Chapter 14

Billie-Renee Knight

“Where the fuck have they all gone?” demanded Shayne from the doorway of the suite that should have sheltered the Blackthorne family.

“Romie, grab an employee and find out where the Hell they’ve gone,” Bear ordered over one shoulder as she surveyed the empty room.

Shayne glared at the young man as he scurried down the hallway. “Did you have to bring, Rambo?”

“Give him a shot. We all had to start somewhere. You, too, were once an over eager puppy. Is Morgan in position?”

Shayne growled something unintelligible under her breath and grabbed her radio. “Morgan? Hang tight. Our birds have flown the coop. We need to reorganize.”

Footsteps pounded back up the hallway and Romie dashed through the door to gasp, “They’re at the hospital. One of ‘em was poisoned.”

“Dead?” Bear’s tone was cold enough to freeze the water in the fountain dancing merrily in the middle of the ostentatious suite.

“Ish,” Romie replied with a grin. “Good news though. The staff caught the perpetrator. She’s tied up in the kitchen waiting for the local police to pick her up.”

“Excellent. Good cop, bad cop?” drawled Shayne with a Cheshire cat grin.

“No time. Bad cop all the way,” snapped their leader with an evil grin of her own. “Watch and learn, kid,” she muttered to Romie as the pair of them brushed past him and stalked toward the stairs leading down toward the main floor.

Romie fell in behind them, pausing on the threshold of the kitchens where a large number of the staff had gathered to watch over the would be assassin. Bear barreled her way past them to stand mere inches from the woman bound to a metal folding chair. Her platinum blonde hair hung in disarray around her narrow shoulders and looked a little lopsided. Bear reached out and swiped it off her head with a chuckle to reveal short curly chestnut hair. The gathered staff gasped in unison. An older man, probably the hotel’s manager stepped forward.

“I’m sorry, señora, but we are awaiting the arrival of the authorities.”

Bear turned a dark gaze on the man, quelling his words. “We are the only authorities you need be concerned with, sir.” She turned her gaze back to the woman. “Who are you working for?”

Behind her Shayne drew a large Bowie knife from a sheath on her thigh and tested the blade with her thumb. The woman, her gaze locked on Bear’s face, shook her head and refused to speak. Shayne stepped closer and pressed the knife against the pale skin of the woman’s bare throat.

“Who do you work for? That will be the last time I ask.”

Shayne pressed the blade harder against her and a thin line of blood oozed down into the V-neck of her white blouse. The woman pressed her lips together, but refused to speak. Behind her the older man held out a purse.

“Please, señora, we found this hidden in the kitchen. It must belong to her.”

Bear motioned Romie forward to take the purse. He rummaged through it and pulled out a passport. “Genevieve Murray.” He held it up opened to the photo.

“So, Genevieve Murray,” Bear said, drawing out the name. “Last chance.”

“There’s also a cell phone,” Romie said, pulling one out and passing it to his boss.

She activated it and grinned. “Hold her hand.” Romie did so and she used the woman’s thumb to unlock the phone’s contents. “Hmmmm. Only one contact on here. There’s a number, but no name. Let’s see who answers, shall we?”

She hit send and everyone in the room could hear the phone ringing. It rang five times followed by a loud click. “Did you find them? Are they all safe?” demanded a gruff voice.

Bear did a double take, frowning. “Jeffries? What the Hell, man? Why are you paying me to save the Blackthornes while you’re paying another operative to off them?”

Danni and Ashleigh slipped back into the hallway and headed to their room, the map folded up and stuck in Danni’s pocket. They had almost made it to safety when a loud voice stopped them in their tracks.

“There they are!”

They whirled to see a veritable horde of people rushing toward them. Ashleigh grabbed Danni’s arm and yanked her inside their room, slamming the door shut just as the first few newcomers reached them.

“Who the Hell are they?” she snapped.

Danni, pale and shaking, just shook her head. Her eyes were wide in her pale face. “How many people are out to get us?” she asked in a whisper.

Outside a heavy hand banged against the locked door.

“Ms. Blackthorne, please open the door. My name is Bear. You met me earlier. I’m part of the writing group here from Kansas. I have some important information for you regarding your brother Charles.”

Ashleigh sighed and reached for the deadbolt she had slid shut moments earlier. Danni grabbed her wrist.

“Don’t! You don’t know if you can trust them! What if they are the ones who tried to kill Charles?”

“Don’t be silly, Danni. They were here at the hotel when that happened.”

She brushed her friend’s hand away and flipped the bolt, allowing the door to swing open. Outside the women they had met earlier in the courtyard crowded around along with several others she didn’t recognize.

“Thank goodness you have an ounce of sense,” the tall, silver haired woman with the New Zealand accent snapped. “I didn’t relish the idea of breaking this damned door down. Come now, we’re off to hospital. With luck young Rambo has already delivered the antidote and your brother is on the mend.”

“Antidote?” asked Danni, stepping out from behind the door. “Then you did poison him!”

The woman laughed, a harsh sound in the sudden silence following Danni’s accusation.

“No, luv, but we caught the bitch who did. You’ll meet her later. Recognize her, too, I’ll bet.” Then she grinned down at Danni.

Ashleigh shivered at the malice behind that grin.

“Quit taunting the girl, Shayne. Come along, we’ll fill you in on the way. Your brother will be fine, by the way. His recovery should be quick once the antidote is administered. Once he’s stable enough to move, we’ll be transporting you all back to the States to a secure location.”

Ashleigh stumbled to a stop. “No, we can’t go. M-my father is here somewhere. I know he is. We have to find him.”

“That is not the priority right now. There are things in motion you have no idea about that put your life and the lives of every member of your family in danger. That must be dealt with first.”

Ashleigh continued to protest, but it was useless. Bear and the woman named Shayne dragged her to an unmarked van parked just outside the hotel entrance and shoved her inside. Danni was tossed in beside her. Just as the door slid shut she caught a glimpse of the man they had met with earlier peering out through the open hotel doors with slight grin twisting his thin lips. Then the door closed and the engine roared to life.