

CHAPTER ONE

Heatedly Alice stepped into the outdoor circular food court. Its four foot pebble stone wall encasing only three sides, she stood at the entrance. The view of the massive lake framed by mountains unobstructed ahead of her she scanned the picnic tables ornamented by large red umbrellas. Spotting him she could feel her anger melt away.

On the drive over she had played this moment over and over in her mind. In her mind she was going to march right up to him. He would listen to her issue, and be willing to do what she needed from him; but now, her eyes on him, anxiety began to wave through her. Alice needed a bit more time before approaching him.

Nervously she stepped up to a counter on her left to one in a chain of four fast food restaurants. She ordered lunch fidgeting, while the young man she hadn't really looked at placed her order on the tray.

"That'll be eleven fifty please."

Alice pulled out fifteen dollars handing it to the young man, and with her tray she walked off without waiting for her change.

Finding a picnic table she scooted onto the bench. Normally she would take in the stunning view of the lake with mountains across so tall they looked like they touched the sky. She would watch the seagulls fly, and the people as they biked or jogged along the sandy shore - but not today. Today she stared a few tables ahead of her at the man she'd hoped would be willing to help her.

If the police weren't going to take the situation seriously then it was time she took matters into her own hands, and put Tom in his place herself. The bruises she found on her granddaughter's arms as she was getting her dressed, accompanied by the look of shame on her face when she asked her what happened, was enough. Alice couldn't allow it to go ignored any longer.

She'd found many bruises on Cami ever since Cami's mother vanished. Alice had questioned her every time in regards to where they came from. She already knew, but hoped Cami would open up to her, but she never would sell him out - Cami was too afraid to tell the truth, never admitting to Alice that her dad did anything to her. Even so Alice had no doubt about Tom being responsible for the marks she would regularly find on her.

Alice had been trying ceaselessly to get Cami out of that house ever since her daughter Patsy - Cami's mother went missing a year ago, but every time

she'd turned to the police they'd told her there was nothing they were willing to do without solid proof that Tom was abusing Cami.

She was disgusted seeing as it was common knowledge that Tom was abusive with her daughter Patsy - though no police reports had ever been filed until the day Alice filed after Patsy had gone missing. That case was shut just as fast as it had been opened. They believed it to be that Patsy took off and abandoned Cami and her husband Tom. They said there was no evidence of any foul play. They said she didn't want to be found, and told Alice that she should respect her daughter's wishes.

Alice felt she had no choice but to accept that they weren't going to help her with the disappearance of her daughter, but when it came to Cami she refused to accept that there was nothing she could do. The only issue was, with all her efforts, all it ever got her was Tom in her face threatening her. Tom had no fear of her. She needed someone that could intimidate him. The man a few picnic tables in front of her she knew could do just that. She'd only hoped he would.

She wasn't ashamed to admit that she was terrified of approaching him. It was a small town - in small towns people talked and rumors flew. This small town with few strangers was no different. It was a town where ladies stood at storefronts - their conversations always starting with...*Did you hear?* Nobody was allowed secrets, and the man ahead of her was no exception. He was just as much a victim to the rumors as everyone else - maybe more so.

The talk about him and his men were they were drug traffickers. They would beat you to the point of knocking on death's door if you crossed them. They've been rumored to kill those that got in their way. Some say that the man in front of her was the Devil himself, and his men his demon disciples - so she was afraid of them, but for the sake of her granddaughter she had to do something. She knew it was a long shot that he would be willing to help, or even listen to her at all, but she had to try.

Alice had to admit as she sat staring ahead at him, as much as he frightened her she found him very attractive. His long blond hair, the unshaven face - he looked far from dirty or unkept - in fact just the opposite. His form fitted black t-shirt showed off his broad chest and the firm pecs under it - along with all the tattoos down his muscular arms. The large silver ring on his right hand drew her attention to them, making Alice take note of how large and powerful they were -forcing her to take a breath both from the sex appeal, and the nervousness to approach such a man.

