Chapter 10

By: Romualdo R Chavez

Charles always had impeccable timing; even when they made love, he finished first. His appearance at the end of her heated exchange with Charlotte left her rattled.

*Say something!* She commanded of herself. A flood of expletives burst forth from the farthest reaches of Veronica’s mind, but nothing escaped her lips.

Charles took a step closer to Veronica, placed a hand on her shoulders. “Well, darling? What were you going to tell me?”

Her heart thumped so quickly, she expected it to burst out of her chest like the monster in that movie, *Alien*. She could feel the perspiration form at the top of her forehead, near the hairline. His hazel eyes bore into her, dissecting every wrinkle, every twitch. The silence between the three of them was deafening.

“Ronnie wanted to chastise you and your brother for making complete assess of yourselves earlier,” Charlotte said. “And frankly, I think she’s right.”

Veronica turned slowly towards her eyeing Charlotte with heavy suspcion. Charlotte smiled and nodded.

Her intervention left a sour taste. What was the woman up to? Only moments ago, she was ready to send her off to the gallows, but now she’s lying straight to her own son’s face? Veronica’s eyes narrowed searching for any hint of her next move.

He rolled his eyes. “As far as I’m concerned, my brother is a moron and I don’t want to discuss it any further.” He brushed past them and headed for the beverage cart.

“Did you at least help your brother track down Danni and your sister?”

“Danni is Nicky’s problem. As for Ashleigh, she is a grown woman, mother. She won’t go far. None of us have ever been to Havana. I doubt she knows her way around.” He grabbed the full pitcher and poured himself a glass. “She probably just went to get some air. She’ll be back.”

“Enough with the boos,” Charlotte said. “Not all problems are solved over drinks.”

“I beg to differ. Perhaps you ought to try it, mother.”

Veronica couldn’t help but crack a smile as she recalled her attempts to get the woman to take a sip.

Charles down his drink in one sitting. “Does anyone have any idea of what our next move is?”

“No clue,” Veronica said.

Before Charlotte could comment, Nicky burst into the room panting. He was sweating profusely. He locked eyes with Veronica who was nearest to him; she broke contact and walked toward her husband. She passed Charlotte, whose eyes narrowed to slits for a brief moment before turning back toward her son.

“Nicky what happened? Why are you a sweaty mess?” Charlotte asked.

He ran a hand through his hair, which was the same golden hue as his mother. “Unlike the rest of you, I was chasing after Danni and Ashleigh.”

“Where are they? Are they in their rooms?”

“No, mother, they’re gone,” he said.

“Charles seems to think they wouldn’t have gone far considering they’re new to this part of the world.”

Nicky scowled at his brother, who was busy swallowing down his next glass of the fruity cocktail. He seemed indifferent to his brother’s plight.

“I’m not surprised he would conclude with that theory considering he was the one who caused their departure.”

 Charles set his glass down hard on the cart, causing a loud clank. “You’re the one—”

 “Enough!” Charlotte screamed, startling them all. “I can’t take another round of your juvenile squabbling. We need to locate Ashleigh and Danni and then figure out where we need to go next. The sooner we get to the end of this game the quicker we can get out of here.”

 “I know where they went,” Nicky said. The group turned to give him their full attention.

 “Ashleigh already figured out the next clue, didn’t she?” Veronica said.

 Nicky nodded. “I called Joel Liebovitz and he let me know about the fax he sent to Ashleigh with a list of Dad’s properties. The coordinates found in Mom’s letter are what brought us to Havana, but there were no other clues as to where to go once we landed. Ashleigh, on the other hand knew exactly where to go. Dad purchased a bed and breakfast two years prior to his disappearance. A place called Old Havana Rooms.”

 “He never told me about purchasing a bed and breakfast,” Charlotte said.

 “Well that definitely changes things,” Veronica said.

 “Yes, it does,” Nicky said.

 “Which means Danni’s claims of seeing our father on television is plausible,” Charles said. He pursed his lips and began to fan himself with the collar of his shirt. “Why didn’t Ashleigh tell us?”

 “Can you blame her?” Charlotte said. “You both haven’t been exactly forthcoming with her either.”

 “Pot meet kettle,” Veronica blurted out.

 Charlotte’s face contorted into a hard scowl.

 “How faraway is it?” Charles asked, switching subjects.

 “It’s fifteen minutes away from here. If we go now, we can catch up with them.”

