Blackthorne

 Chapter Six

 By Lory Martin

The Blackthorne Estate

Ashley woke up when the sunlight hit her eyes.

“Uugghhh!” She turned on her side away from the window and pulled the comforter over her face. Please God, just one more hour. She was not ready to face ‘Charley’ again. Besides the hateful Vanessa. Yeah, she spent a lot of time around her, but only when she couldn’t avoid it. Vanessa was never too hard to avoid, really. All you had to do was stay away from the booze.

She sighed. Now she also felt like avoiding Nicky. She had known he and Vanessa had dated briefly before Charles and she got together, but Vanessa obviously knew how to manipulate Nicky, judging by that scene in Dad’s office yesterday. She’d heard everything, thanks to the system Edward had had installed. It automatically engaged, picking up any sound from a foot shuffling across the carpet to conversations in the office, whenever the lamp by his chair in the humidor room came on. He had always wanted to keep tabs on everyone, especially anyone entering his office if he were having a cigar and brandy. Ashley knew if she were any more manipulative herself, she could probably use that knowledge of their encounter to her advantage. Maybe she could get Vanessa or Nicky to convince Charlotte to leave. Permanently.

Ashley realized she wasn’t going to get any more sleep, her brain was up and running. As she gripped the covers to fling them back and head for the shower, she heard voices and paused, wondering who the hell was up that early.

As she listened, she recognized the voices. That was Charles. And Vanessa. With Charlotte. She sat up, listening as they discussed . . . what?!! She listened harder. Dad left a clue in the treehouse? Hmmm. She’d known about the theatre, but hadn’t ever thought much about it. She’d figured Dad had bought it to impress some actress who was probably too young for him and saw through his machinations. And that made her realize she needed to get a list of all Dad’s properties, because since he had apparently used one of them for a clue – well three of them, if you counted the portrait in his office and the treehouse as separate ‘properties’ and that’s probably how Edward thought of them. He’d had properties all over the place and could have planted clues at any or all of them.

Ashleigh flung the covers back and headed to the shower. She needed to call Joel and see if he’d get her a property list. She quickly headed into the bathroom. She wanted to get the list before the three Musketeers got back from the theatre with whatever they found there. She hurried through her shower and didn’t bother drying her hair, just braided it back and headed downstairs. As soon as she knew nobody was around, she called the lawyers’ office. Joel picked up as soon as the secretary put her on hold.

“Ashleigh. What can I do for you?” He knew what the situation was and figured she wasn’t enjoying the current visitor out at the estate. He’d never been told, per se, how Ashleigh felt, but imagined she felt abandoned by her mother.

“Joel, can you fax me a list of all Dad’s properties? I’d like to be prepared for any family discussions.”

Joel didn’t actually work for Ashleigh, he worked for the estate, but felt it was the least he could do. “Sure. Out to Edward’s office fax number?”

“Yes, please. I have a feeling I may need all the information I can get.”

“You’ve got it; I’ll send it right out.”

“Thanks, Joel, I really appreciate it.”

“No problem, Ashleigh. Call me if you need anything else.”

Ashley let herself into Edward’s office and disconnected the call. She didn’t bother with the lights. The sunlight coming through the windows was enough. While she waited for the fax to come in, she straightened the top of the desk, even getting down on the floor and retrieving the items Vanessa and Nicky had knocked to the floor last night. As she picked up the small clock to put back on the desk, she noticed the crystal over the clock face was cracked. She had given that clock to Edward when she was ten. Something else to lay at the feet of those two.

Things sure were different than they were when she was ten. The fax machine clicked on and Ashleigh watched as the pages fell into the tray. Four, five, six, the pages kept coming out. They finally stopped at nine. Ashleigh picked them up and started scanning the information. Each page looked like it detailed four properties, with date purchased, amount paid and current appraised value.

She pulled her phone out and snapped pictures of the pages, one by one.

As soon as she knew the pictures were good, she shredded the faxes in the cross cut shredder. There wouldn’t be any making sense out of those pieces. Then she erased the memory on the fax machine. On her way out, she blew a kiss to her dad’s portrait. “Guess I have more of you in me than I thought, Edward.”

She opened the door and bumped into Nicky.

“Hey.”

“Hey, Ash, what were you doing in Dad’s office?” He knew she had to have been in there for something to do with the estate.

She looked him dead in the eye, then brushed by him as she said, “Just cleaning up the mess you and Vanessa made yesterday when you were too horny to pay attention to anything but your dick.”

Nicky turned to look at her, mouth agape. What the hell had gotten into Ash? She usually left the snottiness to the others – Vanessa, especially. Then he spotted Charlotte’s car parked on the apron back by the garages and realized nothing was going to be the way it used to be.

He headed back to the main house. His hangover seemed to be passing and he was hungry. He wondered what time Vanessa would be up? And whether Charles would be going into his office today.

Edward took one last look in the mirror and turned to his hair stylist.

“Looks great, as usual, Josie.” He pulled his wallet out and handed her two c notes. Josie stuffed them in her pocket without looking at them and handed Edward a bottle. “This is guaranteed to keep your hairline where it is and should bring it back closer to where it was when you were twenty. Just use it every day. When you need more, holler. And get some biotin to take.”

Edward tipped the bottle toward her in a salute. “I’ll see you in a month for a cut and a check on the rest.” He kissed her on the cheek and left the salon. He might tell himself it was ‘the new barbershop’, but he wasn’t kidding anyone, least of all himself. He went to a salon once a month. What his mother would’ve named a beauty shop, where he saw a beauty operator. Oh well, he supposed he was allowed a few fibs to himself. After all, he wasn’t even alive anymore.