As she tried to think of what she would say to him, she found herself imagining what being in his arms would be like. *"Give your head a shake!"* she scolded herself *"This is about Cami. Not fantasy hour!"* And with that she stood.

No longer shaded by the large red umbrella, the hot sun was now beating down on her.

She was just a few feet away looking at the man dressed in black and hesitated. Though she desperately needed his help she reminded herself of the rumors she'd heard about Rick and all his boys, and stopped to quickly reconsider what she was about to do - knowing she possibly would be unable to stop it once started.

Did she want them watching over Cami? Would he even listen to her? Alice felt like she was taking her life into her own hands just approaching him. But in that moment she'd also concluded she had no other choice - that this was in fact her only option, and took her first step - her knees uncontrollably shaking.

Wanting to act cool and unafraid she stopped right beside him, but in order to keep her shaking from showing she needed to brace herself, and leaned on the table.

Hot, hungry and tired from the morning's work, and rather annoyed that this woman had the audacity to interrupt the conversation he was having, not to mention the personal space she was invading, he didn't look at her while continuing to eat his second burger. "What the fuck do you want?" he coldly asked while wiping the crumbs from his mouth.

Her pale skin losing the little color it had she took a deep breath to ensure she didn't stutter before responding. "Your name is Rick Stackston right?" then paused, giving him time to respond.

Still refusing to look at her his mind raced with cold angry responses that he knew would make her wish she'd never intruded on him and his boys. But the vibrations she was sending through the table told him she was already terrified, making him mildly curious to know what she wanted - his silence telling her to hurry up and make a point.

"My name is Alice Hendricks, and I need a favor." she said as casually as she could.

Her boldness stopped him mid bite. Inhaling deeply he heatedly placed his burger on the open wrapper in front of him, his shoulders and head turning to meet her eyes ready to scurry her away. But one look at her and he softened

slightly. He could see she was terrified as her blue eyes fluttered from him, then to the left, back to him, only to flutter to the right. Her pale skin made even paler by the dark hair that framed it lost the little color it had as he took her in. "A favor?" he thought to himself as he looked the rest of her over. "*If she wasn't so clearly terrified, and beautiful I would set this bitch straight.*"

Turning his attention back to his lunch he picked up his burger, his large shoulders shifting as he readjusted his elbows on the table. "Listen lady, I don't do people favors. They do me favors."

Tears welled in Alice's eyes. She almost walked away but decided to try again. "My granddaughter is being beaten by her father." she said noting him stop mid swallow tensing.

The information she just dumped on his lap pulled at him, but he knew it wasn't his issue. Allowing it to roll off he offered her a cold suggestion instead while he continued to eat his lunch. "So go to the police."

Alice quietly let out a discouraged breath "I've tried, but they tell me without solid proof they won't help me." Without pausing, not wanting to lose her nerve or his attention she continued "She's seven. I find her with fat lips, back bruises, leg bruises. She's been in hospital for fractures and stitches... And today the bruises I found I can only assume are there from being grabbed with extreme force. Whenever I've taken her to the police to have them look, they question her, but when she says nothing they say they can't help."

She followed his eyes now on the very solidly built, strikingly handsome young men sitting across from him. The blond - a mirror image of him was clearly his son. Rumor had it that he and the dark haired young man beside him killed a man for accidentally tripping him in the street. Alice knew there had to be more to it, but now people crossed the street, and moved their kids quickly out of their way. They were afraid there could be truth to the rumors, and no one wanted to be the next victim.

The two were staring at her, but she couldn't read their expressions. Maybe they were trying to tell her she was crazy and to walk away while she still could. Maybe they were feeling sorry for her. She was trying to figure it out when Rick very casually told her "Make her talk, or maybe there's nothing to tell."

Alice couldn't help but take an exasperated breath that caused him to turn in his seat and glare at her, angry yet in awe at the woman that went from terrified to looking him square in the eye with confidence and dislike.

"She's seven! He frightens her!" she assertively barked out "Do you not think it reasonable that she's afraid of him? That maybe she thinks if he got in trouble because she talked that he would be even angrier!"