 Veronica glanced at Charles and noticed he was sweating profusely. By no means was he a lightweight when it came to alcohol. One or two drinks did nothing for him anymore. The man practically sweats brandy.

 Charlotte nodded. “Yes, let’s get going.”

 “Is anyone else feeling warm?” Charles asked.

 All eyes turned to him. His pallor changed. He suddenly began to hold his stomach.

 “Honey are you feeling alright?” Charlotte asked. “You don’t look well.”

 “I…don’t…feel…” Charles struggled to get the words out as he fell to his knees.

 “Charles!” Veronica screamed.

 Charles lifted his head and blood dribbled from the corners of his lips. The eyes rolled back and he toppled forward.

 “Get help!” Charlotte screamed.

 Nicky disappeared out the door, while Veronica and Charlotte tried to attend to Charles.

 “Charles?” Veronica shouted. “Charles stay with us.” He began convulsing.

 Veronica felt helpless. Her husband was non-responsive. All she could think about was how she couldn’t bear losing Charles. She grabbed his hand and squeezed. Even Charlotte was in disarray, both women echoing the other’s terror.

 “Excuse me,” a voice called out.

 Charlotte and Veronica turned toward the doorway in time to see a Hispanic woman carrying a tray with another pitcher.

 “Hello, I’m here to refill the drink cart—” She nearly dropped the tray when she spotted the two women hovering over Charles’ body. Veronica noticed it was not the same woman from earlier.

 “Can’t you see we need help, not drinks. Besides someone else already came by.”

 The staff member, now confused, said, “Ma’am, no one has been ordered to handle the drinks except me.”

 Veronica grabbed her mother-in-laws arm. Charlotte surprised by this locked eyes with her.

 “His drink…” she said.

 Charlotte glanced over at the glass on the drink cart and then back to Ronnie.

 “He’s been poisoned,” Charlotte hissed.

 A commotion erupted from the doorway as several people filed in. Both women were swept up out of the way by Nicky.

 Charlotte grabbed her son by the shoulders. “Nicky, your sister is in danger.”

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The sun’s rays cut through the narrow feathered leaves of the tall slender ash tree, bathing Ashleigh and Danni’s section of the courtyard in an optimal mix of sun and shade.

They sat alone at one of the iron tables mulling over the latest findings in their search.

“‘We have scorched the snake, not killed it.’” Danni said, brushing away a bead of sweat sliding down the side of her face. “I know what it means, but how does it apply to us?”

Ashleigh responded, “Well, the phrase is uttered in reference to the murder of Duncan. Macbeth has a conversation with his wife, who essentially tells him ‘It’s done. Get over it and move on.’ However, Macbeth reminds her that even though Duncan’s dead, there will still be other threats to deal with.”

“Why couldn’t you have been my literature teacher? I’ve learned more in that explanation than any other in my entire academic career.”

“The right teacher makes all the difference.”

“Gawd I hate Shakespeare! If the next clue we find has another Macbeth reference, I’ll scream.”

“Me too,” Ashleigh said.

Danni looked at her friend and smiled. She reached out for Ashleigh’s hand and took hold. She squeezed it and said, “Thank you.”

Ashleigh nodded. “I’m sorry for everything.”

“No, don’t be. I should’ve been—” she broke off. Her eyes welled up with tears. She let go of Ashleigh’s hand and sat back in her chair.

“My brother doesn’t deserve you,” Ashleigh said. “I know you love him and I was rooting for your relationship to work, but deep down I was afraid he would hurt you.”

“And look where we’re at now,” Danni said, a hint of frustration lingering in her voice.

They grew silent as they stared off. Each woman retreated into their own minds, swimming in a pool of their own anxieties and trouble thoughts, struggling to remain afloat.

“What do we do now?” Danni asked, quickly changing the subject. “Clearly the Ash tree is significant and not to mention the quote from Shakespeare. He has to be here, right?”

“You really believe that was my father in that news clip?”

Taken aback by her comment, she responded. “Of course I do. Don’t you? I’d recognize Edward anywhere, despite his attempts at masking his identity.”

“Ok.”

“And besides if the clip didn’t convince you, isn’t this proof enough?” She gestured to their surroundings.

“It doesn’t mean he’s alive.”

“Do you believe he isn’t?”

Ashleigh sighed, “I don’t know. I want to believe he is, but I keep seconding guessing.”

“It’s him. I’m sure of it.”

