle, “Please.” There was a crack in her vigilant shield. She was human after all.

“I hope you don’t believe everything you read.”

“I don’t have to. I’ve been able to draw my own conclusions from our brief time together.”

Whitte grinned at her. “I hope they’re good.”

She smiled and then as suddenly as it had appeared, it went behind a cloud. “There is one matter I think we need to discuss.” She poured herself a cup of coffee and gingerly sipped at it. “I’m here of my own accord. Despite your reluctance, you will be invited to join the Group. I believe that despite your misgivings, you must accept the invitation.”

“And if I don’t?”

“I don’t believe you will have that option available.”

“What,” Whitte scoffed, “are they going to kill me or something?”

“They aren’t going to let you sail away into the sunset if that’s what you’re thinking.”

“Then I am a prisoner.”

Inara shrugged.

Whitte buried his head in his hands. He knew where this was going. “So, tell me, who really killed Abigail Spencer. I mean, no bullshit about some custodian or some guy with dark glasses.”

She shifted in her seat and behind her exotic eyes, Whitte could see, was a conflict. The skin around her eyes tightened and then, as suddenly relaxed. “The easy answer is, I don’t know.”

“You don’t...”

She cut him off. “I don’t know who stabbed her, no. And I can only guess as to why. Before you jump to a conclusion I will answer your next question: Yes, the group that employs me would kill her with a nod of a head if they believed it would get them what they wanted. And I believe that the situation you find yourself in does benefit them but in this instance, I am not sure she was killed by someone associated with our organization.”

“Then who else is there? It’s not coincidence that her stepfather was suing me and that she just happens to turn up dead with me as the likely culprit.”

She sipped her coffee. Whitte grabbed a Danish and took a bite.

“You’re in too deep now to worry about giving you too much information, I suppose. Señor Cordero informed me that you have learned quite a bit in the short time you have been here. And,” she smiled faintly, “I told you quite a bit before you even decided to

come here.”

“I don’t know that I would have made the same decision knowing what I know,”

Whitte interjected.

“Yes you would. We simply would have told you more.”

“Such as?”

“Federal government officials are pouring over Whitte Industries’ financials as we speak.”

Jack shook his head. Where the hell was this going?

“It all stems from a business arrangement made before you were even born,” she continued.

“You mean Dick Spencer? The Spencer Ranch deal?”

She nodded.

“What does that have to do with anything?”

“Richard Spencer belonged to the Group.”

Whitte frowned.

“And so did your father.”

He shook his head. “Nope. Impossible.” But even as he said the words, he knew it was more than possible. It was true. His father had told him as much. “Why are the feds so interested in my books?”

“Because your father gave them the means to do so.”

Whitte frowned. “Mirage?”

“Yes. It was your father that pushed the sale of Mirage to the government. It was

only a matter of time before they tried to use it to hack into Whitte Industries and they have.”

Whitte eyed the bottle of rum sitting next to the carafe of fruit punch. He cleared his mind. “And what have they found?”

“They have found, or will find, a web of accounts within your financials that were used to launder Group money through WI for use in the United States. You were to be indicted for money laundering, wire fraud and a whole host of other nefarious crimes.”

Whitte looked beaten. Inara smiled. “Mr. Whitte, your father betrayed you. But don’t worry, the Group takes care of our own.”

“Why do you think my father betrayed me?”

“Tell me why you have been planning on taking WI public?”

Whitte sat back in the chair. “Because I didn’t want that responsibility anymore.”

“And I’m sure your father knew this. But why now? Why didn’t you do it earlier?”

“Because my father’s will stipulated that no major corporate restructuring could occur until after his will had been in effect for three years.”

“Do you not think it strange for your father to place such a stipulation in his will?”

Whitte shrugged.

“When you take a company public, the books are audited by an outside accounting firm. Even if the federal authorities had not stumbled across the irregularities in your books, the illegal activities would be found during the process of an initial public offering. It was as if your father was reaching out from the grave and grabbing your ankle and pulling you down with him.”

Whitte shook his head. “My father would never do that.”

“And yet you are left with all this evidence to the contrary.”

Whitte shook his head then smirked. “And so you murdered a girl to make me come running into your sheltering arms?” Then he thought for a moment. “The lawsuit. That would have exposed the financials as well. Two birds with one stone?”

Inara shrugged.

“You’re a cold bitch, Inara.”

“I’ve been called worse.” She sat up and leaned toward Whitte. “I’m not telling you any of this to make you join us. I could care less. But I have a debt and so I’m paying it.”

“A debt to me?”

She nodded. “I don’t want you to get stepped on when feet start shuffling.”

“What debt could you possibly owe me?”

“One you will never know.” With that said, Inara stood and walked away without glancing back.