"Listen lady!" his irritation very visible. He didn't appreciate the scene she was making, or the way she was speaking to him, but he would be an idiot not to see her desperation. "I feel for you, but we're not in the kid stealing business. Besides, I don't get involved with other people's shit, and that keeps them out of mine."

"I'm not asking you to kidnap her!" she snapped "I want your help protecting her!" Alice slammed a picture down in front of him "Her name is Cami..."

Before she could continue he cut her off "Listen..." he said his eyes now furious, his patience running very thin with her new found assertiveness "I can't be any clearer. I don't get involved with people's shit..."

"Yes I know..." she said rolling her eyes "and that keeps them out of your shit. I got it! Thanks for your time." and she walked off her knees shaking so badly she was sure others close by could hear them. Alice was afraid they might give out if she didn't sit for a minute to settle them down.

As much as he'd made it a rule to never get involved in anyone's issues outside of his group, he couldn't help even through his fury but to feel for Alice's situation. Holding the photo he looked at the tiny girl smiling back at him finding himself being pulled in - but he was a cautious man. Before he would help he needed to see it firsthand. He needed to learn more.

"You boys know this little girl?" he asked, sensing Alice watching as he passed the picture to his son - but didn't look to know for sure.

"You're not thinking about getting involved are you?" Jonathan asked reaching to take the photo from his father.

Rick took an irritated breath "Just look at the photo would you."

Checking out the beautiful pale little girl with black curly hair and ocean blue eyes he passed the picture to Swan while smirking at his father. He knew Rick wasn't going to let Alice spew off that tale without looking into it.

"Yeah, I've seen her around."

"Yeah..." Swan said looking at the photo snapping his fingers in recall "I've seen her around." With a cool smile he elbowed Jonathan "Her mother was really hot."

"Do you know where her mother is now?" Rick asked.

"Not really sure" Jonathan casually shrugged. "I heard people talking when she first went missing about a year ago - the word '*missing*' holding Rick's

attention "Some thought her husband killed her. Some said he just beat her, driving her away leaving the girl behind."

Rick felt himself being pulled in deeper with each shred of information. "Either of you know who the husband is?"

"Na..." they casually replied.

"Only seen those two around," Jonathan added. "Just hear people talk 'n."

Rick, chewing the last bite of his burger, stood lifting a strong leg out over the picnic table bench as he threw the balled up wrapper in the trash beside him. Snapping the picture of the little girl from Swan he pulled his other leg over. "Think we might take a look into this." he stated placing it in the back pocket of his jeans. "Now let's get back to fucking work!" and stalked off toward the truck.

Swan got up shooting a devilish smile and a wink at Alice before turning to follow Rick and Jonathan. He knew Rick had a soft spot for little girls. Having been taken in by Rick when he was five after his mother had long since run off, and his father was killed in a shootout during a pickup with Rick that went bad. Rick was rough on Jonathan and him growing up. Some might say that Rick's form of discipline was abusive. He believed a firm hand grew great men, but never tolerated that rough hand being dished out on a girl. He'd witnessed Rick put a beating into a few men over the years because of the way they treated their daughters. He believed girls required discipline, but felt a good solid punishment was usually enough.

As they drove back to the construction site to finish the carpentry to the homes just about built, Rick told them to find out as much as they could about the little girl. "Don't go asking questions!" he ordered. "I don't want people knowing we're involved in anything to do with her. These town people talk too much. Think they have nothing better to do around here." he said rolling his eyes "Just follow her and observe. Let me know what you find out and if you see anything."

"And if we see anything?" asked Jonathan.

"Don't do shit!" Rick snapped, "Let it go and report back to me."

CHAPTER TWO

Rick, Swan's father Steven Senior, and Buck had started out as kids dealing dime bags. Gradually they expanded their menu and their clientele, eventually becoming one of the big boys thanks to Arkady.