“Then why lie about all of this? Why put us through this ridiculous hunt? What does this prove?”

“Some kind of closure, maybe?”

Ashleigh mulled over the idea of closure. When her father disappeared five years ago, she panicked. Their relationship had always been the one stable thing in her life when everything else fell apart. Her mother provided no solace. Charles and Nicky were more concerned with the Blackthorne legacy than the mental well-being of their sister. She refused to believe he would abandon them.

Her father’s words floated back up to the surface.

“‘I’m betting on you Ash-Tree…If I’m gone and you’re hearing this, just know I never wanted it to be like this…I’ve been forced away…’”

Hearing his voice again after all these years nearly sent her over the edge. The grief and longing she kept buried inside threatened to burst forth from the damns and barriers she erected. She would have wept in her father’s humidor if Nicky and Veronica hadn’t picked that exact moment to carry out their affair on her father’s desk.

She glanced over at Danni, whose vacant stare suggested she was lost in her own troubled thoughts. Ashleigh’s abrupt revelation about Nicky’s affairs wasn’t warranted. It was divulged out of anger.

“I was hoping the manager would’ve shown up by now,” Danni blurted out, bringing Ashleigh back to the present.

Not long after they found the ash tree, she found herself marching back up to the front desk asking to speak to the manager. They told her he would meet them in the courtyard shortly. According to her watch that was over thirty minutes ago.

“Yeah, the place is quiet. I don’t see why it is taking so long for someone to get back to us. It’s not like there’s a lot of people around.”

Danni stood up. “I’ll go and see what’s keeping them.” She disappeared towards the entrance.

Ashleigh pushed herself up and out of the iron chair. She walked back over to the tree and let her thoughts linger on the phrase ‘we have scorched the snake, not killed it.’ Her mind sifted through the muck of theories about their findings. Is the ‘snake’ in reference to her father? Did someone scorch her father? If so, who? Is the last line the key? He’s alive and Danni was right all along.

How desperately she wanted it to be true, but dared not get her hopes up. This game, while thrilling at first, quickly turned sour. It brought out the ugly side of her family, exposing how shaky their foundation was without their father.

A vibration in her back pocket brought her out of the void of endless contemplations. She reached into the pocket of her capris and pulled out her phone. She had seven missed calls from Nicky and several text messages begging her to call back. Rolling her eyes, she ignored them and shoved the phone away.

Her eyes roamed over the foliage covering the roots. A faint shimmer caught her attention. Out of curiosity, she crouched to the ground and ran her fingers over the spot she saw the glimmer. Her finger glided over a smooth ridge within the dirt. Brushing aside some of the ground cover; she found a metal object buried beneath the soil. She dug into the ground and uncovered some of it. It was an oval mental ring. She used her index finger to dig at the dirt, until she uncovered enough of it. With her thumb and index finger, she pulled on the ring and to her amazement; she uncovered a small antique skeleton key.

“Hello!”

Ashleigh sprung up from the ground and let out a yelp. In the process, she lost her footing and felt herself falling backwards. Two women reached out and grabbed an arm. They pulled her back up on her feet, saving her the humiliation of falling in front of strangers.

“Thank you,” she said.

“Oh gosh, I’m so sorry. I didn’t mean to startle you,” one of the women said. She was dressed in a beautiful red floral sundress. She had a mane of brown curls and a sliver of grey near the front.

“No, no, it’s ok. It’s not your fault.”

 “I’m Morgan,” she said, extending a hand in greeting.

 “Ashleigh.” She smiled and shook the woman’s hand.

 Morgan turned and motioned towards another woman with short cropped grey hair. “And this is Shayne.”

 Shayne was dressed in kaki capris, sandals, and black tank top.

 “Hello, wonderful to meet you, Ashleigh.”

 The accent caught her off guard. “You’re definitely not from around here.”

 “No, I’m originally from New Zealand, but I live in the States now.”

 “We’re both from Kansas,” Morgan said.

“Wow! What brought you all the way out here?” Ashleigh asked.

“We’re here with a large group of people celebrating our friend, Lory, who made the New York Times bestseller’s list,” Shayne said.

Ashleigh was dumbfounded. “Oh wow! That’s amazing.”

They nodded.

 “Each of us made the list at one time or another, so we thought we’d all celebrate our accomplishments with a big trip. We’d planned this a couple of years ago, but couldn’t make it work. Eventually everything fell into place and now we’re here,” Morgan said.