Arkady, his Russian accent almost nonexistent having grown up American, was a powerful and highly feared man in their world -well, anybody's world really. He had come to town to check out the boys that had been growing their reputation in his circle as the boys with the purest cocaine and very professional demeanor. Once Arkady decided to take a chance and see if they had what it took to survive his world, theirs changed. They managed to get the shit kicked out of them a few times learning from their mistakes, but together with Arkady, their first big time buyer they grew their small business into a multi-million dollar empire.

With their new found riches the three bought a large secluded piece of land well outside of town and planted some roots. They built their individual homes around the outside edges, leaving the middle open for friends passing through to pitch tents or park their trailers; and when the sun went down in the middle of it all -a warm bonfire.

They met good women and started families, but trying to raise a family in that world proved to be too much. One by one the wives ran off - some leaving the kids behind to grow up motherless.

Jonathan and Swan grew up in this business built by their fathers. Having been abandoned by their mothers, compounded by the whores that surrounded them - always throwing themselves at the next bad boy giving them attention - they quickly developed bitter tastes and coldness toward women. They were no more than a mere toy they played with. Some they thought were worth a little more than the others, but in the end they always proved to be the same.

To add to their lack of trust, they discovered early on that it wasn't just the women. Finding loyalty in men alike was a rarity in their world. Unfortunately in their world a man's lack of loyalty usually wasn't discovered until it was too late - and usually in the form of a vicious act exposing Jonathan and Swan to

violence most only ever viewed on TV wincing at the graphics. Having lost young and old friends at the hands of evil people they'd met over the years only educated them to trust no one outside of their own. Even some in the group were questionable -so the ones that they did find loyalty in were coveted. They were in a lot of cases closer than those that were blood. There were no secrets with them. They were the ones they talked to when things got rough, and understood them when they stopped talking. Zipper, Bruce and Joe for all intents and purposes were their *brothers*.

They were mean fuckers, but solid friends to Jonathan and Swan. They grew up together in the life of drugs, violence and whores just like them. That was the basis of their upbringing, making them all the mean bastards they were. None of the rumors flying around were false

Bruce however was the only one that fooled people when they saw him. His preppy fashion choice and short brushed back blond hair made him look like a regular town folk. No one ever could figure out what possessed him to dress the way he did. Unlike the rest of them he was so clean cut and friendly looking that people that didn't know him didn't scoot to the other side of the road, or go wide as they passed him in the street. It was like he was in camouflage; but they sure got the shock of their life if they pissed him off. Maybe that's why he chose that style. Maybe he needed a break from the life once in a while and it let him blend in. Maybe it was because he liked to blindside people who tried to fuck with him. It could have been the other way around, and it was him that liked to fuck with them. No one really knew, but Rick and Buck loved to tease the shit out of him.

Joe on the other hand was a jeans and t-shirt kind of guy like the rest of them - Always sporting Doc Martins and a leather coat. His hazel eyes were usually hidden behind his long dark ringlets.

Jonathan swung open the screen door of his and Swan's cottage - a two story work in progress nestled in the trees, but was coming along nicely. The large floor to ceiling arch windows in the front overlooking the field still had the manufacture stickers on them. The sliding door for the walkout off to the side was still only a frame and tarp. The deck he and Swan marched across was still not finished, and the siding was still not on.

Two years prior when they had turned twenty Rick wanted them out of his space and offered them a good size cutout on the property. They spent whatever

time they could building. Considering the little time they had between the construction sites, drops and parties, it was coming along nicely.

The sun was shining bright causing Jonathan and Swan to squint as they casually walked the path toward the field to where Jonathan left his truck the previous night. He would normally have it closer to the house, but the bonfire was in full swing when he got home from the twenty-four seven dive bar they frequented, and was stopped by Joe who handed him a beer.

"How come you two fuckers get out of working today?" Bruce asked, fixing his buttoned shirt before climbing into Joe's truck.

Jonathan and Swan trusted them with any secret and their lives, but couldn't tell them today as Rick wanted it kept hush for now.

Opening his truck door Jonathan leaned in gathering some garbage from the day before and walked it to the smoldering fire.

"Taking the day off." Jonathan replied - a wicked smile flashing across his perfect lips "Think 'n I might stop in and see Joe's sister Jenna if that's okay with you, you fucker. Need to get laid." he teased, both him and Swan now laughing.

Joe leaned out his driver's side window brushing his loose dark curls from his eyes while Jonathan and Swan settled into Jonathan's truck. "Fuck you, you bastards!" he shouted knowing that would never happen. In their world they lived by a few simple rules, and one of them was to never get involved with a *brother's* mother, sister or wife. Many kingdoms in history had crumbled over a woman, and that rule was in place to ensure that theirs didn't. "Stay the fuck away from my sister!"

Jonathan and Swan, still laughing, flipped the bird to Bruce and Joe and took off toward town to see if they could spot Cami.

CHAPTER THREE

Turning off the highway into the residential part of town the speed limit came to a crawl. The rolling hills and open highway behind them the streets ahead were narrow. Thinking Cami would be on her way to school Jonathan drove him and Swan toward the center of town a few blocks ahead of them, named by the residents -*The Heart*. They knew a large group of kids could be found there making their way to the little Catholic school in town. In the passenger seat Swan was busy taking in the activity of the residents packing up their children, or climbing into cars on their way to work, while Jonathan as always drove admiring the quaint little town with its constricted streets lined with well-spaced two story homes. Each home accented with wood siding painted white, powder blue or brown - Jonathan really appreciating the ones with perfectly manicured lawns, and the added touch of flowerbeds or shrubs.

Turning the corner leaving the residential area they entered the beginning of *The Heart*. *The Heart* was where the life of the town was. It consisted of a long line of old red brick stores with white framed windows lining one side of the road. A large playground, game field, baseball diamond, and food court overlooking a massive lake lined the other. In the morning a number of vendors set their carts up randomly down both sides selling coffee and donuts - and later in the day, outdoor toys for kids, hot-dogs, pretzels, snow cones, and cotton candy. The trees like the rest of the town were plentiful up and down both sides of the long road - And in an effort to offer the tourists and residents alike a place to sit and take in the stunning view of the mountains that surrounded not only the lake, but the town, elegant wood benches with cast-iron frames sat under many of them.

Slowly moving with the crawling traffic they found a large group of kids as expected crossing at the crosswalk indicated by interlock stone, and a smaller group on their way. As they made their way closer toward the kids currently crossing the road Jonathan slowed the crawling truck down even more trying to spot her. The problem was they hadn't seen her in a long while, and only from a distance at that. Picking her out in a crowd was going to be tough.

Suddenly horns started honking as one man hollered out his car window.

"Come on Cami! Move it! I'm trying to get to work!"

"I guess we found her" Swan chuckled looking past Jonathan in the direction of the commotion, spying the only child left on the road. She was attempting to skip with her rope, and appeared to be failing miserably. "Man she's tiny." he observed adoringly. "If Alice hadn't told us she was seven, I would guess her age at about four."

"Hi Mr. Randolph!" Cami exclaimed with a beaming smile in response to the impatient man "Like my skipping? I'm getting better at it."

They watched as Mr. Randolph, a middle-aged balding man answered with a genuine smile while rolling his eyes and shaking his head. "Yes Cami, you are, but if you could practice on the sidewalk it would be better. You're holding us up. All this honking is for you darling."

Jonathan and Swan couldn't help but chuckle at the mayhem she was causing. They found it quite amusing all the voices that overlapped Mr. Randolph's as the long line of drivers continued to hit their horns, or bark out their windows at her. What was even more entertaining was the innocent way she chose not to care. All Mr. Randolph managed to do was slow her down by pointing her attention to a few in the traffic jam she clearly knew.

Greeting the impatient commuters by name she fumbled with her rope as she continued to attempt to skip across the road. It took a few minutes but she eventually made her way to the other side, and traffic started moving again.