 “Amazing!” Ashleigh said. “Apparently the only thing I’m good at is falling down.”

 The three of them laughed. It was a nice reprieve from the chaos earlier in the day. Although she couldn’t help but wonder how long it would be before the rest of her family showed up.

 “Did you lose something? Is that why you were on the ground?” Shayne asked.

 “No…uh…I…” She hesitated. Would it be a good idea to tell them what she found? They both seemed genuine. Besides, what could they do with the key? Ashleigh wasn’t even sure *the key* was even relevant.

“I found a key buried near the roots of the tree.”

 “Oh really? Can we see?” Morgan asked.

 Ashleigh extended her hand and revealed the skeleton key. The women glanced down and frowned as they examined her discovery, a reaction she did not expect.

 “I think that belongs to Old Havana,” Shayne said.

 “What do you mean?”

 Shayne pulled out a key from her back pocket and held it up. “See…”

Ashleigh felt her shoulders slump. The revelation was a punch in the gut. The keys were nearly identical, right down to the design of the bow, circular with a cross in the center.

 “You’re right.” Why was she so quick to believe it would be that easy? These women must think she’s crazy.

 Morgan placed a hand on Ashleigh’s shoulder, picking up on the embarrassment, “Are you ok?”

 “Oh, I’m fine—just embarrassed.”

 “Are you staying here?” Shayne asked.

 “No, we just arrived.”

 “Ah, that makes sense why you wouldn’t have recognized the key design.”

 “Wouldn’t that make a great story idea?” Morgan asked. “Discovering an old skeleton key at a Bed and Breakfast while on vacation. Sounds like the beginning of great mystery to me.”

 “We should do a collaborative novel with the group,” Shayne said.

 “Great idea. We have to make sure Romie goes first or last. Remember what happened the last time we tried one of these projects.”

 Shayne let out a cackle. “Oh for fucks sake, not again!”

 Ashleigh chuckled, but felt out of the loop.

Morgan turned to her and smiled. “Just ignore us. A writer’s mind never take a vacation. It happens all the time.”

“I’ll bet,” Ashleigh said.

A large group of people entered the courtyard. Morgan and Shayne turned and waved to everyone walking in. They were a lively group of people carrying on conversations and drinking fruity cocktails.

Shayne yelled, “Bear,” to a red headed woman, motioning for her to come over.

*Interesting name*. Ashleigh thought. *I’d love to hear the story behind it. Perhaps she took on a bear?*

A familiar face bypassed the group. Danni appeared with a man dressed in a light blue polo shirt with Old Havana’s name stitched in gold lettering on the pocket. She motioned for her to come over. Ashleigh nodded, but held up her hand to wait a moment. She approached Shayne and Morgan.

“It was lovely to meet you, but my friend is here and I have to go.”

“Oh darn, we were going to see if you wanted to explore the city with us.”

“How sweet,” Ashleigh said, taken aback by the generosity. “If I didn’t have some business to attend to, I would’ve definitely taken you up on your offer. It was pleasure meeting you both.”

Morgan and Shayne shook her hand and Ashleigh left, leaving the large group of writers to carrying on without her.

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Danni and Ashleigh waited patiently in a private office a few doors down from the lobby. One of the staff members left minutes ago after delivering mini bottled waters. The office was small, but cozy. A small modern style desk with a key board and two monitors on display were near the back of the room with an empty desk chair facing the opposite way, as if someone had just been there and left in a hurry. The interior colors were complimentary to the turquoise exterior of building, a mixture of corals and tangerines.

They sat in two wicker chairs facing the empty desk waiting for the manager to return. Ashleigh’s right knee bounced rapidly.

“Will you relax,” Danni hissed, gently nudging Ashleigh on the knee.

“I’m fine.”

“No you’re not. Your leg hasn’t stopped shaking since we sat down.”

Ashleigh let out a deep sigh. “Your point?”

“Everything will be fine.”

“And how do you know that?” Ashleigh snapped.

Danni rolled her eyes and turned away. “I don’t.”

The stress of the situation was getting to Ashleigh. Any moment someone was going to walk through that door and tell her what she wanted to know. Her anxiety rose steadily with each passing moment and she was taking it out on Danni. A sense of urgency spread through her as the thought of her family arriving any moment trouble her. The last thing she needed was for them to ruin any hope she had of solving the mystery.