Approaching the end of the long strip Jonathan turned left at the stop sign getting ahead of the stream of children on their way to the only Catholic school in town. Pulling the truck over opposite the red brick building with its number of white framed windows indicating classrooms, he threw the truck into park and patiently waited with Swan for Cami to arrive.

On the large white concrete outdoor foyer that marked the entrance to the school one of the two heavy wood doors was propped open ready to receive the children.

A short time later one by one and some in groups the kids began to filter in through the open linked fence that marked the start, or end of school property - depending on what side of it you were on.

By the time Cami finally skipped on to the school grounds almost all the kids had already gone in, but Cami stayed outside skipping.

As they silently observed her an older boy walked up to her. Jonathan thought maybe he was going to walk her into the school, but instead the boy gave her a shove, sending her to the ground.

"Freak." he called over his shoulder as he walked off.

"You're a jerk Damian!" she shouted after him as she got up and brushed herself off.

Setting up her rope she began to skip again.

A number of minutes passed and the bell went, signaling the remaining children it was time to go in. It took a few moments but eventually all children except Cami had filtered into the school. Cami either hadn't noticed they'd all gone in, or didn't care.

Another few minutes and still attempting to skip a young blond woman they could only assume was a teacher stepped out of the school. Silently they watched from their truck the young woman who stood for a short while on the grand white step looking out at Cami. Her long summer dress waving slightly in the cool morning breeze she dropped her gaze and her shoulders before sauntering down the concrete stairs. A few steps in as if shaking off what appeared to be dispiritedness, but for what they had no idea, she lifted her shoulders putting on a warm smile as she gracefully closed the gap between her and Cami.

From the truck their eyes followed her as she moved to kneel down before the tiny girl. The two began to interact, but Jonathan and Swan were unable to hear what was being said. As the girls chatted the young woman first inspected Cami's legs. When she was satisfied she moved on holding Cami's chin, turning her head gently from side to side, then up and down. Finally each hand, one at a time into hers she inspected them.

"Strange..." Swan said more to himself - his eyes locked on the two girls "Why would she do that unless she knows something, and if she knows something why not do something about it?"

"Don't know..." Jonathan shrugged "Maybe she's looking her over because she saw the boy push her."

Swan rubbed at his chin "Na..." Checking his watch he gently shook his head "That's not it. That was almost fifteen minutes ago. If she saw, she would have been out here right away to deal with it." Pulling his attention from the two girls he glanced at Jonathan. "I don't know about you, but I for one believed Alice, and seeing her," he pointed out the windshield "inspect that little girl like that it makes me think this bitch knows something. I mean nothing else makes sense. Why else would she look her over?"

Just then the teacher stood holding her hand out to Cami.

Clumsily Cami gathered up her skipping rope. Jumping forward she playfully placed her hand in the woman's, allowing her to lead her into the school.

Jonathan dropped his hands to his thighs, his eyes lingering on the two girls as they disappeared inside "What should we do now?"

"I don't know," Swan shrugged distractedly. "We could go grab a coffee and breakfast. We should be able to get back here before lunch."

"Sounds perfect," Jonathan said, firing up the engine. "I'm definitely in need of caffeine today."

They drove twenty minutes to Marley's located just outside of town - A dimly lit twenty-four seven dive bar that made it easy to lose track of time, and get lost in fun. None of the town's people ever dared to grace the doorsteps there, so other than the odd uneducated tourist that wandered in it was pretty much only their crew - which was quite large, or any of their business connections that needed a place to party or crash; Making it that much better the police in town rarely ever bothered to monitor it thanks to their payments to Sheriff Stanton, allowing it to get pretty wild at times.

Jonathan and Swan, not having much time before they had to be back to the school, as they glanced around noticing the overturned tables and chairs they were relieved to not see any of their buddies hanging around. In fact there were no customers that morning at all - but the jukebox still played loud.

In the center of the bar in his continued scan for a waitress and at the disheveled space Swan bent picking up their table putting it back on its feet, followed by one of the few uncomfortable chairs.

"Hey boys" Wendy lasciviously greeted them as she came out from behind the long polished bar.

Jonathan flipped a chair back onto its legs straddling it, getting comfortable. "How ya doing?" he smiled.

"Much better now" she winked. Wrapping an arm around Jonathan's broad shoulders she leaned in as she landed her eyes hungrily on Swan "What'll it be?"

Wendy, like most women, found them to be beyond delicious. She often fantasized about what she would do to either of them - or better, what they could do to her. She'd seen some beautiful men, but none like them. Their hard bodies and beautiful faces was a combination she rarely saw. Most men were lucky to have one or the other, but not them, they were blessed with pure beauty - and it wasn't the pretty boy beauty either. It was pure masculinity - the ruggedness, the strong bone structure, deep beautiful eyes and chiseled bodies. There wasn't a woman in town that didn't stop to hold her chin up as they walked by, and Wendy was no exception.

Settling into his seat Swan offered her a soft smile and a wink as he scanned her perfect body from toe to head "Coffee would be great."

With Wendy pressed up against him Jonathan twisted in his seat checking her out like Swan "Two egg breakfasts" he added "and if you could turn down the music that would be great."

Her eyes meeting Jonathan's, her cheeks still dimpled, she tapped his broad shoulder with her draped arm before pushing off "No problem."

As she cat-walked away - being sure she held their attention she stole a flirtatious glance over her shoulder pleased to see they were watching.

Wendy slipping behind the bar the music volume dropped to barely audible.

Jonathan pulled his eyes from her as she got busy pouring their coffees and twisted to look at the remaining overturned tables "Judging by the looks of this place, things got rowdy after I left last night."

Returning she placed a coffee in front of each of them. "Yeah, they did." she said. Crossing her arms she folded herself resting them on the table offering them both a great view of her perfect breasts. "Two guys I'd never seen before. I'm guessing tourists came in here and got mouthy. Buck set them straight though." she said with a quiet giggle "But not before they got a little aggravated."

Buck was a no bullshit kind of guy, and strong as an ox. He was tough and not afraid to get in the middle of anything. He was only a couple years older than Rick, but his dark hair turned gray long ago and changed to white over the last couple of years. The beer gut, combined with the white hair and short beard, he could pass for Santa if he wasn't so hell bent on scaring all the kids.

"Crazy fucker" Jonathan chuckled "I'm sure if anyone was aggravated it was Buck having his beer break interrupted."

Wendy shrugged "Yeah. I tried to warn them when they started arguing with Buck that he was a tough old bastard, but they refused to listen. Anyway" she waved "I don't imagine they'll be back." With that her attention moved to Swan, her expression inviting as she unfolded one of her arms moving her hand to delicately trace one of his "Anything else I can get you?"

Always liking the attention she gave them his eyes danced "No thanks. Just breakfast."

Pushing herself up she moved seductively to stand before him. Wrapping her hands around her tiny waist she pulled her bottom lip in gently biting it while hungrily locking her bright green eyes with his. Batting them she let her moist lip slip from her teeth as she gracefully placed a knee forward - slowly waving it side to side. "When are you going to take me out Swan?"

"Oh...I don't think so sweetheart" he said as he casually leaned back in his seat - his perfect brown eyes trailing her body. "I like looking at you, but I don't think that's going to happen."

"And why not?" she asked flirtatiously pouting as she moved in closer. She'd been trying to land either of them for some time, but couldn't figure out why neither of them ever bit. She knew they thought she was attractive. They didn't hide it.

Gently she rubbed his broad shoulders, her breasts now just inches from his face "You know I could make you happy."

"Oh... I'm sure you could." Swan replied, his brown eyes still dancing as he looked up at her with a knowing smile - fighting with his already loose morals not to take her up on it.

Jonathan and Swan like every man liked their women, and Wendy was living art work. But she had not just been around. She'd been with every man they knew - and some. "How about we just start with that breakfast there sweetheart?" he said watching Wendy drop her shoulders feeling the rejection.

"Coming right up," she said, clearly disappointed.