“Sorry, Danni,” she said. “My nerves are getting to me.”

“I know. I lived with you, remember?”

Ashleigh chuckled. “Yeah…”

Danni shifted around in her chair until she faced Ashleigh. “No matter who walks through those doors, we’re not leaving until we get some answers, ok?”

She nodded.

Despite the blanket of silence, Ashleigh could not help but ponder worse case scenarios. *The manager needed to arrive soon*.

“Do you have several missed calls from your brother?” Danni asked.

“Yeah. I ignored them. I don’t have the energy to deal with it. They only care about their inheritance.”

“Nicky’s called me fifteen times, left five messages, and texted.”

“I find that turning off the phone helps.”

“His last message is a little concerning—”

The door behind them opened and a man in his late fifties appeared. Ashleigh nearly flew out of her chair. He was dressed in a cream-colored short sleeve button down shirt and black dress pants. His skin the color of coco. As he laid eyes on the pair, he smiled warmly.

“My apologies, señoritas,” he began. “I’ve been on several conference calls since eight o’clock this morning.”

“No worries,” Danni said.

He walked over to the other side of the room and took a seat opposite them at the desk.

“We appreciate you taking the time to meet with us, Mister…” Ashleigh broke off, unsure of what to call the man.

The man slapped his baldhead with the palm of his hand. “Where are my manners? My name is Alfonso Reynoso, general manager of Old Havana.”

Both women smiled.

“We won’t take up too much of your time, Mr. Reynoso, but we’re hoping you can help us track down the owner.”

Alfonso’s smile faded. “Is there something wrong with the rooms?”

Danni spoke up. “We’re not staying here. Although, it’s definitely a beautiful place and I wouldn’t mind.”

“I agree, the place is gorgeous,” Ashleigh said. “However, our focus at the moment is on the owner.”

“Señor Blackthorne?”

“Yes, that’s him,” she said, trying to keep herself in check. “Have you seen him recently?”

He shook his head. “I’m sorry, but I have not. In fact, the last time I saw Señor Blackthorne…” Alfonso leaned back in his chair and crossed his arms, mulling over his answer. “…had to be well over three years ago.”

Ashleigh fell back into her chair, an overwhelming sense of frustration and disappointment settling in. She felt Danni’s eyes boring into her, waiting for a response.

“Are you sure you haven’t seen him?”

“Yes, I am sure,” he said.

“It’s strange that someone would go out of their way to purchase this place and then disappear. If it were me, I’d want to check on my investments.”

Alfonso shrugged. “I don’t know.”

“Do you know why he didn’t return? Did he say anything about where he was going or if he’d ever come back?”

“He was involved in the development of Old Havana, but shortly after our grand opening, his visits were less frequent.”

Danni leaned forward, “Did he stay here?”

“No, he did not,” Alfonso said. “He only returned for inspections and would call periodically to see if we needed anything.”

“Who is *we*?” Ashleigh asked.

“The staff and myself.”

“And in three years you haven’t needed a single thing?”

 “What did you say your name was señora? Are you Danni?”

 “No, my name isn’t Danni, that’s her,” she said, pointing.

 “Then who are you?”

 “My name is Ashleigh Blackthorne. I’m Edward Blackthorne’s daughter.” Alfonso’s eyes grew wide. He stared at her for several seconds. Ashleigh dug deep into her pockets, felt the key, but grabbed a folded set of papers. She opened them up and revealed it to the manager. “You’re right about my father purchasing this place, but he’s been missing from the states for over five years, which means he survived the sinking of the “Emerald Skye.” Alfonso regarded her with confusion. “It was the name of our family yacht.”

 “What does this have to do with me?” he asked.

 “My father purchased Old Havana Rooms Bed & Breakfast three years ago, which is impossible if he’s been dead. Yet, the documents say otherwise.”

 Alfonso held up a hand, “I don’t want any trouble.”

 Ashleigh stood up suddenly. “I’m not trying to start trouble.” She could feel the tears welling up in her eyes. “I just need to know where he is and if he’s ok.”

 “Please, sir, is there anything more you can tell us?” Danni asked.

 He stared at them for a moment and shook his head slowly. “I’m sorry, but I don’t know what else to tell you.”

 Dani thrust her phone out in the front of Alfonso’s face; a picture of Edward displayed across the screen.

 “This is what he looks like…”

 Alfonso winced. “That’s not Señor Blackthorne.”

 “Of course it is,” Ashleigh said.