Swan turned leaning back in his chair stretching his long muscular legs out watching Wendy walk away. "I think the only reason she isn't dead yet playing all these guys, is because she's so damn beautiful."

Stirring his coffee Jonathan chuckled.

Shaking the fantasy of Wendy's perfect ass riding him, Swan sat up turning back in his seat. Fixing his coffee with two creams and one sugar he gave it a stir. "I'm not too surprised your dad has us out here."

Jonathan placed his spoon on the napkin "Yeah, I saw it coming the minute what's her name...said Cami was being beaten."

"Why does he have such a soft spot for little girls? Lord knows he never stepped in when we were getting the shit kicked out of us. In fact" Swan stated with a roll of his eyes "I remember a couple times him stepping in and cuffing me in the head. Like it wasn't enough someone else was already slapping me around."

Jonathan nodded - his shoulders bouncing as he recalled a few of those memories "Yeah, he could be an evil prick. As for his soft spot for little girls though" he said growing serious again "I can only assume it comes from his sister."

Swan's brows arched in surprise "Rick has a sister?" He'd known Jonathan and Rick his whole life. This was the first he'd ever heard about a sister.

"Had" Jonathan stated. Pausing he shook out of his coat "and yeah. He's never spoken about her death to me. Hell" he exhaled picking up his mug "he's never talked to me about her at all. I just overheard him talking to Buck once a few years back. Never asked him about her cause I figured he would have told me if he wanted me to know."

"What'd you hear?"

Jonathan swallowed down some of the warm coffee placing the mug back on the table "Don't know. From what I caught of the conversation she was killed. Not sure how, or what happened, but the way I understood it he left home shortly after her death.

Wendy returned, interrupting them with their breakfast plates, placing them on the table. When she didn't turn to leave Jonathan eyed her impatiently.

"Right" she jolted, noticing the glare she was getting "I'll leave you two to eat. Just holler if you need anything."

Swan's eyes followed her as she walked off - visions of Wendy riding him slipping back in "Is there such thing as too much of a slut?"

Laughing Jonathan choked on his coffee "Yeah ... Wendy."

Swan snorted knowing it was true - though for a fraction of a second he'd hoped Jonathan might have said no there wasn't such a thing. Letting his fantasy slip away he chopped his eggs.

"How bad do you think it is? Swan asked, breaking the silence that had fallen between them for the first half of their meal. "I mean that lady having no options that she turned to your dad asking him for his help. It has to be serious right? Hell" Swan stated "we've heard the rumors about us. This whole damn town knows what we're like" he said, circling his hand in indication of '*everyone*' before pointing his fork at Jonathan. "That takes guts."

Jonathan released a breath "I don't know. I doubt it but I'm really hoping that Alice is just an angry nosy bitch, and there's no merit to what she's accusing Cami's father of doing."

"Yeah, I know what you mean," Swan said, "but my gut tells me after watching the teacher check her out like that, that isn't going to be the way of it."

"Well I sure hope for her father's sake that that is the way of it. My dad will make his life miserable."

Swan scooped the last heap of egg onto his toast and bit "How involved do you think he would get?" he asked, chewing it down "I mean your dad doesn't

like to mingle with the town folk. In fact I've never seen him give any one of them the time of day."

"Pretty involved I think. He has us out here. I'm guessing if it's bad enough he would go all the way. You saw him with that prick a few years back."

Swan nodded as he thought back "He saw red when that guy started beating his little girl. I remember Rick gave him a few warnings before he made him disappear. But" Swan pointed "the difference there is that guy was one of ours. Wouldn't be so easy this time."

"If it's serious enough he'll find a way to do the same with this guy." Jonathan said, glancing at his watch. Picking up his mug he gulped down the last sip of his second coffee. "Lunch will be starting soon."

Rushing now Swan speared as many hash-browns as he could shoveling them into his mouth before pushing his plate aside. Chewing it down he leaned over to pull out his wallet and scanned the bills inside. Taking out a fifty he dropped it on the table covering their meal, and a hefty tip for Wendy as they stood to leave the bar.