 “No, this is not the same man.”

 Both women glanced at each other.

 “What do you mean?” Ashleigh asked.

 “He’s not the man I remember. The Señor Blackthorne I remember was much younger and wore glasses.”

 Danni shoved the phone back in her pocket and stared at Ashleigh.

 “Are you suggesting someone is impersonating my father?”

 “I don’t know, but the man in that picture is not who purchased this establishment.”

“Do you have a picture of him?” Dani asked.

 He shook his head.

 Ashleigh felt defeated. Rather than solving the mystery, she was left with more questions. Her eyes roamed around the office, trying to contemplate her next move.

Could someone have stolen her father’s identity? Danni was adamant that she laid eyes on him and the documents stating that this place was purchased in Edward’s name would’ve cemented that claim.

 She glanced down at Alfonso’s desk and nearly gasped. Sticking out from beneath some envelopes was a familiar object.

 “Is that a letter opener?” She pointed to a curved pencil length item.

 Alfonso glanced down, saw what she was referring to, and picked it up from underneath the stack. It was a mini vintage Japanese samurai katana with a white peacock carved into the wooden sheath.

 “Oh this old thing? Yes, it’s a letter opener. It was gift given to me when I went overseas.”

 “May I see it?” she asked.

 With some trepidation, he handed it over to Ashleigh. She examined the katana, pulling it out of its sheath, examining the blade then returning it back inside. As she studied the wooden handle, her eyes noticed a crack near the handle. She swallowed hard and then returned the letter opener to Alfonso.

 “I appreciate you taking the time to meet with us,” Ashleigh said. “I’m sorry we put you through all this.”

 “No apologies needed,” he said. “I’m sorry I couldn’t be more helpful. I truly hope you find your father.”

 She smiled and nodded. “Thank you.”

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 Ashleigh and Danni found themselves sitting on the retaining wall just outside the main entrance of Old Havana Rooms. They stood there in silence watching the cars coming and going from the parking lot. Neither of them spoke, but Ashleigh’s mind was spinning.

 “Are you ok?” Danni asked.

 She shook her head.

 “I thought for sure we would discover something.”

 “Oh we did,” Ashleigh said.

 “Yeah, we figured out someone stole your dad’s identity.”

 “No. Those were lies.”

 Danni turned toward her, puzzled. “What?”

 “He lied to us!” The anger was rising. “The letter opener gave him away.”

 “I’m not following.”

 “My grandfather brought a letter opener from Japan when he fought in the war. He gave it to my father. It was a mini katana with a white peacock on the sheath.”

 “Are you sure that’s not just a coincidence?”

 “There’s a crack on the handle.”

 “Ok. So…”

“Do you know how it got there?”

Danni shook her head.

“I stepped on it one day when I was in my father’s study. He was furious and didn’t talk to me for almost an entire day. I cried and tried to apologize, but he wouldn’t talk to me.” The memory was still so fresh. She even felt the familiar tinge of emotion as if she were reliving it all over again. “He sat me down and explained why it was important. It seemed like just a trinket, but to him it was the one of the few things he got to keep after his father died.”

 “Oh my gawd,” Danni whispered.

 “Mr. Alfonso lied. The letter opener was my fathers. I’d recognized that thing anywhere.”

 “You don’t think—”

 “My father is here somewhere,” Ashleigh said. “Alfonso nearly had me believing his lies, but not anymore.”

 “The story about some other Mr. Blackthorne was just a ruse?”

 “Yes, and I’m not leaving this place until I find out the truth.”

 Suddenly both of their cell phones began ringing. They both pulled them out. Ashleigh rolled her eyes and saw that it was Veronica calling. She wasted no time hitting the end call button.

 “Hello?” Danni said.

 “Why did you answer?” Ashleigh hissed.

 “What do you want, Nicky—”

 Ashleigh rolled her eyes and stood up. She was about to roam around the area when Danni suddenly grabbed her arm. She looked at Danni and saw all the color had drained from her face.

 “What’s wrong?” she asked.

 “It’s Charles…he’s been poisoned.”

 “What?”

 “Ok, we’ll stay put,” she said into the phone and then hung up.

 “Is Charles ok?”

 Danni appeared to be in shock. Ashleigh grabbed Danni by the shoulders and shook her.

 “What’s going on.”

 She looked into Ashleigh’s eyes with a look of panic and fear. “We’re in danger.”